



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Sermon Notes

### Paul's Second Missionary Journey, Part 3

Acts 16:25-40

December 2, 2007

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- **Life is about EXPECTATIONS.** When our expectations are met, we are happy. When reality falls short of our expectations, we become upset. Thus, one of the main reasons why we become upset in life is because our expectations have not been met. However, when we know what to expect, even if it is a time of difficulty, it becomes something we can deal with – at least we do not feel like our lives are “out of control.”
- So it is in the life of a Christian. Unfortunately, many Christians are promised material blessings or even wealth as a reward for “righteous” living. As believers, we at least believe that the Lord will protect us and deliver us from suffering or pain, since He “loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives.”
- Further, many popular evangelism techniques promise lives of happiness, joy, and fulfillment, if only the hearer would “accept Christ as Savior.”
- This sort of “health-and-wealth” teaching, however, has led many professing Christians into periods of disillusionment and bewilderment. We ask questions such as, “Why would God do this to me?” or “What have I done to deserve this?” We find ourselves acting more like Job's friends than Job himself.

- ❑ Yet, once again, the testimony of the New Testament unequivocally prepares the Christians for the reality of walking with Christ. Rather than establishing an expectation of a Christian utopia this side of eternity, the Scriptures are clear: if you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ, you **will** be persecuted.
- ❑ The Apostles and early Christians knew this truth well. **The reason for this is that their expectations were biblical.** As a matter of fact, because of their biblical expectations, when suffering arose, it was reason, not to drift into depression, but to praise God. They knew that, because of their association with their crucified and risen Lord, they were sharing in His suffering. Suffering and persecution, then, was understood not as a curse of God, but a blessing!
- ❑ Thus, as Christians today, we must continually ensure that our expectations of not only ourselves and our future, but also of others, are fully biblical. It is then that we will know the peace and joy of Christ in the midst of our struggles in this life.

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<b>I. Paul and Silas are Imprisoned [vv. 22-25]</b>
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- ❑ In **Verses 22-24**, Paul and Silas are arrested and imprisoned in what basically amounts to a mob scene.
- ❑ Paul had just called out a demon from a possessed young girl, and as a result, the young girl’s masters lost the profit they had enjoyed as a result of her “fortune-telling” abilities.
- ❑ As the two men are brought into the market place before the authorities, the masters of the young slave girl accuse Paul and Silas of (1) throwing Philippi into confusion; (2) simply *being* Jewish; (3) and proclaiming customs which are not lawful for Romans to accept and observe.
- ❑ As a result of these charges, and the anger of the masters **Verse 22**, “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.” After this, Paul and Silas were thrown into the inner prison [dungeon], had their feet fastened in the stocks, and were guarded securely by a jailer.
  - Stocks were made of wood and were intended as torture devices designed to push the legs apart. They were very tight and excruciatingly painful, also designed to prevent any thought of escape.
  - In the ancient world, prisoners were forced to sleep in the seated position or on a hard floor, as they were seen as deserving the harshest of punishment.
- ❑ No doubt, the reason for Luke’s detailed description of Paul and Silas’s state was to further emphasize the miracle of what was about to happen.
- ❑ Then, Luke writes, **Verse 25**, “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;”

- This is the first of multiple scenes throughout this passage that are nothing short of shocking to the modern-day reader. In each of these scenes, glimpses of God’s grace are evident in the most unlikely of places.
  - To most of us today, unjust imprisonment would serve as reason to question or even curse God. In fact, I have heard a leading evangelist today say, “It is ok to be angry at God during especially difficult times...He understands.”
  - The fact is – no He does not. There is never a time when we are justified in our anger towards the Creator of the universe. There is never a time when we are right to curse Him. This is nothing short of a willfully sinful act.
  - What is incredible [even shocking] here is that Paul and Silas were not crying out in pain, cursing God and demanding that He tell them why they found themselves in such a predicament. They were not asking, “What have we done to deserve this?”
  - Rather, they were praising God in the midst of their suffering.
  - The Early Church Father Tertullian wrote “The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven.” [*To the Martyrs*]
  - This is the true blessing that is to be known only through suffering.
  - There is perhaps no greater aspect of our salvation, this side of eternity, than to know the joy of Christ which transcends the temporal and material world.
  - It seems that few Christians will ever know the level of intimacy, of trust, and hope that is to be found through the fires of tribulation.
  - Many, if not most, of us as Christians today seek the blessings of God that can be found in this world – blessings that are material. As a result, **we, unlike Paul and Silas in this scene, become imprisoned, enslaved to the things of this world that “charm us the most.” Wealth, then, too often becomes not something that gives us greater insight into God’s glory, but something that pulls our allegiance away from it.**
- One biblical figure who discovered true joy in the midst of suffering was Job.
  - After losing his sons, daughters, and servants, Job said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away, **Blessed be the name of the LORD.**” Job 1:21
  - Then, after his own wife encouraged him to “curse God and die!” Job asked, “**Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?**” [Job 2:10]

