

Thoughts on Faith and Prayer

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of calling for the light of Jesus Christ in our lives, which brings transformation, freedom, and victory.

Duration: 23:40

Scripture: John 1:6, Acts 16:23

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Paul and Silas in Acts chapter 16. Despite being arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison, Paul and Silas continue to praise and pray to God. Suddenly, there is a violent shaking and the prison doors swing open, and everyone's chains fall off. The speaker emphasizes that even in the midst of darkness and captivity, the word of God cannot be bound and the people of God can't be bound either. The sermon concludes with a call for the light of Christ to invade every place of darkness and transform lives.

Transcript

Father, thank you for your presence here tonight. Thank you for the joy that's in every heart, the sense of expectancy that you have planted inside of all of us, that in spite of how dark this day is becoming, there's a place of light for us, a place of life, not just for ourselves, but for others who can hear the words that you have placed on our lips. I pray, God, that you would touch every heart tonight and that each of us would become an evangelist, each of us a soul winner in our time.

Lord, show us what that looks like, and I praise you, God, tonight in Jesus' name. Amen. If I were to give this a title, I would entitle it Call for the Light.

Call for the Light. It's Acts chapter 16, a time when Paul and Silas, a companion of his, have been traveling. They've been bringing the gospel into places that needed the truth of God, and because of it, they were arrested and they were beaten, accused, and thrown into prison.

You know, in the natural, if you and I were there, we would say, God, is this what happens when we serve you? We're preaching freedom, but we ourselves are thrown into a place of captivity. But how many know tonight, the word of God cannot be bound, the scripture tells us, and the people of God can't be bound either. We live in a place of victory.

Do you understand? It can't be taken captive by the things of this world, because it's not of this world. And the scripture says, and when they had laid, in verse 23 of chapter 16, when they had laid many stripes on them, beatings on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. And having received such a charge, he put them in the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

You know, sometimes, I don't know about you, but sometimes it feels like I've been there. Sometimes all you can do is groan. Sometimes you just wonder, God, what's going on in my life? And why have you put me in this place? You know, you might be there now.

You might be the neighborhood you live in, might be the home that you're part of, might be the work environment you find yourself in, or just an inner groaning that's in your heart. You say, God, how long am I going to be here? And is there any divine purpose to this? The Lord places a song inside of you and inside of me that the world can't take it away. We have to surrender it.

It's a song of hope in God. It's a song of faith. It's a song that we understand that the sufferings, Paul said, at this present time are not even worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us.

There is a day coming when we will be set free from the confines of this earth and this physical body. We'll be in the presence of the Lord forever. And that is something that our minds can't even fully lay hold of, the glory of that eternity with God.

And eternity is a long, long time. Now, you might be suffering a little bit right now, or maybe a whole lot, but a million years from now, you'll be thankful you didn't give up your song. You'll be thankful you didn't give up your hope in God.

You stayed with it. So here they are. They've been arrested.

They've been beaten. For what? For telling people that God loved them. For telling people that there is a way to eternal life.

A savior did come. He did die on a cross. He did pay for the price for the wrongs that people have done.

And through believing in him, you can not only have eternal life, but you can have an abundant life on this side of eternity before you get to heaven. I mean, it's a full life, a life with meaning, a life with purpose, a life that has a reason for being on the earth, a life empowered by the spirit of God to be a testimony to those who still live in darkness of who God is. Now, for this testimony, they're arrested.

They're thrown into prison. Instead of blaming God for their predicament, instead of accusing God of being unfaithful to them, at midnight, which is the darkest time of the night, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. I want to tell you something tonight here in Times Square Church in particular.

You're praying and you're singing to God tonight. That's what we're doing. Now, some of you are in a hard place.

I understand that. But you've still chosen to pray and to sing and to clap your hands. If your testimony make half of us cry, I have no doubt about that.

It's a hard place you're in, but you've made a choice. Paul and Silas made a choice at midnight, the darkest time of the day for them. They're in personal pain, no doubt about it.

