

Always Ready

Acts 16:25-34

Give you a little context. So they head towards Macedonia and eventually land in a city called Philippi. And God starts to work in Philippi. A wealthy woman comes to faith in Christ. Comes across a girl who is demon possessed who apparently can tell peoples's fortunes. I called a psychic...apparently it was good business back then too. The girl made here owners money buy telling people's fortunes, and when Paul drives out the demon they realize their fortune telling business has been shot! So they seize them and drag them before the magistrates and accuse them of disturbing the city and advocating custom that aren't acceptable for Romans...and the courts buy it. And they ordered Paul and Silas to be beaten with rods, "23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

If this is you, how do you feel?

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

We could probably stop the sermon right here and go home. It's midnight, they've been falsely accused, thrown in prison, their feet are shackled, their backs are bleeding...and they're singing they're hearts out! Is this not convicting for us? I mean I know you had a bad week but...not this bad. How is this possible?

He actually tells us his secret for singing in jail. Years later he writes to church at Philippi—the letter to the Philippians—and it's not hard to imagine that he had this night in mind when he wrote, 4:12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me." The secret to Paul's invincible joy lies in the fact that his joy didn't depend on the quality of his circumstances but the quality and glory of his God. Text says the other prisoners were listening—front row seat to joy in suffering. I would love to hear Paul and Silas sing. What were they singing? **(Ps. 16)?**

Paul believed in a God that was completely sovereign over his circumstances and completely sufficient for his joy. And I pause here intentionally because I think everything that Paul does for the rest of this passage flows from his intense love for and trust in God that see here in vs 25. Paul's love for God in vs. 25 is the foundation for the way he lives for God in vss. 26-34. It's the same for us...If you don't have the love of verse 25, you won't have the life of vs. 26ff. So I want to read through this passage and then spend the rest of our time looking at how Paul's love for God fuels the way he lives for God.

26 and 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 bonds were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And 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 and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

So much here that we can learn from about God and about ourselves. **Pray!** 3 exhortations...

Let's be keenly aware of God's saving activity in the circumstances around us.

I'm often so unaware of how God works (Christmas!).

What blows me away about Paul in this passage is that he is so in tune with and aware of God's saving purposes and his role in them. I mean think about you and I—outta there! See ya. But that not Paul's mentality. When the earthquake comes and the stocks fall off and the doors are open, Paul doesn't take a step toward the exit! This is crazy. If we we're watching this in a movie we're screaming at the TV run dude! Go! Get out of there! But he stays! "Why?" Because Paul sensed that God was working in a way that bigger than him. And because of that, when the chains fall off His first thought isn't this is about me getting out, but this may be about someone else getting saved. God hasn't given me this freedom first and foremost to increase my comfort but to empower my witness. I've been physically freed because someone here needs to be spiritually free. Let's all stay put—God may be about to work."

What if you woke up tomorrow convinced that whatever situation you found yourself in, it was because God had placed you there intentionally. What if we were so in love with Jesus and so aware of his intent to work through you for his glory that tomorrow when you're going to work, and your car breaks down, your first thought is not, "this is going to be a terrible day" but "clearly God wants me to show his love to the AAA people." Like God never changes your plans just for fun. What we as obstacles are often opportunities! What if a pipe busts at the house and your first thought isn't anger or pity but, "Clearly God wants me to invite some plumber to church. Or to dinner. Or to Jesus." And what if we were crazy enough to believe that God has designed people to come to faith, by using ordinary people to share the love of Christ with those who God puts in our paths—whether it's in jail or in school or at work. Because this is how he's designed it. But we have to open our mouths...which is exactly what Paul does...

Let's leverages unusual generosity for Gospel opportunities.

Jean Valjean. Generosity does something to people. Especially when they don't deserve it. If this jailer didn't beat them he supervised and them imprisoned them—he is one of the least deserving candidates for mercy. And when he draws his sword—either for fear of punishment or the shame of losing all the prisoners— **But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."** Don't hurt yourself we've all chose to remain in prison. Unbelievable generosity and mercy.

And it does something to him! **29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**

It does something to him deep in his heart. He doesn't come in and say thank you. He doesn't come in and giddy and happy. He says, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul hasn't offered a slick argument for God, or talked about heaven. He simply showed his joy in the Lord and unbelievable generosity and it testified to the legitimacy of this faith so much so that the jailer said "You have something I don't...And I want what you have." Don't miss this—God only saves people when we share Christ but he draws people when we show Christ. Generosity paves the way for Gospel opportunities...

