



Good morning. I want to personally welcome all our new and almost new guests here today! And I'd like to say hello to everyone watching online. I know many of you couldn't make it today or are simply checking us out and we can't wait to see you soon.

Today we continue our series in the book of Acts. Today's passage is Acts 16:24-34, and if you have a copy of God's Word I invite you to join me in this life-giving text. What we read today is part of the larger pattern in God's redemptive narrative: **God often delivers his people in a way that builds faith and displays His glory.** If honest, often we only want the freedom not the faith.

For instance, the 10th and final plague of deliverance began at **midnight** (Exod. 12:29). It was not until the Israelites looked back and saw the Egyptians on their heels that Yahweh parted the Red Sea (Exod. 14:10). It was in the lion's den that king Darius called out, "has your God been able to rescue you from the lions" (Dan. 6:20). And it was midnight in an inner jail cell where Paul found rescue.

And the divine patterns of deliverance throughout history continue today. Yahweh's liberation in your life is not primarily for your comfort. His freedom is a faith building exercise and a glory revealing episode. Would you be willing to pray this with me today, "God build my faith and display your glory."

[A Midnight Deliverance Acts 16:23-34]

The Witness of God through you (16:24) We have already found in the book of Acts that no matter what time of day or day and season of life one can find a glimpse of Jesus Christ. Even in the darkest night of the soul, God has given you a light. Paul and Silas were in a dark place. Literally they were in the inner cell secured with stocks on their feet.

These **stocks** had more than two holes for the legs, which would allow the jailer to contort the prisoner's lower extremities in a way that would bring the most discomfort and cramping pain. Even more the **inner cell** was the most secure location but also the lowest part of the prison where the refuse and human waste collected. **No matter how you say it, these were miserable conditions.** But, even in this dark place, the light of Jesus shown. Maybe you can relate. If you feel as if you are in a miserable place, know that Yahweh has given you a remnant of his grace. For me, **the darker my cell, the more beautifully radiant is the light of Christ that shines.** Fix your eyes on his witness!

In this dark place, something strange occurs. For Paul *the presence of the Messiah in him produced a song from him*. Tertullian, a northern African church father, commented, “the legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven.” Can you picture this scene? I can imagine Paul looking to Silas clearing his throat and starting up the band. What did they sing? “rescue the perishing, care for the dying, Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.” Or did they sing “my chains are gone, I’ve been set free.” Why did they sing? In their singing, they acknowledged God’s **character** and expressed their **trust** in him as their deliver. Paul powerfully shows ordinary people how we share our faith. **People expect you to sing in the choir, but when you sing at midnight in the jail, things happen. Do you need to sing of the goodness of God today?** Let the witness of God work through you!

What happens (16:26)? If you want to guarantee yourself an earthquake or an angel in the NT, throw a Christian in jail. Earthquakes were tremendously common in the region and in Hellenism pointed to divine agency. Everyone would have known this is the Lord. The violent shaking of the quake even woke the jailer who immediately thought the worst.

Something you need to know about the Philippian jailer. **Normally, the local guard was a retired Roman soldier who received his assignment as a retirement gift from Caesar. He would have been a man of deep loyalty and conviction.** He would have been a brash man who would rather commit suicide than face the shame of losing even one prisoner.

Paul cried out “don’t harm yourself!” We do not know whether Paul could physically see the jailer in this instance or whether the Lord provided supernatural insight. Why had the apostle not escaped? Hadn’t he prayed for freedom? Hadn’t God released him? **One person was in the prison and free, the other was free from the chains but in prison.** *You never know from looking at someone where they are. Are you in prison?*

Paul decided that he would rather be in the presence of Jesus Christ than free of his personal prison. And because he choose God over “good,” Paul and Silas were able to save the life of another. When was the last time you choose God over good? In Christ, we are free to stay. **This is the witness of God through you.**

The Work of God in you (16:29). This is the power of the gospel on the lips of someone who loves the Lord. Paul reached into someone’s life, risked his own freedom and health, and loved another deeply. The message delivered was Paul’s but the saving initiative is the Lord’s!

Seeing the witness of the Lord through the disciples, the jailer asks, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved.” He was asking, how can I have the same thing that you have? How can God work in me? What a profound yet simple question. Paul in this moment refused to over complicate the good news. The gospel is clear and powerful: believe and you will be saved. And this brief expression expresses the core of what a saving response to the gospel is—**to trust in Jesus’ salvation authority and work.** Do you believe?

One of the greatest privileges I have as a pastor is to hear the personal story of how Jesus saves. Often, I have the overwhelming joy of seeing people place their trust in Christ (Donna). There is no

greater work than the work of God within you! And in Acts 16 we find three different people who trust.

Religious. Lydia a wealthy, driven, intellectual was a God fearer who opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying (Acts 16:15) and she became a leader in the church. She was a dealer of purple fabric, a prized and rare cloth. Some have speculated that purple cloth from this region was the official supplier of the Roman toga. Lydia was independent, spiritual, moral, and the paradigm of success. **She had a house on Logan Martin, Palm Beach, and in NYC.** Lydia was a seeker but found that **religion at its core is outside in. Christianity at its core is inside out.** When Lydia heard the good news, she believed and followed Christ. This is the power of Christ working in you.

