

“WHAT A NIGHT IN CELL #33”
Genesis 39:11-23, Hebrews 10:32-39, Acts 16:16-40
February 8 & 9, 2025

“Peter Siemens lay on the grimy floor of a Russian prison after being unconscious for three days. He had been arrested for sharing the gospel with children. His fellow prisoners had horribly beaten him in return for being promised parole by the guards. As they attacked him, Peter remained silent.

“Seeing that he was conscious, one of the prisoners asked, ‘Why didn’t you scream as we beat you?’

“I wondered if you were beating me just for your own sport, without the approval of the guards,’ Peter answered through bleeding lips. ‘If so, and I had yelled, you would have been punished for prison misconduct. I did not want you to suffer, because Jesus loves you, and I do, too.’

“Peter’s elegant declaration won the hearts of the hardened criminals in his cell. They sent word throughout the prison grapevine that no one should touch him, regardless of where he was transferred or what incentives the guards offered.

“Prisoners waiting to be executed at the prison heard Peter’s story and sent word asking for his help. Peter responded, and through sympathetic guards, he shared with them the story of Jesus’ love. Some of them may have accepted Christ before their execution because of Peter’s ministry. His living example of Christ’s love brought a significant opportunity to others. Those who would have never heard otherwise received the Gospel message.

“The spoken word can be powerful. A well-timed word of counsel, love, or encouragement can go miles when someone is in need. But what about when someone is spiritually needy? Peter Siemens’ words were motivated by his love for Christ. That love

enabled him to courageously speak of Christ's love to his enemies at a time when they needed to hear it most. Peter was obedient to God's leading, and God used Peter's words to change many of his fellow prisoners' eternal destinies. Did God use someone's words to lead you to Jesus? When God calls you to tell someone else about Jesus, will you obey Him at that time? Consider the eternal difference your example and words can make."¹

Well, that is the challenge for us today as we see the difference folks made throughout history to affect those around them. People freely shared Jesus with others, even their enemies, in order to help them to come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Those who lived before Jesus exemplified God in their lives so that others could see the difference it made to follow the Lord our God. Their lives were testimony of God's blessing to them.

In Genesis 39 we heard how Joseph was treated unfairly by his master Potiphar's wife. She wanted to take advantage of him and make him a sex slave, yet because he refused her advances, she accused him fraudulently of attacking her, thus getting Joseph put into prison. He had done what was good and right, keeping Potiphar's house organized and obeying the guidelines of the house. He followed God's guidelines, to "*Keep your way far from [the adulteress woman who entices with sweet words dripping with honey]. Do not go near the door of her house*" (Proverbs 5:8), and he ran from her. Yet he suffered imprisonment because he did not do what Potiphar's wife wanted him to do. And because he did not conform to her desires, he was accused and punished.

However, once he was there in prison, God blessed Joseph with His presence so that "*He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was*

¹ (Voice of the Martyrs, *Extreme Devotion*, [Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2001] pg. 181)

done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (Gen. 39:21-23).

Even though Joseph was put in prison, he continued to trust in the Lord our God so that God could use him to make a difference in the lives of those in that prison. Oh, there may have been times when Joseph wondered why God **had him in prison**, but as he trusted God, he learned that no matter where he was, if he continued to follow God's leading, he would be able to impact all those around him. He gained respect and responsibility as he lived a godly life so that others were impressed with his work. They saw how he lived and that gave him the chance to help them come to know the Lord, too.

Many times in our own lives, we wonder why God has us where we are. Maybe it's a job that has become a grind and is no longer enjoyable to do. Maybe it is being a part of a family that has become fractured or broken and life is difficult for you. Maybe it is group you got involved with and enjoyed it at first, but after a change in some of the people in that group, it has become less enjoyable to be a part of. Maybe you have also been accused of doing something, unfairly or fraudulently, and have been put into a place you'd rather not be, or are suffering repercussions you would rather not face. What is it that God is doing in the middle of that situation in and through you? What opportunities do you have to share Jesus with others?

God calls us to live in such a way as to be a witness to His love and mercy and grace. Despite what we might have been accused of doing, **are we able to live** in a way that shows love to even our enemies or our persecutors?

That's what we see in our lesson of Acts 16 today. Paul and Silas and their companions have made it to Philippi under the Holy Spirit's direction. They have begun to make a difference in the lives of some of the people there, but they come into a situation that demands changes, and

that turns everything up-side-down. Listen to the account found in Acts 16:16-40. (READ Acts 16:16-40.)

After delivering a slave girl from demon possession, Paul and Silas are corralled up and accused of “*throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice*” (Acts 16:20-21). I didn’t know that freeing a slave girl from demon possession was against the Roman law? But doing what is right can lead us into trouble whenever we separate a person from their source of income. It was certainly a false accusation for Paul and Silas, but as they are taken “*into the marketplace to face the authorities*” (16:19), the crowds get involved and they get all excited about what the owners of the slave girl were saying. There seems to be no real trial, but sentencing was swift and Paul and Silas wind up in prison, in the most secure cell in the place, having been severely flogged.

It’s not exactly what they were expecting, but nowhere do we hear of them putting up a fight against their accusers. They had done the right thing by releasing the slave girl from demon possession, and now they were suffering for it.

Folks, don’t worry about suffering for doing the right thing. “*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened’*” (I Peter 3:13-14). Even though you may end up in a situation you did not expect, DON’T STOP DOING THE RIGHT THING! Keep living for the Lord Jesus in all you do so that people can see it and grow because of it.

So what do you do when you end up in a prison for doing the right thing? It would be so easy to complain, or grouch, or scream out from the pain, or even get angry at the guards and other prisoners, pronouncing that you were innocent and surely justice would come!

Paul and Silas took another avenue - they prayed and sang songs to the Lord. After all,

they couldn't sleep as their backs were all torn up from the flogging they had received. They couldn't lie down because it hurt so much. They couldn't lie on their sides because their feet were in stocks. I can only imagine them praying for release of the pain, and then, maybe Silas turns to Paul and says, "God just put a song in my heart. *'Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross; lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss. From vict'ry unto vict'ry His army shall He lead, till ev'ry foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord in deed.'*"

Paul might have answered, "Hey, that's a good one. Here's another one, *'Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come, why should my heart be lonely, and long for heav'n and home, when Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me; His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me. I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free; for His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.'*" Back and forth it goes, encouraging each other.

And those in the prison are hearing these two guys praising God and singing songs. And this went on and on, even until midnight! I wonder about the other folks there, if there were any complaints from them about the lateness of the praise session? "Can't a guy get any sleep, even in prison?" In any case, it certainly wasn't what anyone in the prison would expect from two guys who were just flogged and thrown into stocks.

Luke tells us that *"the other prisoners were listening to them"* (16:25). Paul and Silas not shy with what they were doing to the point that everyone else there heard them. They were hearing joy, not anger. They were hearing thanksgiving, not complaining. They were hearing prayers, not condemnation. This was not the typical pair of "criminals" they were all used to. What in the world would be causing these two men to praise God in prison? They wanted to understand the reason for Paul and Silas to be praising God for them being in prison. They

would want to know more about this peace and joy that Paul and Silas were experiencing.

However, all of this is interrupted by a massive earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison and released all of the prisoners from their chains and opened up all of the cell doors (Acts 16:26). Though the prison seems to be intact, everyone is freed from their confinement, to the point that the jailer is awakened, and seeing all of the doors opened, probably cried out in anguish because he was responsible for all of these guys. If anyone were to escape, his life would be on the line for allowing it to happen.

Hearing this outcry of anguish, and hearing the jailer draw his sword, Paul suddenly realizes that he does not know that everyone is still there. So he cries out, informing the jailer of the situation. And so amazed is the jailer that he falls at Paul and Silas' feet and says, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30).

And then the marvelous happens - the jailer believes in Jesus as his Savior, and he leads his whole family to the Lord. It's a total 180* difference as the man accepts Jesus into his life. Paul saved his life by preventing him from killing himself, and Jesus saved his soul as he professes Jesus as his Savior.

Isn't that cool!? Through the pain and anguish suffered by Paul and Silas, through their worship and praise of the Lord God Almighty in Jesus Christ, this Roman jailer and his family are set free from sin and death and everyone was baptized that very night! I don't know about you, but I'd be willing to endure difficulty and hardship if it meant the redemption of a whole family. And who knows how many prisoners in their cells were converted too?

It's an amazing thing that can take place if we remain faithful to the Lord Jesus throughout our lives, so that even the difficulties we are forced to endure produce eternal fruit for the Kingdom of God. Even the harshest treatment we may receive for being followers of Jesus

can bring about eternal results if we keep our focus on living for Jesus and following all His commands. Though those around us may claim that we are throwing our households, communities or cities “*into an uproar by advocating customs “unlawful” for [those around us] to accept or practice*” (16:20-21), we have been called to stand up for what is right in order to help others come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Who knows how many we might affect by our prayers and songs of praise to the Lord?

So the words of Hebrews 10 come alive for us. Even though we may not have had to face severe persecution for being followers of Jesus yet, still these words ring true for us. “*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised...*” (10:32-36).

No matter what kind of suffering you face because you are a follower of Jesus Christ, stand your ground and be firm in your convictions that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Do not be concerned about things you may lose. Do not be concerned about abuse you might face. Do not be ashamed of being outcast by your family, or unfriended by ones who once claimed you as a friend. Stand up for what is good and right and just and true, according to what Jesus tells us, and God will see you through it. And not only will He see you though it, but your witness of faith will be a shining witness to those around you so that they might find faith in Jesus, too.

The jailer in Acts 16 was so impressed with the faith that Paul and Silas had in Jesus that

he received Jesus as his Savior, too. He and his household became believers, and they were so filled with joy that they tended to Paul and Silas' wounds, they fed them and learned from them all that night and into the morning. What a tremendous reward for Paul and Silas for remaining faithful throughout this whole ordeal!

You see, many people today need to see real life witnesses of Jesus Christ. This world has so dulled the minds and hearts of people in the United States that they refuse to even see any hope for new life. The pleasures of this world so deaden the hearts of people that they no longer see truth or righteousness. Who will give them true examples of the difference that Jesus makes unless we live it before them? How will they come to know of Jesus unless we stand strong in our faith and live it for them to see it?

We are to have such love for those around us that we live for Jesus every day. We are not living just for ourselves. When we have Jesus Christ as our Savior, we become the ambassadors for Him, representing Him with our every word and action. And as we live for Jesus, we may be able to bring others to know Him as we live that faith before them. But it is for us to live and endure and shine the light of Jesus wherever we go, for His glory.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for the witness of Paul and Silas, who praised You even in the aftermath of unjust beating and imprisonment for doing what is good and right in Your eyes. Their testimony of faith changed the hearts of many around them, and led them to put their faith in Jesus. So, may we also live our lives before those around us, that we also might endure the suffering that comes our way so that others might see our witness and turn to Jesus, too. Give us the strength and courage to faithfully and boldly live our faith for the benefit of those around us to see. This we pray in Jesus' great and powerful Name. AMEN.