The reality is that all across this room, there are unbelievers in your networks who are aware of your Christian beliefs but have never experienced your Christian generosity. They know you love Jesus, but they haven't felt you really love them. And I believe that one of the ways God intends to attract them to Christ is by the powerful beauty of Gospel generosity; a generosity that's kind of hard to explain; a generosity that leaves them with the suspicion that you have something they don't—but something they want.

I want to challenge you this morning in light of what we've seen here—I want you to pick one person in your network this week and blow them away. Maybe it's a letter you write to them, maybe it's an invitation to come over and have a steak dinner, maybe it's a financial gift—whatever it is, I want you to blow someone away this week...and pray that God would use that blessing to give you a platform to share the Gospel. Which is exactly what Paul does...

Let's be clear and honest in our gospel explanations.

This guy asks one of the best and most significant questions anyone can ever ask. It's a question that many people in this room have asked and perhaps it's a question that folks are still asking, 30 “what must I do to be saved.” And it's crucial that we get the answer to this question right. **(Jamie answering “accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior”)** What does that mean? PieR². Make Jesus Lord of your life. Invite Jesus into your heart. Surrender your life to Christ. And I want to encourage you if your generosity does afford you the opportunity to share the Gospel with someone to do what Paul does here...look at this response...he says

31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” But he's not finished, vs 32 is crucial 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

So listen, when people want to know how to be saved, don't give them a phrase give them an explanation. And make sure that explanation is clear and honest. It's frightening to me how many people have good sounding wrong answers to this question...

How can I be saved? Some people would answer “Live for God” Well this sounds good, but it's the *result* of getting saved. It's not *how* you get saved. You see if you say you're saved by “living for God” then what you're saying is that your really saved by your religious devotion. And if you live your life by Christian principles he accepts you and if you don't he doesn't. This is everywhere. The idea that Christianity is sort of a way to help you behave better and go to heaven when you die. And if you're an unbeliever in the room, this is not the gospel. We're not offering people an alternative system of morality.

There's a similar version of this that acknowledges the need for Christ's death on the cross but it's still works based. It goes something like this. Jesus died on the cross forgive me of all the sin in my past, and gave me a second chance to live right. I've done some bad things, but Jesus gave me a clean slate and now it's up to me to keep it clean or things won't turn out well. Both of these versions of the Gospel make the mistake of thinking that there is some amount of self-improvement or religious devotion or good works that could earn or keep us in God's love. But the fact is, you and I, even on our best days, still sin. Which means that even on our best days, we fall short of God's standard—and God's standard isn't good it's perfection. Holiness. Righteousness. You have to be perfect! Only Christ was perfect. “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—” His gets credited with my sin and I get credited with his righteousness. **Beauty and the Beast!**

This is the Gospel! And when we understand it changes our lives. It changed his...Don't miss vs. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Look at this! This man hasn't just accepted a new philosophy he's become a new person!! He immediately walks in obedience to God. He's been changed. And this transformation an important part of the picture when we talk about coming to Christ. Now I said earlier that we need to be clear and honest when we share the Gospel. And sometimes we try to soft pedal the Gospel up front and act like God doesn't really care whether you obey him as you love him. You don't really have to leave your sin, as long as your just like believe in your heart. You can have Jesus as your Savior but not your Lord. But it's not true. We're not saved by obedience, but we are saved to obedience.

But realize it's not an obedience out of a sense of duty but obedience out of delight. Do you get the picture that this guy is like doing this because "it's the right thing?" No. Think about it...it's 12:30am he wakes up the wife and kids—wake up everyone Paul's going to share about Christ—a let's get baptized and throw a party rejoice together because we've been brought into the family of God. What could possibly motivate this kind of behavior? This guy has found the satisfaction his soul was made for. He's found a treasure that is so valuable that celebrating can't wait and nothing else matters.

And this treasure isn't a raise at work. It's not increased respect in the community. It's not an improved physique or a new house. It is the supremely satisfaction of knowing the King of the universe and being transformed by his love. This is what we offer people. We don't offer people Christianity, we offer them Christ! We don't tell people that if they come to Jesus that he'll give them a comfortable and easy life. We say that with Jesus even when you've been falsely accused and you're in a dark jail cell, you'll still have a reason to sing—because you have a joy that can't be taken away from you; We don't offer a Jesus that makes all your dreams come true. We offer a Jesus that shows you your dreams aren't worth living for and gives you new dreams—dreams that will definitely come true; dreams of a life lived for a king and a kingdom and an eternity with Christ. That's what we offer people!