

FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLES BEFORE US

ACTS 16:25-40

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 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 chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 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 household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

This is the great story of the Apostle Paul and Silas, who may or may not have been called an apostle. An apostle was one that was sent out by Jesus Himself, and the closest to Silas possibly being called an apostle was in Paul saying "we" "as apostles" in **Thessalonians (2:5-6)**. Where we're going with this message is in how not only was Paul and Silas sent out to share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ, so are we. Whether or not we are called apostles, or prophets, or pastors, or whatever gifts that God has equipped us with, Jesus is sending us out to share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only that, but they were being watched, closely, and in their obedience and faithfulness to the call of Jesus Christ it brought forth a harvest of won souls, even from being in chains of imprisonment. Hopefully we won't have to suffer such persecution, but in each and every circumstance, good or bad, while experiencing

blessings or trials and tribulations we can be His light that shines forth hope, which may be the encouragement someone needs to stay in the faith or may even lead to someone's salvation in Jesus Christ.

Now in Acts 15:32 though, Judas and Silas were called prophets. Silas isn't recorded to have met any persecution until he joined up with Paul, after Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement about whether or not to take Mark with them. The point being made is that in this story Silas is then in ministry with THE Apostle Paul, who was bold enough and confident enough in who he was in Christ Jesus to say, "follow my example" (**Philippians 3:17**) and even to say to his spiritual son Timothy, "follow(ed) my doctrine" (**2 Timothy 3:10**). Silas was with the great man of God, the Apostle Paul, who said in **2 Corinthians 11:24-30**, " From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily:." What does he say then after listing all of his sufferings that he has endured? He speaks of his "deep concern for all the churches." All of his sufferings were in sharing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Up until then Paul hadn't even mentioned his affliction that tormented him to the point of Paul praying to God several times to remove it to which God replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." After Paul had mentioned his infirmity he said, "I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity." Why would he say such a thing? **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."** Similarly to what John the Baptist said of Jesus when Jesus began His ministry, "He must increase but I must decrease." To God be the glory!

So here we read in this story that after Paul and Silas had been hounded by a woman with a spirit of divination and Paul had grown weary and annoyed at her for following them for days saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation", then Paul commanded in the name of Jesus for that spirit to come out of her. What was so wrong about what she was saying? First of all if she were a child of God, saved by believing on Jesus she would be preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ just as Paul and Silas were. If she were a disciple of Christ she would be pointing people to Jesus not to other men. She had a similar spirit of Balaam who also worked divination for profit. Balaam had his donkey talk to him and ask him why he kept striking him, as the donkey could see a mighty angel with a sword drawn ahead, and so the donkey stopped and was afraid. King Balak wanted Balaam to pronounce

a curse on Israel. God intervened and had Balaam speak a blessing on Israel instead but even after all that, Balaam instructed Balak to cause the Israelites to stumble by the women of Moab. Although Balaam spoke truth in blessing Israel and the woman that pestered Paul and Silas spoke truth in what she said, if God doesn't get the glory then there's a huge problem. If one is not pointing people now to Jesus, who has revealed by God to be our righteousness then there's a major problem. To God alone be the glory! What our lives are to reflect is what Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."
(**John 3:16-17**)

Why have I said all that when our story is about Paul and Silas being in prison and then being miraculously freed through a great earthquake and the doors of the prison opening on their own and the shackles of everyone being loosened? First it could be mentioned that whom the Son sets free is free indeed! (**John 8:36**) Yet, the main focus of this message and this passage of Scripture shows that your circumstances don't determine whether you're free or not. If you have Jesus you are free indeed. "He who has the Son has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son does not have life." That is something to get excited about, is it not? **2 Timothy 3:12** says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." We are all in bondage to something or someone. As the Apostle Paul said in **Romans 6:16**, "to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" Silas, the prophet, got to learn from the Apostle Paul as Paul had learned from Christ to be able to rejoice in persecution, suffering, and imprisonment. Paul said in **Romans 8:18**, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." We can have great hope in knowing that one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth and God make all things new and "God will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (**Revelation 21:4**)

You may be thinking, "that's all good and stuff, but what about the here and now, in my suffering and pain?" When Paul said to follow his example, He was following Jesus' example. In **Philippians 2:5-8**, Paul says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." As Paul said further on in **Philippians 3:8-11**, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for

the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may **know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Just imagine what God has to see and put with on a daily basis. The grief and sorrow He must experience in watching an evil, selfish, whining, prideful world. Yet even greater than that, Jesus "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." (**1 Peter 2:24**)

Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself when He suffered mocking, torture, people spitting in His face, slapping and punching Him, wearing a crown of thorns and then being crucified on a cross, for our sins! Oh how great is His love for us, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." (**Romans 5:8-11**)

Paul possibly showed Silas, by example, or maybe Silas didn't need Paul's example, but nevertheless that while Paul and Silas had been whipped and put in prison and shackled, they rejoiced and sang songs of praise to God! "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!" (**Philippians 4:4**) We know by Paul's example that he wasn't just talking Jesus stuff for inspiration. He and Silas were living it. What began as severe persecution, whippings, and imprisonment led to the jailer and all of his family being saved and baptized. And God only knows what effect their singing and praising God in the prison had on the other prisoners. But the story tells us that the prisoners **were** listening to them. And be assured of this, that there is almost always someone watching you. Kind of creepy sounding I know, but yet while we have all been put in this place, on this earth, in this town, to even where we are at today, to uplift and encourage one another, to help one another, to light the path for one another, to share in the hope that is in us with each other, there is most possibly someone looking and watching you to see what is that hope that lies in you, or the love or joy or peace or patience or kindness. They may just see that there's something in you that they want for themselves. But in all things, good or bad, we point people to Jesus. You can say, "the hope that I have is in Jesus!" "I may not always be that perfect example, and please forgive me if I have done

you any harm, but my hope is in Jesus." And when we are reconciled with God through Christ and reconciled with each other we **can** rejoice together in Jesus as did Paul and Silas, whether good times or bad. In all things, our hope is in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord!

One last thing about this story is in the last part of the story. The way it is worded says that after Paul and Silas went to the home of Lydia, where some of their brothers and sisters in Christ were, "they encouraged them and departed." After being whipped and imprisoned Paul and Silas encouraged the house of Lydia. Wow!

Jesus said that while He is in the world that He is the light of the world. (John 8:12) Yet now, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, interceding with the Father for us, as is the Holy Spirit that He places in us, and now we are His light that is to shine in this world. Yet unlike the woman of divination, unlike Balaam who set up a stumbling block to Israel, we are the light of Jesus, to help one another. We ARE in this together. Jesus said, "blessed is the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." (**Matthew 5:7**) We are to love one another, even our enemies. Sounds impossible perhaps, but with God all things are possible! We don't know who will overcome who was once our enemy, just as perhaps we were at one time someone else's enemy-namely God's.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (**Hebrews 12:1-2**)

Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. (**Romans 13:11**) Jesus will get us through this. Yet in our time of trial while we are in these mortal bodies, let us be the examples that others can look to, that who they will see is Jesus in us by the Holy Spirit that works in us and when they ask us, we can say it's Jesus! We have a great hope and promise in Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen!