

In the previous passage, Paul and Silas were visiting the churches that had been planted on Paul's first missionary journey and sharing with them the good news from the Jerusalem council. Luke and Timothy had been added to the team as they journeyed. Then they sought to go on to new territory and were directed by a vision to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9<sup>i</sup>). There they met women who gathered in a place of prayer, and Lydia was converted and baptized along with her household. A fortune teller with a python spirit was annoying them by following them around announcing to everyone that they were servants of God showing the way of salvation. Annoyed with her distraction, Paul cast the evil spirit out of her (Acts 16:18<sup>ii</sup>).

*<sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.* Acts 16:19 Luke employs a pun using the same word to describe the spirit leaving the slave and the hope of financial gain leaving the owners of the girl<sup>iii</sup>. The court and city office were right in the market place, so the men dragged Paul and Silas in to file a complaint. Romans saw slaves as property and Paul had made their property of less value by casting out that spirit. It was the right thing to do, to deliver the poor girl from being possessed, but the Romans would see it as damaging property.

*<sup>20</sup> And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city.* Acts 16:20 Apparently Judaism was not allowed to be practiced in the city as the women had to meet outside the gate. Antisemitism has a long history. The accusation is not the real reason these men were making the charge and the magistrates probably knew it. Still, bringing up the fact that they were Jews and were making converts in the city would put the magistrates on the accusers' side. If it is disturbing to hear about the love of God and the mercy available to us through the cross, may the whole world be disturbed (Acts 17:6<sup>iv</sup>)! Conviction of sin is disturbing, but it is a blessing from God for our good.

*<sup>21</sup> They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."* Acts 16:21 That may have been true for that city, but Judaism, and still at that time Christianity as a branch of Judaism, were accepted by Rome as legal religions. The accusers did not say what those illegal customs were. It was a corrupt court that decided the verdict simply at hearing the accused were Jews.

*<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.* Acts 16:22 Wow! Were they worked up over nothing or on edge because of some prior incident? Or perhaps the town valued the fortune teller's predictions. Whatever the case, there was no defense, no questions to the accused, and not even a discussion of the sentence. The magistrates just tore off Paul and Silas' clothes getting them ready to be beaten with rods (Acts 16:3-4<sup>v</sup>). The crowd joined in on the beating. Paul and Silas must have thought it might be the end of the journey for them. There were times when such a beating resulted in death.

*23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.* Acts 16:23 After a brutal beating, they asked for the high security cell for them. The innermost cell was the most secure and the most disgustingly inhumane. It sounds like the city has something against Jews. If you are sent to prison, isn't the expectation that you will be kept secure? But the magistrates made sure the jailer knew they expected these men to remain locked up.

*24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.* Acts 16:24 Not only are they secure in the inner prison, but their feet are in stocks. Their backs are bruised and bleeding. Their feet are fixed in place to the ground so they can't move to get comfortable. They have no idea how long they would be there or even if that was the end of the punishment. What do you do when it seems like God has abandoned you in the middle of what He has called you to do (Psalm 35:17<sup>vi</sup>)? It was the Holy Spirit who sent them to Philippi, and look where that has gotten them. How would you feel? What would you do?

*25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,* Acts 16:25 Instead of giving in to despair and moaning their complaints, they were praying out loud and singing hymns to God. That's because they were in the Spirit and not the flesh (Galatians 5:16<sup>vii</sup>). They were crucified with Christ and it was no longer they who were living but Christ in them (Galatians 2:20<sup>viii</sup>). The old nature that died with Christ would be whining and complaining and wanting to return to Antioch and forget about the Great Commission (Acts 1:8<sup>ix</sup>). The life of Christ in them was praying for strength and for God to turn this around and bring glory to Himself through their suffering.

Imagine the prisoners listening intently to these godly men calling out to God in faith and trust. It was unlike the prayers they would pray to the Greek or Roman gods. Paul and Silas' prayers were filled with such an intimacy and trust that they must have stirred the prisoner's desire to know such a God. **Spirit led prayer from our hearts to the heart of God ushers in the presence of God** (Hebrews 4:16<sup>x</sup>). People can sense the powerful presence of God. They either want to run from it or run to it.

In addition to the prayers, they were singing hymns. Hymns then were quite different from ours today. Scholars think that some passages in the letters of Paul were hymns that were written to praise Jesus<sup>xi</sup>. The psalms were the hymn book of Israel. I imagine the early church sang many of them, especially the ones that clearly pointed to Jesus (Matthew 26:30<sup>xii</sup>).

Think again how those prisoners who heard them must have marveled, considering that in Paul and Silas' condition they could be singing songs of praise to God. The world is watching Christians to see how real our faith is (Philippians 2:16<sup>xiii</sup>). They are especially watchful to see our reaction to difficult times. If our faith is real, we will walk in the Spirit as Paul and Silas did (Galatians 5:25<sup>xiv</sup>). We will have faith and trust in our God who loves us and gave Himself for us (Titus 2:14<sup>xv</sup>). That is one way that we testify to

the world that Jesus transforms us and that faith in Him makes us new creations in Christ. We can see the results of that testimony in the following verses.

*<sup>26</sup> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.* Acts 16:26 A skeptic would say that it was a coincidence. But then ask that skeptic how everyone's bonds were unfastened. This is different from the time that the angel broke the disciples out of prison and sent them to preach in the temple (Acts 5:19-21<sup>xvi</sup>). It's different from the time Peter was set free from jail by an angel (Acts 12:6-7<sup>xvii</sup>). In those events, they were the only ones who were released. In this divine jail break, everyone was set free, but they didn't go anywhere. That tells me these prisoners were in awe of the of the prayer and praise they were listening to and would rather be there in God's presence than being free. That's the power of Spirit filled prayer and praise. It was unusual that Paul and Silas prayed and sang. It was also unusual that they sat in the prison after the doors and bonds were opened. What was going on? The Spirit was at work!

*<sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.* Acts 16:27 A Roman soldier would face the sentence of anyone who escaped on his watch. Seeing the doors open he assumed that everyone had escaped. He didn't want to face the consequences which were worse than death.

*<sup>28</sup> But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."* Acts 16:28 "We are *all* here." Paul saw the power of God moving the hearts of the other prisoners. He knew that to escape meant the death of the jailer. He waited for the Spirit's direction. The Spirit was answering their prayers and forming the living stones that make up the church of Philippi from the most unlikely people, prisoners (1 Corinthians 1:26-27<sup>xviii</sup>). I've read the testimonies in our time of Christian witness transforming lives in such dark places as Arab nations closed to the gospel and in North Korean labor camps. Sometimes they are even divinely delivered from their captivity such as the case with Brother Yun. If they can be such powerful witnesses in such horrible circumstances, may God help us be living witnesses even in our prosperity.

*<sup>29</sup> And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Acts 16:29-30 Paul and Silas' prayers continued to bring fruit. There was Lydia, the fellow prisoners, and now the Philippian jailer. He knew that the God who could not only set these men free, but also keep them in the cells waiting for God's direction, had to be the true God. Bringing Paul and Silas outside, he asked what he needed to do to be right with God, to be saved (Acts 2:37<sup>xix</sup>). He wanted to know how could he have the same relation with God that he could see they had?

*<sup>31</sup> And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."* Acts 16:31 Believe means to have faith in, to entrust your spiritual well-

being, to commit yourself to the thing in which you place your belief. Why didn't Paul tell him to repent? He could already see the man was repentant. And notice that Paul included the jailer's household. Lydia's household had just believed which encouraged Paul to trust God for the jailer's household (Acts 16:15<sup>xx</sup>).

*32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.* Acts 16:32 The jailer took them home and had them witness to his household. This is a step we rarely take but an example I think we should follow. I saw it happen in India. We witnessed to a woman who was crying in the airport. Her son had just died and she left work and spent her savings to fly home for the funeral. She trusted in Christ, and then we learned that her son had been raised in a Christian school while she worked full time. He was no doubt a believer. That was a huge comfort to her. Then she invited Dr. Mathai to come and witness to her entire household, which he later did. Many of them placed their faith in Jesus.

*33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.* Acts 16:33 Verse 25 told us the earthquake came at midnight. By one in the morning the jailer had cared for their wounds and he and his whole family had been baptized, a picture of having died to their old lives and risen to new lives. Now there were two large families and a bunch of prisoners that made up the church of Philippi. The greatest part of the church was formed because the owners of the slave girl wanted Paul and Silas punished. How amazing is God who turns man's intentions for evil into eternal gain for the kingdom of God (Genesis 50:20<sup>xxi</sup>)! I wouldn't be surprised if that slave girl who had been possessed also became a part of the church.

