



## **Acts 16:16-34**

### **Songs in the Night**

God uses people who make themselves available to Him to do in and through them what He chooses to do.

He is on the look out for people who will be obedient to Him and step out by faith and follow. He prepares a person to share the gospel and then leads him to people He has been preparing to hear that message.

In Acts chapter sixteen we encounter the Holy Spirit leading, guiding and directing the apostle Paul and Silas as they seek to do God's will. We see Him closing and opening doors for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Paul and Silas were looking to see where God was at work and making themselves available to Him.

#### **SAINTS IN PHILIPPI (16:14)**

God is at work all about us. He is always leading His people to accomplish His eternal purpose. Anything we try to do in our own strength, imagination and power will not impress anyone. It will usually fall to the ground as premature fruit and rot. Only what God chooses to do in and through us will last for eternity. Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5b). When He has prepared our hearts spiritually then He will invite us to join Him in His eternal purpose.

How tragic when we are not available to Him or are not willing to allow Him to work a deeper work in our hearts. Only when He has prepared us adequately for the task will He invite us to join Him in His work. He is constantly pursuing an intimate love relationship with us preparing us and making us usable in His service. We do not get invited because we are not ready for the task at hand.

When we are ready He speaks to our hearts and guides us into His chosen area of service. When God leads us it is always something beyond our ability to do it. It has eternal magnitude. It is larger than us. It is beyond our means. Only God can do it. It will always cause us to exclaim, "I can't do that; only God can." And when it is accomplished we can only shout: "I saw God do it!"

We have to step out by faith to join Him. However, the exciting thing is that He always provides everything we need when He invites us to do His work. When we walk hand in hand with Him He uses us to bring honor and glory to His name alone and we experience Him.

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This is exactly what we see God doing in Acts chapter 16. The apostle Paul in Acts 16 was seeking God's leadership on his second missionary journey. He and Silas were journeying through cities where Paul had preached on a previous missionary journey strengthening churches in the faith and people were coming to believe on Christ daily (v. 5). As they passed through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia Minor (v. 6). They kept on trying to go into another region, Bithynia, And the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them (v. 7). In a vision a certain man of Macedonia kept standing and pleading with Paul to come over and preach the good news of Jesus Christ to them. It was in the city of Philippi that Paul met a businesswoman by the name of Lydia whose heart He had prepared to hear the gospel.

Lydia was a Jewish proselyte, a God-fearer, and she was listening with sustained attention to every word the preachers were saying. And the Lord opened up wide her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul (v. 14). Again Luke stressed the sovereignty of God in salvation (cf. Acts 13:48). Not only did Lydia believe on Christ as her Savior, but also her household, probably includes her immediate family, slaves and freewomen employed in her cloth dying business. God planted a church in Europe in the home of this businesswoman. Only God can do that! God invited Paul to join Him in taking on a God-sized opportunity.

### **SATAN SEEKS A COMPROMISE (16:16-24)**

It wasn't long before Satan used a demon-possessed ventriloquist to compromise the gospel. Paul was going to the place of prayer where Lydia and others had put their faith in Christ for salvation. A slave girl having a spirit of divination met them and began following Paul around. She had a quite profitable business fortunetelling (v. 16). She brought her owners a steady source of income. The original word refers to a tumult of mind with the flurry and temporary madness under which those who were possessed delivered their oracles (Trench, *Synonyms*).

The original priestess in the Greek city of Delphi was thought to be possessed by the god Apollo who was considered to be embodied in a python snake. It was thought that anyone possessed by the python spirit could predict the future. Demons and evil spirits took advantage of these pagan worshippers of false gods. This slave girl was demon possessed. Her owners were making a fortune off the scam.

However, even though what she was crying out to people was true Paul would not accept the witness of an evil spirit. What she said was true, These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation (v. 17). However, there was a problem of integrity. The messenger was unclean. Sometimes we cannot hear what people say because their own actions speak louder than their words. The source was unclean. The message and the messenger were incongruent. Jesus also refused the witness of the unclean, even though they spoke the truth. Paul refused to compromise the gospel. Satan is great about telling the truth one minute and deceiving the next. He has no integrity.