Their feet are fast. It seems like they can't go anywhere. Their backs are hurting.

They're in the inner prison, which is the darkest, dankest place. There's no light there, no windows. The air stinks in that place.

It's foul, stench-filled. All around them is captivity. But they made a choice at midnight.

They began to pray and they began to sing, and the prisoners were listening to them. I want to tell you, those that are here tonight, there are people online that are in prison right now. There are people who are actually in prison online tonight.

There are people who are in a prison, in other kinds of prisons, prisons of fear and despair, hopelessness, and they're listening. They're here tonight. They don't fully embrace or understand everything that you do, but they're listening to you tonight.

You see, you've made a choice. Paul and Silas made a choice, and the prisoners were listening. We've got people tentatively visiting us in the service tonight from up to 200 countries.

Some of those circumstances are very dire. They're very difficult and hopeless in some cases, seeming like they'll never get out, like they're going to be captivated forever. But you made the choice to sing and pray, and they're listening.

This very moment, they're listening. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake. Suddenly, everything starts shaking, not just for you tonight, but for people online tonight, for people who will be watching the service tomorrow when it's more in their proper time frame for them.

Suddenly, everything starts shaking. When you and I begin to worship God, and we choose to pray, hell can't stand any longer. The foundations of it are shaken.

The scripture says the foundations of the prison were shaken, that place that is built to keep prisoners. It's built to keep people captive, secure, unable to move, function, have hope for the future. It's dark.

Suddenly, because two men have made the choice to pray and sing to God, the foundations are shaken. The foundations of that prison are shaken so violently that the doors open. That means the walls are going like this.

Suddenly, the lats that's going across into the bolt mechanism is shaking. Suddenly, they part and the doors just swing open. On top of that, everyone's chains fall off.

They're standing there. You got to understand, they're standing there. It's still dark.

There's still no light in this place, but everybody suddenly looking and the chains are gone from their hands. They're moving the door out and in and out. They're almost in unbelief that this thing isn't locked anymore.

They're wondering, should I run for it or should I just stay here? I'm not sure what to do right now. A lot of people online listening tonight, you're not quite sure what to do. You're feeling something in your spirit, but you don't know what to do with it.

What do I do with what I'm feeling? Now, the keeper of the prison, who's a guy who's there and his sense of righteousness, may I call a right standing, is just knowing he's keeping track of people who are worse off than he is. You remember when you were like that? You remember when before you came to Christ, you'd say, well, I'm a good person because I didn't murder anybody. I'm a good person because I never robbed a bank, because I never did this.

I never did that. His sense of wholeness or righteousness is in the fact that he's keeping track of people that are worse than he is. They've done things that he's never done.

He awoke from his sleep and he saw the prison doors open and he assumed that everybody had gone and he was about to kill himself. But Paul the apostle called with a loud voice saying, do yourself no harm for we are all here. Now, I want to speak to people online tonight.

Do yourself no harm for we, the people of God, are still here for you. The reason that God doesn't take us home after we've opened our heart and received him as savior and that we've been cleansed from our sin, there's nothing really separates us from him now, but the reason he doesn't take us home is for you. The reason he lets us go through hardship is for you.

The reason we struggle is for you. The reason we have to endure the frailties of this life and the attacks of this world and its darkened condition is for you. You are the reason that God left us here and doesn't take us home.

So don't harm yourself. We are still here for you because God is still here for you. So what the jailer did is what every person tonight should do.

The scripture says he called for a light. Help me to see what I'm feeling right now. Remember, Jesus came, Luke 4, 18, to give sight to the blind.

Help me to see. I've been so long in this place, but I feel that something is happening tonight. Something's happening to this place of darkness that I've become familiar with this place that holds me captive and, and I hold others captive in, but something's happening.

I feel doors are opening. I feel chains are falling. Somebody is calling out to me with a loud voice saying, don't hurt yourself.

