

# What Paul and Silas Can Teach Us About Rejoicing in Jesus Through Our Pain

I was reading through the book of Acts recently, and I saw something very interesting in chapter 16. Paul and Silas were falsely accused and thrown into jail. How would you handle that? What would those around you think of your response to being beaten, falsely accused and thrown in jail? And, not just that, they were chained in stocks.

In the natural, outside of the grace of God, I would be screaming, “I am innocent!” I would be terrified, and it would be apparent to everyone around me that I was terrified—just by my actions. But Paul and Silas had a very unnatural response to this great injustice. “At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25).

First, we see that at midnight they were full of Holy Spirit and worshiping. That, in and of itself, is amazing. They were just beaten with rods, after being stripped of their clothes, and yet, they were focused on the mission and on the man, Yeshua. Like the apostles before them, they “rejoic[ed] that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41)

## **The Prisoners**

But look at the end of Acts 16:25: “and the [other] prisoners were listening to them.” Yes, beloved, you are being watched! Unbelievers want to see how you, as a believer, react to trials and tribulations. They want to see if you really practice what you preach.

These were criminals. Imagine what they thought when they

heard the rabbi and his prophetic friend worshipping God after their beating. They didn't know if it was real, but they were sure convinced that these two fellows thought it was real. And then, there is an earthquake.

Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" (Acts 16:26-28)

Isn't it interesting that none of the prisoners ran away? If you are a prisoner and, suddenly, you are freed, your first instinct is to run! I have never seen a TV show where the freed prisoner didn't run. But these prisoners were more interested in hearing from Paul and Silas than they were in running. Freedom in Jesus just became more important than freedom from chains.

## **'Woe Is Me'**

But imagine how different this scenario would have been if Paul and Silas had been in their cells, moaning and crying from the pain. I have, at times, given up on life—over not being able to find my car keys, much less being persecuted. In fact, it reminds of when I was arrested after blocking an abortion clinic in the early 90s. The police put me in plastic cuffs and, because of a bracelet I was wearing, it cut off circulation in my hand, not to mention it was really painful.

On the way to the police station in a school bus, I asked the policeman to loosen the handcuffs, explaining that they were too tight. I can't remember his exact words, but they were something akin to, "What did you expect when you got arrested?" He looked at me as weak—a soft suburbanite who expected special treatment. I was embarrassed. Yes, I was

being watched—and I failed.

But I've learned much since that time. Sadly, there are so many who are willing to speak of the glory of God to unbelievers, and then, the minute trouble comes, they collapse. As Proverbs says, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" (Prov. 25:10).

## **Decide Before**

We can be proactive and prepare for times of trouble. We can choose now to be like Paul and Silas who, in the midst of their trial, worshipped God at midnight. No one cares how happy we are when times are good, but they are watching to see how we react in difficulty. How we react can be the difference between heaven and hell for those watching.

Those prisoners could have run, but they stayed to hear about Paul's God. The fear of God came upon them as God answered Paul and Silas with an earthquake. *God, help me to react like Paul and Silas in times of trouble.* You never know when God is about to answer—so don't give up! {eoa}

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