- So, we find Paul and Silas imprisoned, shackled, and in the stocks for proclaiming the Gospel in Philippi. Not only this, they are praising, not cursing, Almighty God. Yet, to us today, this seems foolish, almost a fanciful myth. What reasons, then, did Paul and Silas have to praise God?
  - They were sinners who had been forgiven. Certainly Paul understood the gravity of his own sin. He was a persecutor of the Church. He knew what he *deserved*...eternal perdition. Yet, he also knew what he had received...eternal life in the presence of God. Therefore, to suffer temporarily in this life was **nothing** compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord [Philippians 3:2].
  - They were deemed worthy to suffer as Christ suffered. The Apostle Paul counted suffering for Christ's sake as a privilege. In so doing, he saw the approval of God who had deemed him worthy to suffer as Christ did.
  - Paul and Silas's suffering had "uprooted" them from the world. It had focused their eyes, not only the material blessings, which are temporal and finite; but, on the spiritual blessings *in Christ*, which are eternal and infinite. They were not focused on the material things of this world which so often "imprison us"; rather, they were **truly free** in Christ, and as a result, they praised God.
  - They possessed a real joy that the world could not take away – the fruit of the Spirit. This truth is a reality for all Christians. As believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we possess a joy that the world cannot see, touch, or ever take away. Furthermore, as the Holy Spirit is fully God, the third person of the Godhead, He never changes and, therefore, His joy never fades.
  - They had the supreme privilege of proclaiming Christ to not only fellow prisoners, but guards as well [Philippians 1:13]. As they sang and praised God, the other prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas. In other words, their imprisonment became yet another opportunity to declare the glory of God!
  - They also knew that God was in absolute control. Their imprisonment had not caught God "off guard"; rather, it was part of His plan that they suffer in the Philippian jail.
- Later New Testament writings also address the "blessings of suffering":

Romans 5:3-5: "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

James 1:2-3: “Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

1 Peter 1:6-9: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.” \*See also Isaiah 48:10: “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

- ❑ From these passages, we see that suffering also produces perseverance and hope [Romans 5:3-5] and endurance [James 1:2-3].
- ❑ Not only this, but it is only through suffering that we realize that Christ is fully sufficient for us...He is all we need, and when we have Him, even when we experience tribulation and suffering, we lack in nothing [James 1:2-3].
- ❑ Ultimately, as well, our faith in Christ is purified, so that after suffering, what remains is genuine faith in the one true and living God.
- ❑ Thus, even through the imprisonment and suffering of Paul and Silas, the grace of God is present. For, we often wonder today why the Apostles had such incredible insight into the nature of God. Certainly, part of this was that they possessed unique apostolic authority and God had chosen to use them to complete the Scriptures, for example. Yet, one of the means God used to teach His Apostles about Him was through their suffering. It was only then that they could get at least a glimpse into what Christ had experienced and therefore know Christ in a much more intimate way.

## **II. God Opens the Prison and Unshackles the Prisoners [v. 26]**

- ❑ As Paul and Silas sang hymns and praises to the LORD in the prison, **Verse 26**, “...suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened.”
  - Throughout the Scriptures, God’s divine presence was often accompanied with such “shaking” [Exodus 19:18; Psalm 17:8; 47:6; 81:5; Matthew 28:2; Acts 4:31; 12:6-11].
  - Furthermore, earthquakes were common in this part of the world, so the shaking of the prison would not come as a complete surprise to those from the region.
  - However, certainly the timing of the quake demonstrated that it was a direct act of God.