We are all here. We're not gone yet. One day soon, the church will go.

One day soon, the Bible says the trumpet of the Lord's going to sound and those who have died as Christians are going to be raised first. And the rest of us who are still here are going to be gathered together with them. The church is going to leave at some point, but till that day happens, we are still here.

Don't harm yourself. Do what this jailer did and call for a light. Call for a light.

Wherever you are, say, God, send light to me. I want to see, I want to understand. I want to know what it is that these people have been sent here for.

I want to know what they're singing. I want to know where this power that they have seems to come from. The scripture says, he called for a light and he fell down.

He ran in and fell down, trembling before Paul and Silas. Now listen to what John says about the light. There was a man sent from God.

His name was John. That's John the Baptist. This man came for a witness to bear witness of the light that all through him might believe.

Now he being John was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light, which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through him and the world did not know him.

He came to his own and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, he gave the right to become children of God. Even to those who believe in his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

To those who believe, he gave the right to become children of God. He gave the right to be given this new song that he had just heard sung in the prison. He gave them the right to pray and see the foundations of prisons that hold people captive in their society shaken.

Gave them the right to stand up and declare that there is a day of freedom that is available for all people who will turn to Christ and believe in him. Then the jailer said, called for a light and he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. He fell down humbled before God, not before Paul and Silas, but before the God in them.

Some people tonight listening online, you need to fall down on your knees tonight. You need to fall down with a sense of awe that God is willing to meet with you tonight. God is willing to set you free tonight.

God is willing to change your future tonight. God is willing to give you a hope tonight. God is willing to cleanse you tonight.

God is willing to give you a new heart, a new mind, a new spirit, a completely new future tonight. That's who God is. That's why he sent his son and you simply need to fall down in awe and say, God, you're willing to do that for me, me, drug addicted, me, drunken, me, liar, me, living in immorality, me, whatever your situation is, God, you're willing to do that for me.

And God says, yes. And I've left my people on the earth to sing and to praise me, to show you that I'm still there for you. And he brought them out and said, sirs, what must I do to be saved? So they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

You and your house will be saved. You and your household. Believe that Jesus died for you.

Believe that he paid the price for that, which is called sin that has separated you from God. Every wrong thing you've done against the word of God, believe that he died for you. Open your heart and your home to him.

Invite him to come in and you will have a new future, a new life. You'll no longer be captivated by the prison that became your source of income. They spoke the word of the Lord to him and all that were in his house.

I can just see this scenario in my mind, this, this rough and tough, angry jailer, this guy that's fed up with life. He's grown accustomed to living in the dark. He's grown accustomed to the cruelty of the prison

system of that time that had no regard for comfort or life.

There were no rights back then as there might be today. His children and wife would be stunned that he's brought these two men home. He doesn't bring anybody home from the prison.

He doesn't even care, but he comes through the door and there seems to be light in his eyes. It was never there, but I can just see his children, his family. Maybe they were afraid of him when he would come home.

Probably was, you know, it's hard to turn off. If you're one way at work, it's hard to become something different when you get home. And maybe they were afraid.

Maybe his children used to tremble. Suddenly a man comes through the door, seemingly like they've never known before. A man who cared for the prison, but he had as much of a prison in his own life as the prisoners did.

And I can just imagine his children, his family. It says in the Bible, he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. And they're looking at this rough and tumble jailer of a father.

And he's washing the backs of these men that he was partly responsible for hurting in the first place. And I can just see his family because as his wife and children are watching this happen, they would come to the conclusion. Whoever their God is, is God.

And any God that can do that to our father or her husband in her case is God. And I want him to be my God. And the Bible says immediately he and all his family were baptized.

I'm in, I could just see the kids. I'm in, we're in dad. We're in.

I can see his wife, whatever it is. They don't fully understand it all, but they see such a transformation in this man's life. And it all started when he called for a light.

And so that's the crowd, my heart, that you at home would call for the light. The light is Jesus. He is the light.