Oppressed. We also meet one who is the opposite of Lydia. This girl is not wealthy, she is not independent. Rather she is abused and used by society for selfish gain. This girl was not only an outcast but obnoxious. And she found that the Gospel for was people like her. That the power of Christ has the power over addiction, pain, hurt, abuse, and even demonic stronghold. **This is the power of Christ working in you.**

Secular The jailer did not want sentiment but honor. He was spiritually indifferent. You don't tell the gospel to a man like this, you show the gospel to a man like this. **This is the power of Christ working in you.**

Early 1st century Jewish prayer in the Talmud, "Thank you for not making me a gentile, a slave, and a woman." **Paul a Jew found in one town the power of Christ to save a gentile, a slave, and a women.**

Those who were enemies and separate are immediately brought together, only Jesus Christ can do this. **This is the work of Christ in you.** When was the last time Messiah worked in your life?

The Work of God Upon You (16:33-34) As soon as he believed, everything changed. That same hour of the night. He didn't wait until daylight. Some right now are waiting; **don't wait.** Run to Christ now! Jesus doesn't say clean up and follow me. He says, "come to me in your darkness." The jailer believed, and his family believed, they were baptized. Immediately the jailer took the prisoners into his home and washed them. **John Chrysostom commented, "He washed and was washed. He washed them from their stripes, and was himself washed from his sins."**

This is the power of Christ working upon you. Paul did not lecture the roman guard and ask him to change his life. No! Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus and everything will change. This is the work of God upon you. **Why do we try to do to others only that which the Messiah can do?**

Transition Here Story of a young man who asked, "I don't know if there has been a change." I counseled with a young man who had grown up in church and was now wrestling with the work of God upon his life. He said that he had made a decision but didn't know if there was a life change (many will say Lord Lord). What a profound insight. He wanted the presence of the Living God to work upon and in him. When was the last time that God worked upon you? When was the last time you brought the prisoner in and washed him?

How will you respond? **34** He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

Do you believe? He paid the price for your sins that you might believe and have eternal life. Don't wait for daybreak, run to him even at midnight and find deliverance.

Will you sing even if you are in the stocks? **God often delivers his people in a way that builds faith and displays His glory.** If honest, often we only want the freedom.

Are you willing to surrender everything so that others will see Christ in you?

Will you choose good or God?

Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace. —Oswald Chambers

Notes

24 Receiving such an order, he put them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks.

Prison

Prayer and singing were a common response of those in prison (ECNT, 540)

Inner cell

Often the lowest part of the prison where the refuse and human waste collected. Although it was the most secure, it was also the worst conditions.

Stocks

These stocks had more than two holes for the legs, which could thus be forced apart in such a way as to cause the utmost discomfort and cramping pain (NICOT, 315).

It was not the jailer's business to take any thought for his prisoner's comfort, but to make sure that they did not escape (NICOT, 315).

“The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven.” –[Tertullian](#)

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose. **27** When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped.

In Acts, Christians are always full of hope. Peter slept peacefully the night before his trial (12:6); Paul and Silas sang.

Singing

What were they singing? Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, Jesus is merciful Jesus will save. Or I'm not longer a slave to sin, I am a child of God. Mine eyes have seen the glory?

In their singing, they acknowledged God's character and expressed their trust in him as their deliverer (Peterson, 468).

Earthquakes

Earthquakes were common in this region. In Hellenism, an earthquake points to the theophany (ECNT, 540).

Jailer and 3 stories of deliverance

Of the many conversions in Philippi Luke highlights three people with significantly different backgrounds: a businesswoman, a slave girl under bondage to a spirit of divination, and a jailer in Roman prison (NIV, 447).

Early 1st century Jewish prayer in Talmud, “Thank you for not making me a gentile, a slave, and a woman.”

The church was quite literally born in the place of prayer, which following the initial visit, apparently became the daily focal point of the mission (Motyer, 15).

Lydia, a wealthy, driven, intellectual was a God fearer who opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying (Acts 16:15) and she became a leader in the church.

As they were on their way in prayer, a slave girl followed and spoke “these men who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the servants of the Most High God.” (Acts 16:17)

Philippian jailor, who stopped from suicide, proclaimed, “what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30)

Usually a retired Roman soldier. As a retirement gift they were usually given a jail to oversee by Caesar.

Jailers and guards were personally responsible for their prisoners and in some instances were executed for allowing them escape (NAC, 355).

Acts 16:28 But Paul called out in a loud voice, “Don’t harm yourself, because we’re all here!”

We do not know whether Paul can physically see the jailer in this instance or whether the Lord provided supernatural insight.

Acts 16:29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. **30** He escorted them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Acts 16:31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” **32** And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house.

This brief confession expresses the core of what saving response is – to trust in Jesus’s salvation authority and work (ECNT, 542).

33 He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. **34** He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

“He washed and was washed.” “He washed them from their stripes, and was himself washed from his sins.”
– Chrysostom

Those who were enemies and separated are immediately brought together. This scene illustrates the reconciliation that the gospel brings at the human level (ECNT, 543).

Salvation came to this house because of the conversion of the head (Peterson, 470).

Illustrations

Application

What does evangelism by ordinary people look like?