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I really am surprised this evil spirit got away with scam as long as it did. She continued doing this for many days. 'Paul was greatly annoyed' is probably a polite way of saying it! She wore him out. He could bear it no longer (NEB). He was annoyed and in a burst of irritation, turned around on his heels one day and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!' (v. 18). And it came out at that very moment! "

If you think Satan gives up that easy when God is busy at work think again. Paul got his hand in someone's pocket book. But when her master's saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities (v. 19). The slave owners cared nothing for the spiritual freedom of their slave girl. They were only interested in their spreadsheet. They manipulated the gathering mob and stirred up their religious-social prejudices against these Jews. Probably Paul and Silas had the most Jewish features in their makeup and Luke and Timothy were considered Greeks to the crowd. Confusion reigned in the mob action. The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order *them* to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks (vv. 22-24).

Hey, I didn't think this was supposed to happen to the good guys! Where is God? His messengers have been beaten to a bloody pulp. The legs have been stretched as wide apart as possible to cause excruciating pain in the stocks. This will not be a comfortable night.

The next scene is in the darkness of the night in a cold, damp dungeon in the Philippi jail.

### **SING SONGS IN YOUR PRISON ((16:25-29))**

Paul and Silas were singing praises from the gladness of their hearts in prison. They were exercising the priesthood of the believer at the highest level in thanksgiving to God for the opportunity and privilege of serving and suffering for Him.

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God . . . (v. 25a).

What was there that made them so glad? These two believers had such an intimate love relationship with Jesus Christ that they were gathered together in the name of Jesus and He was in their midst. The Lord was there though unseen by the eyes of the physical senses, and unapprehended by the other prisoners in their cells. The Presence of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ was with these men in their prison cell. Christ was in that dungeon. We do not hear these men whining. They did not ask for anything. They were not begging Him to set them free. They gave God praise for the privilege of knowing Him!

What was the secret? They had an intimate personal relationship with Christ. He causes all things to work together for our good.

These two men were in stocks and in a great deal of pain in the Philippi prison. But that is not the final word. They were in Christ and abiding in Him! They had a sense of God's presence with them in the prison. It was not that of the prison, or the stocks, or the pain, but of God that gave them the victory. They could sing praises in the prison. That is the heartbeat of Christianity.

Any fool can sing in the day, said Charles Haddon Spurgeon. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by. Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men. "

Have you learned how to sing in prison? Those who sing in their prison have learned the profound secret that suffering is the method by which God perfects joy. Our joy is always perfected in suffering. All the ultimate joys of heaven are joys that have come out of the agonies of tribulation. Our best songs come out of suffering. Suffering is the method by which joy is perfected in our lives.

## Where is your prison?

Do you feel you are in some deep dark dungeon of depression? Are you going through the ravages of a loved one addicted to drugs or alcohol? Perhaps your dungeon is cancer, or a loved one who is enduring that dreadful disease. Maybe your prison is the emotional pain and suffering that goes along with divorce, or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Where is your prison? What do you think is your inner prison?

Are you allowing God to cause all things to work together for His glory and your good? Are you singing in your prison?

You cannot imprison a man who sings in prison. It was impossible to imprison Paul and Silas. Their feet may be in stocks in the inner prison at Philippi, but they are not there. They are sitting with Christ in the heavenly places! They are in the presence of the Living One. They are singing praises to Him whose name is above all names. Men who sing in prison cannot be imprisoned. ”

Do you sing at midnight? Have you found the deep inner source of joy that enables you to sing and make music in your soul on your darkest night? If you do you are a citizen of that city which has no need of light or sun or moon, for the Lord and the Lamb are the light of it. Paul and Silas were singing in the City of God! God had visited them in that prison.

You do not stop God's work when you put a man in prison. Men who sing in prison are men whose work is never stopped. Ten years later Paul would write to this same jailer a letter from another prison in which he says: Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in *the cause of* Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear (Philippians 1:12-14).