The light's the way to every man ever born, every woman into this world. He is the light that gives you the right to become a child of God. He is the one who says the entrance of his words.

The Bible says gives light. He is the one that will dispel your darkness. He is the one who will give you a hope and a future is the one who will change your nature into that, which you could never hope to be in your own strength.

He's the one who will give you a song and a prayer, even in the midst of your own trial, that will be a living testimony of who God is to other people around you. God send light, send light. Give me sight.

I want to see, I want to see a hope. I want to see a future and not only he, but his whole house was turned. What a future that man had.

What a difference. If he stayed on that job, I don't know if he left her. The Bible doesn't tell us, but if he stayed, can you imagine the difference for the prisoners now? Do you imagine the tenderness that would be in this man's heart? You imagine the encouragement would be in his voices.

Maybe in the nighttime, he'd start whispering into some of those darkened jail cells saying, guys, girls, it doesn't have to be this way. I used to be like that, but God touched my life. And he put a song inside of me that is like nothing you've ever heard in this world.

And you too can be free. Oh God, I pray Lord Jesus Christ. Send the light to us, Lord.

Send the light God into our minds, send the light into our hearts, send the light into our homes, send the light God across the internet, Lord, let it beam God into every home, into every country, into every situation. Let the light of Christ come in and invade every place of darkness. God, I'm asking you tonight in Jesus name to transform lives as we pray now, as we believe you now, as we've been singing now, Lord, transform lives, transform families, transform homes.

Lord, let the miracle power of God begin to be known throughout this world. One last time for your holy name sake, Jesus. And for the sake of the prisoners that you died to set free for the sake of families and children.

Oh God, for the sake of a generation that don't know you, Lord, we call out for the light tonight. We ask you to send the light, send the light everywhere. God, the sound of our songs can be transmitted through the internet.

Send the light, send the light, oh God, into places where people are huddled because of fear. Send the light Lord to that man and woman tonight who lives alone and thinks that nobody cares and life is not worth living. Send the light, oh God, to that man tonight who's sitting at home and contemplating doing some more drugs, even at the end of this prayer meeting.

Send the light, Lord God, send the light, send the light to that teenager who doesn't see a reason to live, is being bullied at school and feels like ending it all. Send the light, oh God, send the light to the single mothers wondering how she's going to feed her children and make her way through tomorrow. Send the light God to every man who feels remorse and shame and wants to end his life because of the mess he's made of his own home and family.

Send the light, God, with the promise of your word. There's healing, there's restoration, there's hope, there's a future, there's a song, there's a testimony. My God, there's victory that can only come from our Christ.

Oh, send the light, my God, send the light, Lord. Send the light into our workplaces, God, into our environments that we live in, into our apartment buildings, our neighborhoods. My God, send the light, Lord, as we live for you, Lord, as we open our mouths, oh God, to give you praise in the midst of our day.

No matter the depth of our own pain, send the light. Send the light, Lord God, send a spiritual awakening, God, into our generation. Shake the prisons, Lord, of this generation.

Let the doors open, my God. Let the chains fall off and let the redeemed of the Lord say so in this generation. God, open our mouths, Lord.

Open our mouths, Lord. Deliver us, God, from self-focus and timidity and help us to sing our song that you've given us, oh God, in the midst of our prisons and trials. Father, thank you.

And tonight we thank you, Lord, for every place that you've let us be, every place that we are. There's a reason, Lord. I thank you that there were two men in the Bible who didn't moan and groan and complain because the prisoners were listening to them.

Oh, if they had complained, how many would have died in their sin? The jailer would not have found you. His wife would not be saved and his children would not be in heaven today. If they had complained, they chose to praise you.

They chose to pray and the prisoners were listening. Oh God, I'm asking you, Lord Jesus Christ, to do something tonight unprecedented in our generation. This very moment, Lord, let the foundations of every prison be shaken, every door opened, God, and begin to heal.

We thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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