- God had sent an Angel, in Acts 12:7, to deliver Peter. However, here, He uses an earthquake. This reveals that God uses both natural and supernatural means to accomplish His purposes. Yet, both are equally miraculous, as it is God, in both situations, who uses His creation to accomplish His purposes.
- Unfortunately today, unless an act of God defies the laws of physics, we do not constitute it as a miracle. Yet, every act of God is a “miraculous” demonstration of His super-natural, sovereign power over the universe He created. Thus, God often uses very “ordinary” means to accomplish His “extra-ordinary” purposes. Rather than dismissing these events outright as occurring well within the “laws of nature” we should praise God, the Creator of those laws!
- Thus, it would at first seem somewhat natural to experience an earthquake in this region of the world; yet, ultimately, it is God’s “natural” means to demonstrate His “super-natural” power and plan.
- So powerful was the quake that “the foundations of the prison house were shaken...the doors were opened, and the chains of everyone were unfastened.”
- Not only this, but the **earthquake most certainly served to strengthen the faith of Paul and Silas**, for they knew that it was God who was at work accomplishing His will.
- Indeed, this was a miraculous act of God.

### III. The Philippian Jailer is Saved [vv. 27-34]

#### a. He is Brought to the Brink of Despair [v. 27-28]

- After the earthquake, Luke writes, **Verses 27-28**, “When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he 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!””
  - This scene is another powerful revelation of God’s grace in the most unlikely of circumstances.
  - The earthquake wakes the jailer who quickly realized that all of the doors of the prison were open.
  - Assuming, naturally, that all of the prisoners had escaped, the jailer drew his sword and was about to commit suicide.
    - The reason for this was that many of the ancient cultures, to include the Greek and Roman, valued greatly the virtues of honor and duty. The

shame associated with the prisoners from an entire prison escaping would be more than a man like this could bear.

- The only “honorable” thing to do would be to commit suicide. The guilt and the shame would be simply unbearable.
- Not only this, but according to the ancient *Justinian Code* in the Roman Empire, the penalty for allowing an escape, not to mention one on this grand of a scale, was many times death. Rather than face the horrifying pain of Roman justice, he decides to end his life quickly.

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- Yet, this scene demonstrates such an “unusual” picture of God’s grace, that it can easily be missed.
- Through the supernatural intensity and timing of this earthquake, **God has brought this jailer to the point of hopelessness and utter despair.**
  - This may not seem like an act of God’s grace, but it most certainly is!
  - This jailer, rightfully, realizes that he is without hope. He realizes that, if his assessment of the situation is correct, **he deserves death.**
  - **In other words, the jailer is keenly aware of his “helpless estate” and what he deserves.**
  - Unfortunately, too many of us as Christians have ever truly been at this point. We have never been brought so low as to realize that, apart from a miracle, we are ruined.
  - This is similar to what Jesus was speaking of in Matthew 5:3, the first of His Beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
    - It is important to note that everyone who has ever lived is “poor in spirit”; but, not everyone is aware of it.
    - This is one of the greatest acts of God’s grace, then – to become aware of our “spiritual poverty” [or, “poorness in spirit”], and therefore, our desperate need for a Savior.
    - These are the ones Christ is speaking of in Matthew 5:3. They are the ones who know that apart from Christ, they are destitute.
  - For, to understand what we deserve [eternal death] and to understand what we have [eternal life] leads us to a view our Lord most rightly – as our Savior and **only** hope! This, once again, is the grace of God.

- Even as Christians, it is necessary for us to understand this truth and be continually reminded of it.
  - Furthermore, believers often experience times, like the jailer, of utter and complete despair. Yet, often, it is only in these times, when it seems like we have lost everything in this world – to include material possessions as well as our own honor and dignity – that the sufficiency of the grace of Christ is most evident and clear.
  - In fact, the Apostle Paul’s revelation that Christ’s “grace is sufficient for you” occurred only in the context of the persistence of his “thorn in the flesh.”
- Then, as the jailer is preparing to kill himself, Luke writes, **Verse 28**, “But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!”