And the prisoners were listening to them (v. 25b). You sing in prison and prisoners will listen to you! You whine and no one wants to listen. Don't you just love being around whiners? How many of you like to be around whining kids all day long? How many like to be around whining adults? None one does. They sap all your emotional strength. They drain you dry.

But we all love to be around those who sing in prison. Their hearts may be bleeding, and their lives full of pain, but when they sing we listen. They have a song worth listening to. It has a message of depth and encouragement. The prisoners were attentively listening to the continuous activity of praying and singing going on in the dungeon. You sing in your prison and they will listen to you, too. Praying, singing and preaching is what Paul and Silas were doing in prison. And the prisoners were hanging on the each word just like Lydia did earlier.

## When There's No Earthquake

And suddenly there was an earthquake . . . (v. 26). But remember earthquakes do not always come. Don't be led astray to think that if you sing in prison and pray an earthquake will come at midnight. Prison doors may not be opened in your case or mine. Thousands of believers who loved Jesus just as much as Paul, and

may not be opened in your case or mine. Thousands of believers who loved Jesus just as much as Paul, and were equally called of God, have been left in prison and died there, but they sang. And they sang through the night until they joined those who sang the new song at the throne of God in heaven. We will probably never have an earthquake of deliverance to set us free, but we can sing and pray continually.

A few years later the apostle Paul was in prison again in Rome, and when he wrote to the same church in Philippi, including this same jailer, he was singing the same song of Jesus and there was no earthquake. Read Paul's letter to the Philippians and it is a song from the first verse to the last one. Rejoice, and again I say rejoice! He was a prisoner not of Caesar, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he was in prison again and he never came out alive. But he sang. His last letter, *2 Timothy*, is the letter of a man in prison still singing knowing perfectly well that he will never escape.

The earthquake came, I think not for Paul and Silas, but for the jailer who had done a great job putting them in stocks in the inner prison and he was sound asleep.

The earthquake it, the prison doors opened, the jailer drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here! And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? (vv. 27-30).

God got the jailer's attention. I think the earthquake was for the jailer. He knew the hand of God was in that place with all the Hebrew songs and the LORD God being exalted. Moreover, the jailer knew that if these prisoners escaped he would suffer the consequences at the hands of the Roman soldiers. The only solution he could think of in his panic was suicide. Who needs to be saved? We all need to be saved from the punishment that we deserve because we are sinners. We need to be rescued from our personal depravity.

### **SALVATION MESSAGE (16:31-34)**

The ready response of Paul is Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household (v. 31). Paul is not stressing merely intellectual consent, but complete surrender, yielded lordship to Jesus Christ. The next verse tells us that Paul explained in greater detail the message of salvation. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house (v. 32).

We know enough from Paul's writings to know what he shared with the jailer and his family. He declared to him that he was lost in his sins and unbelief and the consequences is eternal separation from God. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). We are sinners and we are guilty in the sight of the Lord God and we deserve punishment for our selfishness. However, God laid all of our punishment upon Jesus Christ and He died in our place on the cross. He died as our substitute. He bore our death penalty so we could be set free by believing on Him. The wages of sin is death. You and I deserved to die for our sins, but Jesus stepped in and died in our place.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6, 8). You see, someone had to pay the debt. Someone had to die the death as a punishment for the sinner. That is what Christ did for us. Now that the price has been paid God is free to offer us His gift of eternal life if we will believe on Christ.

Paul told the jailer, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved. . . He wrote to the church at Rome, if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he

you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (10:9, 10).

Christ came to save sinners; and that means that He came to save you and me, because we are sinners. If a person knows himself to be a sinner, Jesus Christ died for you, for that is the evidence that Christ came to save you. He that believes —is he that believes *on* Jesus and *in* Jesus; he that cast himself on Christ. He who puts himself on Christ —throws himself flat on the sovereign mercy of God. He that believes on Jesus Christ —that is the foundation. That is what saves you—Christ.

Notice what follows in the next verses. And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household (vv. 33-34). Baptism is to come afterward, not for merit, but as a mode of profession. He that with his heart believes and with his mouth confesses —he that believes shall not be damned. Whether a man be baptized or not, if he does not believe he shall be damned. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:17-18).

