
Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 16:24-34
Lesson 30 – ZOOM OUT

Acts 16:24-34 (NIV) ²⁴ Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ 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 family.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to worship God before your circumstances change?

Reference: **Acts 16:24–25; Habakkuk 3:17–18.**

- a. Paul and Silas praised God while they were still wounded and chained.

Personal Reflection: Is your worship based more on **who God is** or **what God does for you**?

2. How can worship change your perspective even when it does not immediately change your situation?

Reference **Acts 16:25; Psalm 34:1–4.**

- a. **Personal Reflection:** What situation in your life have you been “zoomed in” on so closely that it has become difficult to see God in the bigger picture?

3. What is the difference between being physically bound and spiritually bound?

Reference **Acts 16:24–25; John 8:36; 2 Corinthians 3:17.**

- a. The sermon declares, “*What’s happening TO me doesn’t have authority OVER what’s happening IN me.*”

Personal Reflection: What have you allowed to control you internally even though it cannot control your relationship with God?

4. What does Paul and Silas’ response teach us about taking responsibility for our response to suffering?

Reference: **Philippians 4:11–13; James 1:2–4.**

- a. We cannot always choose what happens to us, but how does faith influence **how we respond** to what happens?

5. Who is listening to your life when you are going through your “midnight”?

Reference **Acts 16:25; Matthew 5:14–16.**

- a. The text specifically tells us that *“the other prisoners were listening.”*

Personal Reflection: Who might be learning something about God by watching how you handle adversity?

6. **Why might our witness be more powerful in difficult seasons than comfortable ones?**

Reference: **2 Corinthians 4:7–10; 1 Peter 2:12.**

- a. What does a Christian response to disappointment, grief, conflict, or injustice reveal that words alone cannot?

7. **How can one person’s faith create a “chain reaction” in the lives of others?**

Reference **Acts 16:25–26; Hebrews 10:24–25.**

- a. Paul and Silas worshipped, the prisoners listened, the earthquake came, the doors opened, and **everybody’s chains came loose.**

Personal Reflection: Who has strengthened your faith simply because you watched them trust God?

8. **Does every open door mean God wants you to walk through it? Why or why not?**

Reference **Acts 16:26–28; Proverbs 3:5–6; 1 Corinthians 16:9.**

- a. Paul had an open prison door but stayed because leaving would have endangered the jailer.

Personal Reflection: How do we distinguish between an **opportunity** and an **assignment**?

9. **How does asking “Who needs me here?” change the way we understand difficult seasons?**

Reference **Acts 16:27–30; Genesis 50:20.** The sermon challenges us to move from *“God, why am I here?”* toward *“God, who needs me while I’m here?”*

Personal Reflection: Could there be someone connected to your present struggle whom God wants you to encourage, help, or reach?

10. **Why did the jailer ask Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?”**

Reference **Acts 16:29–32.**

- a. Before Paul preached the Gospel with his mouth, the jailer had already watched him demonstrate faith, compassion, restraint, and worship.

What would have to be visible in our lives for someone to look at us and ask, **“What is holding you together?”**

11. **How can God redeem a painful situation without pretending that the pain never happened?**

Reference **Acts 16:33–34; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4.**

- a. The jailer who guarded Paul and Silas eventually **washed their wounds**, and his household heard the Gospel and was baptized.

Personal Reflection: Can you identify a painful experience God later used to produce compassion, ministry, maturity, or blessing in your life?

12. **What would “ZOOMING OUT” look like in your life right now?**

Reference **Philippians 4:8; Psalm 103:1–5; Romans 8:35–39.**

- a. The sermon argues that worship does not pretend nothing is wrong; rather, it refuses to allow **what is wrong with life to become bigger than what is right about God.**

Closing Personal Reflection: What are you currently **zoomed in on**—your pain, disappointment, loss, fear, finances, health, relationships—and what changes when you **zoom out and remember the faithfulness of God?**

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

F. Philippi (Part III): A Jailer and Salvation, 16:25-40

1. (16:25-28) Salvation: the preparation for salvation is fourfold.

1. There was the strong witness of the disciples through terrible difficulties. Paul and Silas had just been stripped, beaten with rods, imprisoned, and put in chains. Their backs were a lacerated, bloody, swollen mass of human flesh. We can just imagine the excruciating pain. But note: sitting there in the dark, smelly, rat and roach infested dungeon, they bore a strong testimony to the wonderful grace of God.

a. They prayed. They probably asked God what every dedicated servant would ask: for God...

