

Church is a Family

9-24-2017

Acts 16:25-34

There is something scandalous about doing meaningful work for our eternal God. Here it is: the world will not celebrate or appreciate the work that we do as Christians to reconcile people back to God. Doesn't that just sound crazy? People literally get upset and defensive when we as Christians try to evangelize the world on behalf of Christ. Friends, here's the truth; they did it to Jesus, they did it to Paul and Silas, and they are going to do it to us – the world will not be happy when the church does the work that we are called to do. You don't believe me? Well, in Luke 4 – Jesus announced that the day of salvation was at hand. This was the day that the Lord had set apart to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to proclaim freedom to captives, sight to those that were blind, and liberation to those that were oppressed – and the response of the people was unfavorable! Let me try this again, in Mark 5 – Jesus meets a man that is demon possessed, living in a cemetery, a chronic insomniac, supernaturally strong, and hurting himself. Jesus kicks out the legion of demons, and the people of the town were afraid when they saw the man sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. In fact, these people asked Jesus to leave the town after he delivered this man from demonic occupation. And even in this text: Paul and Silas, this small band of preaching brothers, traveling throughout the district of Macedonia, to a major city called Philippi, seeking to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ – met a woman who was demon-possessed and a slave. The text says that she was a fortune-teller who earned a lot of money for her masters. Paul and Silas rebuked the demon and set the girl free from demonic occupation, and the response of her master's and the people in the city was to capture, arrest, beat, and then imprison Paul and Silas as criminals. Wow! The point is this: we should not expect people in the world to celebrate, acknowledge, love or appreciate the work of the those that love God. But here's the greater point: we cannot allow the response of the world or what we have to suffer for the sake of Christ, to change our attitude, our behavior, or our character.

At this point, one would think that Paul and Silas would be ready to denounce Jesus Christ and the ministry of outreach and evangelism. You would think that these men would be bitter, confused, embarrassed, and outright angry at these turns of events. But, there is something unique, wonderful, and beautiful about the hope that we have in Jesus. Our hope in Jesus, and our fellowship with one another, helps us to find joy in the midst of suffering. Please, don't look past the point that Paul and Silas, these two gospel brothers, were together during this time of suffering. They were determined to share Christ together, as brothers!

LifeNote #1 – Are you determined to share Christ with others?

Now, this is family. As a family, united by the hope of the gospel, they preached Christ together, they traveled together, they suffered persecution together – notice what they did not do: have a pity party together, complain together, give up together. Instead, these two gospel brothers

found a reason to pray and praise God together, amid the horrors of persecution. **A godly family knows how to pray and praise God together.**

LifeNote #2 – A godly family knows how to pray and praise God together.

Acts 16:25 “Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.”

Again, please notice what they weren't doing. They weren't complaining or contemplating giving up even though their current circumstance was difficult. Can you imagine? They were stripped naked, beaten with wooden rods, thrown into a wet, stinky, unsanitary dungeon-like prison, while their feet were placed in stocks. And, amid their time of suffering for Christ sake, they bonded together like a family, prayed to their God, and then found it within themselves to praise God, even in a terrible situation. Too often, I get on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and I see an abundance of critics, cynics, and commentators, but God wants us to be Christians; people who are willing to be Christ like, that is all that God desires from us. So, I have some questions:

- How do we respond to difficulty?
- How do we respond when we see injustices?
- How do we react when we are persecuted for our faith?
- Do we hide, do we run, do we give up?

I love Paul and Silas in this text; they give us a model to follow for how to endure suffering and bond together as family. What would families look like if we pressed beyond difficult situations, if we refused to get bitter or harbor unforgiveness, if we choose praise parties and instead of pity parties? Families would look a lot different if we learned how to pray and praise even when we meet life on its unfortunate terms.

But, before we move to the next verse – consider with me the last part of verse 25: the other prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas as they prayed and praised God. This is something that we should take very seriously – people are watching us! When you name the name of God, when you tell someone that you follow Jesus, when you preach (through word or action) that Jesus is alive, people are watching. People want to see, not how you act when everyone is singing the praises with you, but how do you act when you are going through hell. Do you go through life's difficulties with bitterness, unforgiveness, and anger, or do you go through life's difficulties like David says in Psalm 23:4-5a, “Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.” Do you walk through the difficult times of life like John says 1 John 4:4 “Greater is He that is in me, than he that is in the world.” We must realize that people are watching us to see if the gospel of Jesus Christ works when life is hard, unfair, and full of pain. The prisoners in this jail were watching and listening to Paul and Silas as they prayed and praised God through the storm of a lifetime. And again, these two gospel brothers, teach us something else about family. A godly family stays together.

LifeNote #3 – A godly family can be a gospel witness to a frightened world.

Acts 16:25 “Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.”

The human reality is this: Paul and Silas, and the other prisoners were probably frightened by the terror of being imprisoned. Think about it, they were incarcerated, their freedom was restricted, they were treated cruelly, they were stripped of their dignity, and then they are prohibited from going about on their own. But even in the midst of this terrible situation, these two brothers were able to maintain their gospel witness. Now, that could be the end of the story right there; but, that's just the beginning. Verse 26-28 really brings a reality to a head! The saying goes, "when it rains, it pours." Things went, seemingly, from bad to worse. When everything seemed to be down, out, and just terrible, more devastation met them in the form of a massive earthquake. See the picture: these two gospel brothers, along with a prison full of criminals, are in this cold, dark, and wet prison quarters – and suddenly the very ground that they were standing on begins to tremble and quake. One would think that this story would end in these brother's funeral services in the following week, or a long and uncomfortable journey to the nearest Philippian hospital, or even the Philippian county jails infirmary; but to the contrary, the prison doors flew wide open, their chains fell off, and these prisoners were miraculously free. Of course, when the Philippian jailor rushed to the scene and saw that the prison doors had been opened, he decided to do the inevitable, and that was to kill himself. He had lost hope. He felt he had no choice in the matter but to take his own life. Paul called out with a loud voice, "Stop, don't kill yourself! We are all here! To the surprise and chagrin of the jailor, these prisoners choose to stay put despite the opportunity to run away in the name of freedom. Now, we could speculate as to the reason that the jailor fell to his knees and wanted to know the way of salvation, but the truth is that we really don't know why.

Read verses 31-34

- Is there something about fear or a near death experience that makes us conscious of our need for God?
- Is the feeling of hopelessness a pre-requisite for a plea of salvation?
- Does catastrophe encourage us to think deeply about eternity?

We don't know the jailors reason for crying out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved." We don't know if he saw the confidence and poise of Paul and Silas, amid the angry shouts of an evil mob, or if he saw the Jesus-like demeanor of these two budding preachers as they were stripped and beaten. We don't know. But what we do know is this: once he asked what he needed to do to be saved, that both men led him to Jesus Christ. Paul and Silas didn't try to give him advice to handle the other inmates that also stayed even after being released, they didn't try to help him put the prison back together, and they didn't help him to concoct a story to explain the turn of events. No, instead, they saw his eternal need, his spiritual need, his ultimate need – and they shared Christ. These two gospel brothers, who were joined together by the work and power of Jesus Christ, were willing to see beyond their cultural, economic, and racial difference, to see his obvious need for Jesus Christ. Consequently, they invited the man to believe in Jesus – and from this jailors decision to believe Jesus, his entire family was also saved. Doesn't that sound like God's will? The leader of the home was saved, and then his entire household followed the lead. These two gospel brothers, gained another brother and his entire family, when they shared the gospel even under harsh conditions.

Don't you wonder What if Paul and Silas had turned their backs on God and were panicking instead of praying? Or, what would've happen if Paul and Silas, and the rest of the prisoners would have run out to enjoy their freedom? When we suffer, do we automatically think that it's the devil causing us to suffer? Or, could it be God sometimes; who would strategically put us in difficult and uncomfortable situations to win someone else to Himself?

Lastly, I want you to notice the immediate fruit of the gospel. (verse 33-34) The jailor felt compelled to live in a way that reflects the truths of the gospel. The jailor, my friends, had been transformed! Formerly, he was probably the one who stripped the prisoners, beat them with wooden rods, robbed them of their dignity, and then imprisoned them in horrible conditions. But now, after he trusted in Christ, was hospitable, caring, considerate, and had a servant's heart. Now that's the difference that only Christ can make in the heart of man. Only Christ can change the heart. Not fancy theological jargon, not religious rhetoric, not tailored suits and nice dresses, not programs and church protocol – Jesus! Yes, that's it, only Jesus can take those who are polar opposites socially, racially, religiously, and the like – and make us One as He and the Father are One! Only Christ can make us, the Church, a family.

LifeNote #4 – Only Christ can make us, His Church, a family.

I can picture the jailor now, sitting down on his porch, after everyone's gone and the dust has settled, singing a song like this:

He Touched Me

I was – Shackled by a heavy burden,
'Neath a load of guilt and shame.
Then the hand of Jesus touched me,
And now I am no longer the same.

He touched me, Oh He touched me,
And oh the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole.

Since I met this blessed Savior,
Since He cleansed and made me whole,
I will never cease to praise Him,
I'll shout it while eternity rolls.

He touched me, Oh He touched me,
And oh the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened and now I know
He touched me and made me whole.