The emphasis in the Scriptures is that you are saved the moment you believe on Christ to save you. Justification is an instantaneous act, preached C. H. Spurgeon.

I am perhaps this moment unjustified. The moment God gives me faith, I become justified; and being justified by faith I have peace with God. It takes no time to accomplish it. Sanctification is a lifelong work, continually effected by the Holy Spirit; but justification is done in one instant. It is as complete the moment a sinner believes as when he stands near the lamps that smoke before the Eternal. Is it not a marvelous thing that one moment should make you clean? . . . There shall be a man standing there with all his sins upon his head, and he may yet go just, complete in Christ, without a sin, freed from its damning power, delivered from all his guilt and iniquity, in one single instant! It is a marvelous thing, beyond our power and comprehension. It is done in an instant. God stamps it; the man is pardoned. He goes away in that same instant justified as the publican did when he said, Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner, and received the mercy from which he sued (C. H. Spurgeon, Pardon and Justification in *Sermons of Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. iv, pp. 63).

But that is not the only thing that is so wonderful about this marvelous truth. Not only is our justification an instantaneous act, but one of the greatest things about it is that it is irreversible. That is the beauty and sweetness of it. Thank God that once He justifies He will not reverse His decision. Allow me to quote Spurgeon again:

We are justified and pardoned, and then the mercy is that we never can be unpardoned —we never can be condemned. . . We know better than to suppose that God ever pardons a man, and punishes him afterward. . . It is complete washing that Jesus gives —from that which is to come, as well as that which is past. . . God never did anything by halves. He speaks a man into a justified condition, and he will never speak him out of it again; nor can that man be cast away. Good God! And do any persons teach that men can be quickened by the Spirit, and yet that quickening Spirit has not power enough to keep them? Do they teach that God forgives, and then condemns? Do they teach that Christ stands surety for a man, and yet that man is damned himself on his own responsibility? . . . We have not so learned Christ. . . We believe that if He stood our substitute, it was an actual, real, effectual deed; that we are positively delivered



stood our substitute, it was an actual, real, effectual deed; that we are positively delivered thereby; that if He did pay the penalty, God can not by any means exact it twice, that if He did discharge the debt, it is discharged, and cannot be revived; that if the sin was imputed to Christ, He did suffer for it. We say before all men that heaven itself cannot accuse the sons of God any more of sin. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect, if God has justified and Christ has died? Ah, Christian! You may stand and wonder at this mighty justification, to think that you are so pardoned that you never can be condemned, that all the powers in hell cannot condemn you, that nothing which can happen can destroy you; but that you have a pardon that you can plead in the day of judgment, and that will stand as valid then as now. Oh, it is a glorious and gracious thing! . . . When He justifies, He justifies forever, and nothing can separate us from His love (*ibid*, pp. 64-65)

I had a friend ask me one morning, Wil, what do you mean by the gospel? What does it mean? Now that is a prime indication that God is at work in someone's heart. I told him about what you have just read in this message that God has some good news for us sinners in that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. He is alive right now and ready to give us eternal life if we believe on Him.

Then he began to tell me about being held prisoner in Vietnam and his prison experiences. He told me about being a gunner on the helicopter gunship in the war and turned to me and said, "You mean God can forgive me of all my atrocities in Vietnam? You mean to say God can forgive me of all my sins? Wil, there is blood on my hands. "

I said, "Yes, my friend, Jesus Christ died for all those sins on the cross. He died for every sin you will ever commit. He died for the sinner. You and I qualify for sinners. That means He died for you and me. "

Have you come to the place in your spiritual life that you know if you died you would go to heaven?

Let's suppose you died today and stood before the Lord God, and He said, "Why should I let you into my heaven? What would you say?"

As a believer are you seizing every opportunity God has given you to share the Gospel? Where have you seen God at work this week? If God should invite you to come and join Him at work in someone's life are you ready to make the personal adjustments in your own life and be available to Him to do what He so chooses in and through you?

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries for ten years. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor and teaches seminary extension courses in Honduras.

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