

Paul's Second Missionary Journey: the Philippian Jailer--Acts 16:16-40

by J.R. Miller

The sermon highlights the Philippian jailer's conversion and the power of faith in God, demonstrating that no prison or chain can hold back those who trust in Him.

Scripture: Acts 16:16

Topics: "Faith in Adversity", "Transformation through Christ"

Description

J.R. Miller shares the story of Paul and Timothy during their second missionary journey, focusing on their encounter with a demon-possessed girl in Philippi and the subsequent imprisonment they faced after healing her. Despite being beaten and thrown into a dungeon, Paul and Silas maintained their faith, praying and singing hymns at midnight, which led to a miraculous earthquake that freed them. The jailer, fearing for his life, was led to ask Paul how to be saved, to which Paul responded with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The jailer believed, was baptized, and transformed from a fearful man into a compassionate believer, demonstrating the power of faith and the transformative nature of salvation. Miller emphasizes that true belief in Christ leads to a change in character and actions, as seen in the jailer's immediate response to help Paul and Silas.

Transcript

As Paul and Timothy were going to the place of prayer at Philippi, they were attracted by an unfortunate girl possessed by a demon. She was used by her owners to make money for them. "She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling." They traded upon her supposed inspiration, using her as a fortune-teller. Paul was disturbed by her following him, and, being sore troubled on her behalf, he turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ--to come out of her!" Instantly the demon obeyed, and the girl was left sane. Her owners, however, were very angry, and had Paul arrested and dragged before the magistrates.

The missionaries were cast into a dungeon--but nothing could make prisoners of them. They refused to be crushed by the sufferings through which they had passed. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into the lower dungeon, their feet being fastened in stocks. At midnight a strange thing happened. The prisoners in other parts of the prison heard praying and singing. It seemed a strange time and place for a prayer meeting. It is not so surprising to hear of men praying in such circumstances, for even wicked

men turn to God in distress--but it is certainly unusual to hear hymns in a dungeon.

Most people are in the singing mood, only when their condition is pleasant, and too often a very small trouble hushes every voice of song. But here were men singing, in the midst of greatest suffering. What was the secret? It was their strong faith in God. These missionaries had learned to rejoice even in tribulations. They had the peace of God in their hearts. Christ was with them in their prison, and instead of being cast down, they rejoiced.

Something else happened. There was a great earthquake. The prison walls were shaken, the doors were opened and the prisoners' chains were loosed. This was Heaven's answer to the prayers and songs of the dungeon. Heaven is not very far from earth--at least, it did not take long for the prayer to ascend and the help to return after these good men began to plead. No doubt the prayers rose all the more swiftly because they went up on the wings of song. God likes prayers that are songs--he likes them far better than complaining, repining prayers, such as too many people offer up when they are in trouble.

The prisoners were listening that night to the songs, and they must have been deeply impressed; but there was another Listener. We do not know for what these men prayed in the prison. Perhaps it was for release, if that were God's will. They may have recalled Peter's release, when the angel came and took off his chains, opened the gates and led him out to liberty. They knew that God could get them out in some way if that were the best thing for them, for he knows how to deliver his own children. No doubt they prayed that if God did not see fit to set them free--he would give them strength to bear their imprisonment submissively.

There is no prison too strong for God to break open; there are no chains too heavy for him to snap asunder, there are no walls too thick for him to shatter. There are other kinds of prisons besides those built with stone--prisons of trial, of temptation, of trouble, of circumstances. If we are in any of these, God is just as able to bring us out of them--as he was to release his servants that night at Philippi.

The conduct of the jailer was singular. When he was roused from sleep and saw the prison doors open, he supposed that the prisoners had all escaped, and knowing that he would be held responsible for them--he drew his sword to kill himself. He knew no better refuge from his trouble than this. But there was a better refuge. Paul saved him from this rash act. The gospel does not merely save men's souls from the pains of death; it also saves them from earthly dangers.

But soon another fear fell upon the jailer. Some strange power touched him, and, trembling from fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" What frightened the jailer so? Why did he ask this question with such dread? The danger was past; the earthquake was over; his prisoners were all safe. The worst danger in this world is not found in earthquakes and falling walls and the displeasure of despotic rulers. The jailer had a glimpse of another Judge, besides the emperor at Rome. He had a glimpse of God, and in the light that shined upon him he saw that he was a lost man!

The jailer had brought his question to the right place. Paul himself had experienced the consciousness of a perishing condition, had asked the same question and had found the true answer. So he told the jailer what to do, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ--and you shall be saved." Suppose the jailer had received a wrong answer--suppose someone who did not know how to answer had tried to tell him what to do. His soul would have been hopelessly lost! We should always be prepared to give the right answer to those who may come to us with questions like this. There was only one Savior, and the only way of salvation is by believing on him. What is it to believe on Jesus Christ? It is not enough to give an intellectual assent to

the truths of the gospels. To 'believe on one' is to commit oneself to the person. There must be a committing of the soul with all its needs and dangers into the strong hands of Jesus Christ.

The trembling jailer accepted the gospel, committed himself to Christ and rose up a Christian man. We see the evidence of this at once--in the man's new spirit and character. "He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, set food before them, and rejoiced." Immediately after believing on Christ, the cruel pagan became as gentle as a kind woman! The love of Christ began to work in his heart--and to work out through his life. He became kindly and compassionate. At once he began to love the Disciples of Christ and to relieve the sufferings of the men who had told him the way of salvation. At once he made confession of Christ before his family and friends, and was baptized. He also began to rejoice. The songs the prisoners had been singing a little while ago in the dungeon, broke now from this new convert's lips, too. No better proof of conversion can be found, than what we see in him.

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