- Here is yet another miracle in this passage. The earthquake had not only unfastened everyone’s chains, but it had opened all of the doors to the prison. **Yet, no one escaped!**
- Paul and Silas did not even attempt to escape. They exercised incredible restrained and self-control. **They realized that it was not about them. There was something of much greater importance than their temporary deliverance from prison – the jailer’s eternal deliverance.**

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- In the mid-1950s, the Ecuadorian missionary team of Jim Elliot finally made contact with the Auca Indian tribe – a tribe notorious for its barbarism and brutality.
  - Each of the five men on the missionary team had weapons for self-defense. Yet, they decided, in advance, that they would not use them if overrun by the natives. The reason was, according to Elliot, the five men knew that, unlike the Auca, their eternity was secure.
  - On January 8, 1956, the five-man missionary team was overrun and killed by members of the Auca tribe.
  - However, through later efforts of others, to include Elisabeth Elliot, the wife of Jim, many members of the Auca tribe, to include those who participated in the massacre of January 8, came to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
  - These missionaries, like Paul and Silas, knew there was a greater purpose than their own personal, temporary comfort.

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- Luke does not inform the reader why the other prisoners do not escape from the prison. It may be that they are still in great fear from the violent earthquake [possibly fearing more aftershocks]. It may also be simply that they fear the consequences of being recaptured after escaping [likely a tortuous death]. It may also be that they were “captivated” by respect for Paul and Silas. It could have even been a “divine restraint” by God in order to ensure what was about to happen. We simply do not know.
- What we do know is that the other prisoners remained in their cells as the prison doors were open.

<b>b. He Hears the Gospel [vv. 29-32]</b>
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- After Paul’s words, the jailer returned his sword and “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?”” **Verses 29-30**
    - After being “brought low” through the preceding series of events, the jailer ran in, with torches and lights, and fell before Paul and Silas, “trembling with fear.”
    - His question, though, is nothing short of profound.
    - He asks them, “...what shall I do to be saved?”
      - It is quite possible that the jailer had heard or heard about the fortune-telling slave girl who had followed the missionaries around crying out, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation” Acts 16:17.
        - Furthermore, the jailer may have viewed the earthquake as divine confirmation of what the slave-girl was saying and vindication of the men and their message of salvation.
      - Also, it may have been that the jailer had fallen asleep that night to the hymns that Paul and Silas were singing.
      - Darrell Bock writes, “The earthquake has presented him [the jailer] with irrefutable evidence that God is at work with Paul’s group. He wants to know whatever more Paul can offer. Is there a way to escape God’s reaction to the injustice in which the jailer has played a role? In the face of this evidence, the jailer does not want to be found on the opposing side.”
- The Apostle then responds with the life-changing, yet simple message of the Gospel, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” **Verse 31**.

- Then, Luke writes, **Verse 32**, “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.”

**c. He Believes and Demonstrates His Love for God’s People [vv. 33-34]**

- Then, Luke writes, “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 household.” **Verses 33-34**
  - **Verse 34** concludes by Luke writing, “...having believed God with his household.
  - In other words, the jailer is now a believer. **He is now “held captive”...by the grace of Christ!**
- Yet, what follows is one of the most incredible scenes in all of the Book of Acts.
  - The jailer, who would be responsible for each of the prisoners, takes Paul and Silas and “washed their wounds.”
  - There could have scarcely been a greater demonstration of Christ-like love and humility.
  - This is yet another demonstration of God’s grace in this text. **Enemies have now been made brothers. Not only this, it is the converted jailer, the new believer, who is demonstrating the grace of God to the seasoned missionaries.**
  - This scene may have taken place in the prison courtyard where a water supply, such as a well, would have been found.
  - Yet, after the washing of Paul and Silas’s wounds, the household of the jailer was also “washed” being baptized, possibly utilizing the same water source the jailer used to wash the wounds of Paul and Silas.
  - The Early Church Father, John Chrysostom, wrote, “He washed and was washed; he washed them from their stripes, and was himself washed from his sins” *Hom. Acts 36.2*.
- Finally, the jailer did something that was very unusual – he brought them into his home.
- One must remember that **Paul and Silas are still considered prisoners and the responsibility of the jailer**. Yet, what is clear, here, is that the jailer no longer sees the two men as criminals or prisoners, but as brothers in Christ.
- It is over this meal that they all “rejoiced greatly”, no doubt, because of the goodness of God’s grace.

