

Philippians III –

Introduction: God's Power to Deliver and Save (Acts 16:25-40)

Introduction – When God changes our plans, when God's providence places us in a prison of sorts, when we are mistreated for our righteousness, do we by faith rejoice in the expectation of God's deliverance and in His perfect plan to glorify Himself in us? So deeply connected to this question is another: are you learning to sing/pray the psalms?

At Midnight In a Prison Cell (v 25) – Having been beaten with many stripes, their feet are fastened in stocks and they are placed in the inner prison (v22-24). These details describe particular torture and persecution. The command from Jesus at such a time is to “rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Matt 5:10-12). Is such a response possible?

Singing Prayers – Paul and Silas, “*while they were praying, were singing to God*”. They were really doing two things in one. They would have sung with great faith and with a great cry to God, not just to one another, remembering what God had promised (Matt 28:20b). Here is our test – do we believe in God's good sovereign power in all things or not? When we sulk or shake our fists at God, we have either forgotten (a sin to be confessed) or we find we really do not believe (hypocrisy – another sin to be confessed).

The Prisoners Are Listening – The unbelievers around you, especially those who find themselves in similar trials, will listen to the sound of your voice, your tone, and what you say. We must not mumble through our psalms, nor refuse to shout our “Amen”s. Our prayer-singing accomplishes much and our faith should show forth in sound.

What Singing Accomplishes – Our singing (the content and the way we sing) testifies of God (Psalm 89:1) and His good news (Psalm 96:1-3). Singing in every circumstance and at all times is a testimony (Psalm 92:1-2). Singing is a part of the life of a Christian, like breathing (Psalm 104:33). Having the gift of righteousness, and walking in holiness, causes one to sing (Prov 29:6). Maybe they sang Psalm 69 (vv 1-4, 29-32).

A Great Earthquake (v26) – We think of earthquakes only in terms of natural disaster. The scripture teaches us to think of earthquakes as a sign of a divine deliverance. It is God's anger over the mistreatment of His children (Psalm 18:6f). It is God's marching conquest over the land (Psalm 68:7f). It declares His deliverance (Psalm 77:15-18). It did so at Christ's crucifixion (Matt 27:51) and at His resurrection (Matt 28:2). And this is the prophetic promise of Haggai (2:6f).

Salvation for Our Enemies (vv27-34) – Roman guards were put to death when their prisoners escaped (Acts 12:19). Despairing of his life, this jailer decides to take his own (v27).

Saved Twice – Paul shouts to the jailer that no one has fled. Now a new trembling occurs in this jailer (v29). Now he is truly afraid to die (Matt 10:28). Luke's narrative is short and few details are given, but the emphasis is on believing. He is to believe, not on a series of propositions, but on a person. And Jesus Christ is called ‘*kurios* - Lord’. In the Roman culture particularly, this has great ramifications (Phil 2:9-11). As with Lydia, we see the marks of salvation – heeding the Word, receiving baptism, and practicing hospitality. Table fellowship is thrice sweet here. God has saved this man and his family. This man had just yesterday been Paul's enemy (Matt 5:44). And the wall of Jew and Gentile is obviously broken.

Set Free and Sent Away (vv35-40) – The extraordinary earthquake is somehow attributed to these prisoners, and the magistrates send word to have them set free, but quietly to save face. Paul makes the situation for them even more difficult in his revelation that they are Roman citizens. It was illegal for these Caesar-fearing Romans to beat another Roman, especially without any due legal action. Some ‘deal’ is made (“*they pleaded with them...*” – *parakaleo* can mean “to strive to appease by entreaty”) and Paul agrees to leave the city, but only after returning to the new house-church at Lydia's, having the chance to encourage and instruct them, most likely in the faith and in their standing in the city. It also appears that as Paul and Silas depart, Luke, and possibly Timothy as well, stay to continue the work of this new church plant. It does not appear that Paul was trying to “get even” with the Roman authorities, but rather to use his circumstances to protect and provide for this church.

Lessons – Rejoice in the Lord always, and again...

You Come Bound in Fetters of Sin, Temptations, Trials, and Encumbrances – Sing and rejoice in Your prayers. For you have come to Mt. Zion, where another great shaking and freeing will occur (Heb 12:25-29). Here, you will be invited to come and eat with your Great Deliverer as well in communion and peace.

The Power of Singing Prayers – Do not lose the context of all that has happened here. Paul and Silas had prayed for opportunities to display the power of the gospel to Philippi, and God answered in profound and unexpected ways. Are you stirred to pray for the deliverance of bound family members, blind friends, fallen nations? God is setting up watchmen who will not cease to pray (Is 62:6f), who understand what it means to command God (Is 45:11). Rejoice over the power of God to save sinners. Petition His throne of grace to do what He loves to do.

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