*34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.* Acts 16:34 You may recall the evidence of Lydia's salvation was her desire to host Paul and Silas in spite of the danger it might present. The jailer's sign of conversion was his kindness toward Paul and Silas in caring for their needs and the joy that he experienced in that he and his whole household had come to believe in God. He had that unexplainable joy in one's Spirit that comes from the presence and peace of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 16:11<sup>xxii</sup>).

*35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go."*

*36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace."* Acts 16:35-36 The jailer had to put them back in prison. I wonder if the rest of the night was spent encouraging the other prisoners to follow the Lord. The magistrates may have wondered if the earthquake had something to do with how they treated Paul and Silas. Being superstitious, they always looked for a connection between disasters and human actions. There was indeed a connection, one deeper than they understood. The magistrates sent orders to have Paul and Silas released. The jailer relayed the message, but they wouldn't leave.

*37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out."* Acts 16:37 There were several actions that the magistrates took that were illegal. It was illegal to beat a Roman citizen or to punish them without a proper trial and chance for appeal. They didn't even ask their citizenship. Their accusers said they were Jews and thus the magistrates assumed they weren't Roman citizens. They could get in serious trouble if their hasty illegal actions were reported to Rome.

*38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.* Acts 16:38-39 Tails between their legs, the magistrates came offering apologies and kindly requesting that they move on. What this also did was open the way for their return to minister to this new church. When they return, they will not be bothered because they have something to hold over the heads of the magistrates. Again we can see that what man means for evil God can turn around for His glory (Genesis 50:20<sup>xxiii</sup>). Look what prayer and praise ushered into the situation! It's not always that way, but it is always the best way to deal with difficulty (Philippian 4:6<sup>xxiv</sup>).

*40 So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.* Acts 16:40 No need to hurry then. They could take their time to encourage the church before they departed. And what a church it was: a jailer's family, a bunch of convicts, a lady of influence and her household, and probably a woman who had been possessed. God loves variety and it shows He is impartial and loves us all (James 3:17<sup>xxv</sup>).

What should we remember from this account? I would suggest that we remember that when trouble comes, and it will in every life, we remember that God is on the throne of heaven. We don't need to fear (Luke 12:7<sup>xxvi</sup>). It may be painful. The situation might be difficult, but God is working in ways we can't see. **Pray and praise! It lifts our spirits. It testifies to the world.** God is building His temple one living stone at a time, and sometimes whole families at a time, for He is the God who can do more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 5:20<sup>xxvii</sup>).

#### Questions

- 1 What had taken place earlier in the chapter?
- 2 What was the pun that Luke employed?
- 3 How did Paul and Silas deal with their pain?
- 4 What signs do we have of the prisoners' conversions?
- 5 How was this different from other jail breaks?
- 6 What do you think caused the jailer to seek salvation?
- 7 What was the signs of his conversion?
- 8 Why did the magistrates want to release them?
- 9 How did God work despite man's evil? 10 What kind of people make up this church?

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<sup>i</sup> **Acts 16:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

<sup>ii</sup> **Acts 16:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

<sup>iii</sup> *exerkomai*

<sup>iv</sup> **Acts 17:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,

<sup>v</sup> **John 16:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.

<sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

<sup>vi</sup> **Psalms 35:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction, my precious life from the lions!

<sup>vii</sup> **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

<sup>viii</sup> **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

<sup>ix</sup> **Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

<sup>x</sup> **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

<sup>xi</sup> Phil 2:5-11, Col 1:15-20, 1Tim 3:16, Heb 1:1-3, and 1Pet 2:21-25 *may very well* have had earlier literary lives as actual hymns sung by early Christian communities.

<sup>xii</sup> **Matthew 26:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Philippians 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

<sup>xiv</sup> **Galatians 5:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

<sup>xv</sup> **Titus 2:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Acts 5:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and

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said,<sup>20</sup> “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.”<sup>21</sup> And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Acts 12:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

<sup>7</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands.

<sup>xviii</sup> **1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

<sup>xix</sup> **Acts 2:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

<sup>xx</sup> **Acts 16:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Psalms 16:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Philippians 4:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

<sup>xxv</sup> **James 3:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Luke 12:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)**

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,