#### IV. Paul and Barnabas are Vindicated [vv. 35-40]

- “Now when the day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, “Release those men.” And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” **Verses 35-36**
  - Luke does not inform the reader why the chief magistrates released Paul and Silas.
  - It is likely because they felt that Paul and Silas had “done their time.” They had been beaten and spent a night in jail. This may have been a just punishment for their “crime” in the eyes of the magistrates.
  - It may also be that the earthquake caused them some fear and superstition about the two foreigners, and they just wanted them to leave the city and cause the people of Philippi no more harm. We simply do not know.
  
- However, Paul was not going to leave so easily. “But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.” The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.” **Verses 37-39**
  - Some Christians today may see Paul’s actions as “un-Christlike.” After all, he did not simply “turn-the-other-cheek” and walk away happily.
  - Paul and Silas had been publicly flogged, beaten and thrown in prison. Not only this, they had not received a trial! This was strictly condemned under Roman law.
  - All Roman citizens in the 1<sup>st</sup> century had the right to a fair trial. As one scholar [Sherwin-White] writes, “according to the text of the *lex Julia* [the law of Julia]..., the Roman citizen might not be beaten or bound by a magistrate *adversus provocationem* or by any other person in any circumstances”, let alone untried and uncondemned.”
  - In fact, there were stiff penalties for Roman authorities who violated the rights of Roman citizens. The magistrates could be removed from office and the city could lose all of its rights as a Roman colony – rights such as tax exemption.
  - **In other words, what Paul was doing was demonstrating that it was the civil magistrates, not the missionary team, who had broken the law – not just God’s law, but even Roman law.**

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- Paul realized that he and Silas had been beaten publicly, and as a result, there was a false perception of Christianity by the people of Philippi who would have witnessed the criminal treatment of the missionaries.
- Thus, because they had been falsely accused, condemned and punished publicly, Paul demanded that they be exonerated publicly [not by simply “sending us away secretly!"]. This is why Paul insisted that the chief magistrates – the chief offenders! – “bring us out [from the prison].”
- **Yet, there was a much greater purpose than his own personal vindication that Paul was aiming towards. He knew that he would soon leave Philippi. However, when he did, he would leave behind a young group of Christians. It was essential for the health of the church that they have good standing in the city in order to grow.**
- Thus, Paul’s actions were, not primarily for his benefit, but for those brethren he would leave behind.
- As one scholar writes, “innocence would be left publicly unresolved” had Paul not done what he did.
- Further, John Polhill writes, “Paul may have seemed a bit huffy in his demand for a formal apology from the magistrates, but that is not the point. It was essential that the young Christian community have a good reputation among the authorities if its witness was to flourish. Christians broke none of the Roman laws. Luke was at pains to show this. It would continue to be a major emphasis in Acts. In this instance Paul and Silas were totally innocent of any wrongdoing. It was important that the magistrates acknowledge their innocence and set the record straight. This was why Paul made such a major point of it.”

○ This scene also points to another truth of Scripture: eventually, God **will** vindicate His people, just as the Father vindicated the Son. And it will certainly be a **public vindication!**

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- After being led out by the magistrates of the city, the leaders “kept begging” Paul and Barnabas to “leave the city.”
- At this point, Paul and Silas certainly had “the upper-hand”; so they were in no terrible hurry to leave the city.
- “They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.” **Verse 40**
- After encouraging the new believers in the home of Lydia, the missionaries left the city.

- ❑ It seems that they left behind Luke [he will reappear in Philippi in Acts 20:5-6].
- ❑ Yet, as they left Philippi, they no doubt rejoiced at how God had moved there. They had encountered many people, three of whom we read of in Acts: Lydia, a wealthy merchant of purple goods; a young demon-possessed slave-girl; and a Philippian jailer.
- ❑ There could hardly be three more different types of people. Yet, all three needed Jesus. And all three were saved in exactly the same way: by grace through faith in Christ.
- ❑ For this is the good news: that *all* [without exception] have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; yet, all who believe in Christ will, indeed, be saved.

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- ❖ **Considering, once again, the importance of biblical expectations: the Gospel in this account accomplished exactly what God had intended. For the Gospel is sufficient, not for securing worldly wealth, power and “favor”; but, rather, the Gospel is mighty to save! It is indeed the very power of God for salvation for all who believe.**