- to strengthen and help them. • to forgive their persecutors. • to use their suffering to reach others for Christ.

b. They praised and thanked God for...

- His salvation. • the privilege of suffering for the name of Christ Jesus. • His presence and strength through all the suffering.

Note: all this took place at midnight (cp. Psalm 119:62), and they sang so loudly that the other prisoners could hear them. They were unashamed of their Lord (cp. 2 Tim. 1:8). The idea is that the praying and singing went on for a long time.

The point to see is the strong testimony they bore through the terrible trial. Their faith in the Lord Jesus was a strong witness that prepared the heart of the unsaved for the gospel. Note this: when Paul later wrote to the Philippians, he told them to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4; Phil. 3:1).

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephes. 5:19).

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul" (Psalm 66:16).

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence" (Isaiah 62:6).

2. There was the movement of God. In this instance God moved through an earthquake. In other instances He will move in other ways. God can move upon a person's soul through...

- some happening in nature
- some event in the person's life
- a tragedy
- thinking about life or death

- sensing a lack or need
- the reading of Scripture
- some miracle
- the preaching of the gospel
- an innumerable list of ways

The point to see is this: God moves events to prepare man's soul for salvation. One of the major reasons for causing the earthquake was to stir the jailer to cry out for salvation.

3. There was the desperate plight of man—his fear, helplessness, and insecurity. In the case of the jailer he felt that he faced a hopeless situation because...

- the earthquake had sprung open the jail doors, allowing the prisoners to escape.
- he had fallen asleep while on duty.
- the penalty for allowing prisoners to escape was death (cp. Acts 12:19; 1 Kings 20:39, 42).

The jailer, feeling helpless and hopeless, drew his sword to kill himself. He knew the terrible shame and punishment awaiting him and the shame coming upon his family due to his letting the prisoners escape. Therefore, he preferred to go ahead and die the less painful death of suicide. It would look like he was murdered by one of the prisoners when they escaped and this would spare his family the shame of his having been derelict in his duty.

Circumstances differ; but every person experiences serious problems that cause fear, helplessness, hopelessness, and insecurity in life. In every instance of serious need, a person either turns to God or farther away from God. A person either becomes softer toward God or harder in reacting against God. A person either seeks God for help or approaches some humanistic answer.

The point is this: helplessness and hopelessness are used by God to prepare the human soul for salvation. *But we have to turn to God* when impossible situations confront us. The choice is up to us.

"And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38).

"And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:25-26).

4. There was a call of hope by the believer. The jailer was standing out in the hallway or corridor in the light. Paul, in the dark dungeon cell, saw him and shouted out for the jailer not to kill himself. No greater voice or call was ever heard by the jailer. It saved his life. This is a picture of the human soul sensing helplessness and being prepared for salvation. The believer must cry out, proclaiming hope to the helpless and hopeless of the world. The cry of hope is part of the preparation for salvation, a part so desperately needed. Without it the world hurts and ruins itself and dies in its helpless state.

"For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:15).

"These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" (Titus 2:15).

2. (16:29-30) **Salvation**: the cry for salvation. Note two significant points.

1. There was the immediate and reverent search for salvation. The jailer...

- called for a light.
- sprang in.
- came trembling.
- fell down before Paul and Silas.

The stress is immediate reverence for the God of these men. Their God had caused the earthquake and had saved him from being executed by keeping the prisoners in their cells. (Most likely the other prisoners had gathered in Paul's cell.) He had heard that Paul and Silas had been preaching about *salvation* throughout the city, that is, that people could be forgiven their sins and delivered from sin and death. And since being in jail, he had heard the two preachers praying for strength and deliverance and for the forgiveness and salvation of their persecutors (which included himself). He feared the God who answered a man's prayer so quickly and who had such enormous power. He must waste no time in seeking this God and having Him forgive his sins lest he face the judgment of such a God. A significant fact is this: the man was repenting out of fear. Fear is a legitimate reason for seeking salvation despite the minimizing of it by so many.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

"And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

"But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35).

2. There was the urgent cry for salvation. Note: the man knew to whom to go. He had heard Paul and Silas praying and singing about *salvation*. He knew....

- that salvation was what he needed.
- that he desperately needed to know this God of theirs.
- that he and everyone else needed to be cared for by a God who looks after His followers as He did Paul and Silas.

The jailer cried out "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The disciples were God's instruments for proclaiming salvation. They were tired and sore and it was the wee hours of the morning, yet they did not put the matter off until morning. They took time right then and there to meet the man's need.

"Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength" (Psalm 54:1).

"Show us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation" (Psalm 85:7).

3. (16:31-33) **Salvation— Believe**: the proclamation of salvation—believe. Note three critical points.

1. The necessity of believing (see Deeper Study #2, Believe—John 2:24 for discussion). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" is the answer to the jailer's question. What is not said is of extreme importance. Note what Paul *did not* say:

- Saved? My good man, such is superstition, a delusion. There is nothing to be saved from.
- Saved? Well, if you have done wrong, right it. And do the best you can from now on.
- Saved? Go to work for God. Put your hands to the wheel. Labor and toil for God and mankind.

• Saved? Man, don't trouble yourself about such whims. Life is too short. Live! Eat, drink, and be merry. Make the most of what life you have.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:15-16).

Note the promise that the jailer's whole house would be saved. The influence of the head of a household in spiritual matters *cannot* be over-emphasized. A strong spiritual leader almost assures the salvation of his family

2. The necessity for understanding the Word of the Lord. The man and his household were utterly ignorant of Christ. Apparently they had never heard anything about Him, so Paul and Silas had to instruct the jailer and his household in the basics of salvation. Note the jailer's living quarters were within the prison walls.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

3. The necessity of repentance and baptism. The man and his family believed, trusted Christ as their Savior (Acts 16:34), and they repented of their sins. This is not mentioned, but it is clear, for the very first act of belief and repentance is baptism. Note: they were immediately baptized (Acts 16:33). (See Deeper Study #1, Baptism—Acts 2:38.) Also note the man demonstrated repentance by caring for the wounds of the men whom he had treated so badly.

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

4. (16:34) **Salvation:** the fruits of salvation. Three fruits are clearly seen.

1. There was the privilege of ministering to fellow believers. The jailer brought Paul and Silas into his house which apparently was within the prison walls, and then he fed them. What he was doing, of course, was showing his appreciation for what God had done for him. A believer cannot sit still and ignore people around him, not if they have desperate needs, not if he is a genuine believer. When God had helped him so much, he could not shut his eyes to those who needed his help.

"For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in" (Matthew 25:35).

2. There was the joy of rejoicing. God had saved him and his whole family, saved them all from the grip of sin, death, and condemnation. He could not help experiencing the joy of rejoicing.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

3. There was the salvation of his family. He was faithful. He knew the importance of salvation, so he insisted his whole family come together to hear the gospel. And note it was in the wee hours of the morning. God honored his spiritual hunger and leadership and saved the whole family. (See Deeper Study #3, Home, Religion—Acts 16:15 for more discussion and verses.)

5. (16:35-40) Salvation: the effect of salvation upon the world. Three effects are seen in this experience.

1. The world had a sense of guilt over the injustice done. What caused this? Apparently the movement of God in the earthquake. As usually happens in any natural disaster, most men's minds turned toward God. These men had just committed a serious evil; they were the judges and rulers and they had allowed themselves to be swayed by the influential and wealthy of the city. They had punished and imprisoned two men without a trial. Their consciences bothered them and they decided to do what they could to right their wrong. They released the men.

Thought 1. The Spirit of God will convict every man who ever mistreats a believer. No man will ever escape His convicting power. But note: repentance is up to the man. God cannot repent for the man. Repentance is the man's responsibility. And if the man does not respond to God's conviction by repenting, he will be judged and condemned eternally.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:16-19).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25).

2. The world feared and was humbled. Paul revealed that he was a Roman citizen. It was against the law for a Roman citizen to be denied trial and to be flogged. If the rulers were reported to Rome, they would be removed from office and could be tried for treason.

The point is this: God was using natural events to strike fear and humility into the city of Philippi. God wanted the church at Philippi left alone so it could grow and become one of the great ministering churches in the first century.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

3. The disciples were released and delivered by the hand of God.

⇒ They went to the house of Lydia.

⇒ The word "they" is used instead of "we." Luke stayed behind in Philippi.

⇒ The first fruit in Europe was born. There was now a Christian fellowship or church in Philippi: Lydia, the slave girl, the jailer, and perhaps Clement. Euodia and Syntyche were also saved on this first mission to Philippi (cp. Phil. 4:2-3).

Thought 1. God is able to deliver the believer through all trials, and He will deliver and work all things out for good until He is ready to take the believer on home to heaven.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"There hath no temptation [trial] taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Acts.