

Everything seemed to finally fall into place for Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke when they began to evangelize the people in Philippi. They went to a place of prayer, down by the river, and there won a woman named Lydia to the Lord Jesus Christ. She and her whole household became the members of the first church established in Philippi. Others heard the message, and believed, so that the church began to grow. Everything went well until Paul delivered a possessed woman of her demon. Her owners suffered a financial loss and had Paul and Silas arrested.

The accusations were that these men were Jews, that they were disrupting the city, and teaching practices unlawful for Roman citizens. Since Luke was likely a gentile, and Timothy was half gentile, they were not arrested. Paul and Silas, on the other hand, were Jews. They were beaten, shackled, and thrown into the most secure portion of the Roman prison in Philippi.

We should expect that every great movement of God would be opposed by the devil. Satan does not like to lose ground, and he will challenge, and attack the people of God in order to effectively rob them of their witness. Those who were being swayed by the gospel message, and thinking about following Christ would have second thoughts about becoming a Christian when the evangelists were thrown in to jail.

This is why it is important for us to live in integrity, to protect our witness, and prayerfully discipline ourselves against all ungodliness. Those who look to us, for guidance in how to know Jesus, might become discouraged, or disillusioned, if we fall. When authorities arrest a person for breaking the law, people immediately think of that person as untrustworthy. Whatever message they might try to promote is viewed with suspicion.

But what if a person is falsely accused? Satan does not care if the accusations are lies. All he cares about is stopping the advance of the gospel. He doesn't lose any sleep over accusing the innocent. He only cares about destroying the witness.

The opposition we face today, because of our faith in Christ, is on the rise, and it is likely to intensify as we approach the Lord's return. This can be a frightening thought, but we can find encouragement to take the stands that must be taken, by considering the biblical principles in our passage this evening. Please read with me, Acts 16:25-40.

Paul and Silas were severely beaten. They were bound with chains and shackles, and thrown into the most secure portion of the Roman prison. Put yourself in their position. When a person is hurt, or beaten, misery sets in after the shock wears off. Pain brings about sleeplessness. Add to the physical misery the emotional trauma of being thrown into jail, and the uncertainty of what tomorrow might bring. The tendency of our flesh is to worry, or to feel sorry for ourselves. Perhaps we would try to figure out how to get out of this mess.

Paul and Silas become role models for us whenever we have to face adversity. About midnight, they were praying, and singing hymns to God. It is quite natural for Christians to pray about their situations. Lord help me, Lord get me out of this mess, or something to that effect naturally wells up in our hearts and we plead with the Lord to give us relief. There is great power in prayer, and our God is able to do whatever He wills. He says that you have not because you ask not, so we ask, in faith, and trust Him. Through our prayers we remind ourselves that God is in sovereign control, and we are in His hands. If we are truly innocent, we have confidence that He will see us through.

In this passage we see Paul and Silas taking an extra step that may not come as natural to Christians who are in the midst of suffering. They were singing hymns to God. In the darkest of

their circumstances, Paul and Silas filled their hearts with praises to God and vocalized them. This verse reminds me of a news article I read a week or so ago. When little boy was abducted he began singing the song, "Every Praise." He sang it continually even though his abductor kept telling him to quit singing that song. After some time, the man let the little boy go. There is power in songs that lift our praises to God.

In our church we sing traditional hymns, contemporary Christian songs, and praise choruses that contain fundamental truths about our Lord, and the victory He gives us over sin, and the challenges of life, and this world. They are filled with promise and truth. These songs are an expression of our praise and worship. We sing them over and over so that the message of the song is in our hearts, and fresh upon our minds. When under the devil's attack, recalling and singing these words of truth will feed our spirits and fight off the head games the devil plays in our minds. They remind us of who God is, and who we are in Christ Jesus. They lighten our hearts with the promise of scripture, and help us to see the world from a biblical, and eternal, perspective.

Through prayer, and singing hymns, the missionaries turned their misery into joy, and the bible says that the other prisoners were listening. In their darkest hour, the disciples gave a powerful witness. It just doesn't make sense to the world, that in the midst of oppression, a Christian can have real joy, and express it openly.

Not only does focusing on our relationship with Christ help us in times of trouble, it captures the attention of those who do not share our faith, or our joy. They wonder what makes him or her different. They ask, "How can they be so happy and at peace, when I am suffering in a similar situation." How we deal with adversity has a powerful influence on the effectiveness of our testimony. It gets people thinking, and helps to open their hearts and minds to the gospel. When they see faith in action, they understand that our faith is real, and that there is hope for them, through faith in Jesus Christ.

As they were praying and singing where everyone could hear them, suddenly there was a great earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison. The doors flew open and the chains and shekels fell. How great is the glory of God when complete deliverance comes in answer to prayer? When our faith is strong, we have complete confidence that the Lord will deliver us, and when he does, we glorify Him, and others see how great is our God.

When the jailor realized what had just happened, he feared for his life. The Romans gave him responsibility for tending to the prisoners. He had specific instructions to keep Paul and Silas in the most secure cell. He failed at his duty, and would likely face the full wrath of the Roman officials. In his mind there was nothing for him to do but to take his own life.

It is hard for most of us to imagine how a person can become so depressed, so void of hope, and joy, that they contemplate taking his or her own life. I have known several people, personally, over the years that have taken their own lives. Very recently a man that I have known since I moved to Florida in 1974 took his own life, and nobody knows why. From a secular viewpoint we rationalize that it is because they could not deal with the circumstances of their life. I have observed that most suicides are the end result of a long spiritual battle.

Through trickery and deceit, the devil puts thoughts into our minds. The godless thought process that ensues can lead us down a path of self-destruction. This is why the scriptures instruct us to take captive every thought, and to set our minds on things above. The bible also promises that we will not be tempted beyond that which we are able to resist. The ills and uncertainties of this world have always existed. Satan's power is always on display, but he is a dog with no teeth for those who fully trust in the Lord.

This jailor was at the absolute low point in his life, when Paul called out, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” Why didn’t they escape, when they had the opportunity? It was a part of God’s plan that Paul and Silas would suffer, and be thrown into jail, that they might provide the witness necessary for this jailor and his household to be saved.

After Paul’s Damascus Road experience in chapter 9, Jesus appeared to Ananias and told him to reach out to Saul who would become God’s instrument to reach the world with the gospel, and that he would show Paul how much he would suffer for the name of Christ. Suffering for Christ is a part of the Christian life. I pray that none of us have to suffer to the extent of Paul and Silas, but if we are faithful in presenting Christ to the world, if we stand upon the truth, and the principles of God’s word, the world will cause us to suffer.

If, however, we are living for Christ with all of our hearts, we know our suffering is not because of our sin, but necessary to God’s purposes, and it just may be that we must suffer in order that others might be saved. If Paul and Silas had not been jailed, if they had not testified through prayers, and singing of hymns, if God had not supernaturally broken their bonds, if they escaped without first reaching out to the man, this jailor might not have ever surrendered his life in faith to Jesus Christ.

But God works all things for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. The man rushed to the missionaries, trembling, and asked, “What must I do to be saved?” Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your whole household.” The jailor, overcome with the power of God, surrendered his life to Christ and was baptized. He then took the missionaries into his home where he tended to their wounds, and fed them. Paul and Silas explained the gospel more fully, and led the man’s whole household to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Afterwards, apparently, Paul and Silas returned to the jail, to keep the jailor from getting into trouble. When morning came the magistrates sent the police to instruct the jailor to let the men go. We don’t know how they came to that decision, but we can be certain that God’s hand was in it.

Notice what Paul did, however. He did not simply leave when he had a chance. The law had put them in jail, but he used Roman law against his accusers. He and Silas were Roman citizens, and they had been denied due process. This was a serious offence as can be seen in the official’s response. They humbled themselves. They had to apologize. They asked, not demanded, that they leave town.

Many of the laws we have to live by today are unjust, and ungodly. Many of the ideas and proclamations of government leaders, that are not laws at all, are forced upon us as if they carry the same authority as settled law, and we have to deal with, and take a stand against, these issues until they are settled by the courts. A perfect example is the government’s threats to withhold funding in public schools if they do not allow trans-genders to use whatever bathroom or shower they choose. This is a terrible precedent and opens the possibility of our children being exposed to situations that could cause them psychological damage for the rest of their lives.

If you have been paying attention, you know that Bro. Carl drafted a form letter that, if sent to school officials, presents a first line of defense for parents who want to protect their children. Basically what that letter does is to use the same law meant to promote a godless agenda, against those who seek to undermine and destroy the moral fiber we hope to instill in our children. This is a good model for us to follow. Our nation’s laws are so complicated in the way that they are written, that clever people are always able to find a loophole. We should use these loopholes to our advantage as we seek to take a stand for righteousness in our country. Paul used

this technique to his advantage. We are using this technique in this situation, and we probably will be able to use it in the future as we continue to stand against all godlessness that is being forced upon us, and our children.

Once freed from jail, Paul and Silas went back to visit with, and encourage, Lydia and her household. Afterwards they headed off to Thessalonica, but if we observe Luke's use of personal pronouns in verse 40, and on into chapter 17, in particular the word "they," we realize that Luke stayed behind in Philippi for a time, before rejoining the others.

The lesson that this passage brings to the church today is that God has a plan. If we are a part of the plan, and doing our part with the right heart, God works out the details. Even if we must suffer for Christ, God can deliver us in His time, supernaturally if necessary. If our suffering should end in death, we will be with Him forever, which is what we long for to begin with. In the days ahead, with all the challenge we are likely to face, let us trust the Lord completely, and serve Him with all of our heart. God has a plan, praise Him for including us in bringing His light to the world.