

Remember This Biblical Principle When All Seems Hopeless

Just after Paul, Silas and other prisoners had been singing and praising in a Roman prison in Philippi, the earth quaked in a somewhat unexplainable fashion, and the prisoners were freed. Rather than run, Paul and Silas seemed to tarry in place. The Bible repeats this principle often: “Serve where you are; move when the Spirit moves you.”

The Roman soldier tasked with guarding the prisoners panicked at the thought of what would happen to him if they escaped. After all, he had received strict orders when the prisoners arrived to “guard them carefully.” We know he took these orders seriously: “When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks” (Acts 16:23-24, NIV).

According to Roman law, the guard would probably not have been held accountable because of the “act of God” provision, but he surely felt regret, remorse and personal failure at the prospect of losing his prisoners. He appeared to be at the point of suicide when Paul stepped in to serve the soldier:

“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).

I’m particularly moved by Paul’s exhortation, “We are all here.” I think he is saying much more than, “We haven’t run away. We are still here.”

The phrase speaks to my heart in this way: “Do not harm yourself, sir; we are here for you.” What other reason would

cause the jailer to fall at the feet of his former prisoners?

“The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” (Acts 16:29-30).

Some scholars argue that the jailer was simply seeking to be saved from the Roman rulers. What a limiting view! When we consider the verses that follow, we are persuaded to realize that a radical transformation occurred in the heart of the jailer:

“At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household” (Acts 16:33-34).

The prisoners’ worship in times of extreme pain and stress moved the guard to seek what they modeled. He wanted whatever the prisoners had. Their hanging around the cell after the earthquake further modeled there was something different about these men.

When Paul stepped toward the guard and comforted him at his weakest point in life, the man could only reply, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30b).

I suppose even in Bible times, people were not accustomed to someone hanging around the office late only to provide counsel and comfort. How beautiful are the words, “I am here for you,” followed by a readiness to act immediately?

Many times throughout my ministry, people have asked me, “What must I do?” It seems the best I have to offer is encapsulated in the one word “believe.”

Believe in the promises of the Lord Jesus—and consider these action steps:

Consider your memorial stones. Make a list of all the times your needs were met. How many times did you feel pending doom, only to find an answer from the Lord?

Pray for the specific circumstance. Ask God to show you again. If we pray without ceasing, He listens without ceasing.

Take a gift inventory. Use what you have. Be faithful with what you have. Whatever you lack for a situation, God will provide as He always has, but perhaps in different ways than in the past.

Praise more than you petition. I heard this phrase in a podcast with Jungle Jen (if you haven't heard that podcast, find it on Greenelines on). Paul and the others were busy singing and praising well before they were freed.

Remember more. Pray more. Use more gifts. Praise more!

Then prepare to have people ask you, "What must I do to be saved?"

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