

Acts 16:16-40

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to think about, as I said a moment ago, think about Paul and Silas in this situation in the Philippian jail. Now again, this morning, David drew our attention through this passage to what God was doing to bring the jailer to a place of repentance and to a place where his soul was brought from death to life.
- And on a few occasions, David drew the attention of those of us who do trust Christ already, drew our attention to those situations perhaps where we've been placed in somebody's life to be that testimony to Christ, to be that thing in their life that would point them in the right direction.
- And he only gave us a few challenges like that because his intention this morning was focused on those who don't yet know Christ. A necessary focus. Tonight, we're going to fill out the whole picture, and we're going to focus on those of us who do trust Christ.
- Although, if you don't trust Christ at this point, I do pray that as we contemplate God's word, that you will be brought to a place where you do know him and love him. But we're going to think about three things that Paul and Silas demonstrate when they're thrust into a situation against their will, thrust into a confusing, difficult situation.
- How do they respond? What we see is, we see they have a very private experience. Something is going on within them. Private experience.
- [1 : 4 6] But we also see a public expression. They actually show something outwardly that the jailer sees. And the third thing that we're going to look at is passionate evangelism.
- So those three things, private experience, public expression, and passionate evangelism. And the way we're going to look at those three things is to note that one thing, one thing shapes all of these.
- One vital thing shapes Paul's and Silas' personal experience. That same thing shapes how they express themselves outwardly for the jailer and others to see.
- And that same thing shapes how they evangelize passionately. And so I wonder about us. For example, your personal experience, excuse me, private experience even.
- What do you feel in life generally? What is it, what's the one thing perhaps that keeps you grounded no matter what happens in your life?
- [2 : 5 5] And if that one thing were stripped away, would you, well how would you feel? Would you be able to stand firm? What about your public expression?
- What image of yourself is the most important thing that you think that others should see? What do you want to portray to other people? And what about passionate evangelism?
- Peter writes, and we'll come back to this verse at the end, Peter writes, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have in you.
- So those three things. Let's turn to the first. And we're going to focus again on Paul and Silas. Thinking about what they experience inside.
- Their private experience. It's shaped by this one thing. And the window that we're going to use to look into this issue of private experience and what we can understand from it.

[3 : 57] We're going to ask the question, what's the difference between Paul and Silas on the one hand and the Philippian jailer on the other hand? So we're going to ask, what happened to Paul and Silas and how did they react?

And then what happened to the jailer and how did he react? And we have to ask that question, what's the difference? Because they act in a very different way. So first, what was it that Paul and Silas actually experienced?

Now we've already read this and listened to it. We've read it twice now today. So I'm going to just simply draw out a few things from the situation that we just read.

What was it that Paul and Silas experienced in Philippi? Well, a few years later, Paul mentions how he thought of Philippi.

Not of the Christians, but of the experience that we've just read about. In 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 2, Paul says Thessalonica was the place that he went right after Philippi.

[4 : 57] In the next chapter. And Paul says to them, we had previously suffered and had been shamefully treated in Philippi. We had been insulted in Philippi. Now Paul has tremendously warm feelings for the Christians in Philippi.

But his memory of being there, which we just read, is this was a place of insult and shame. And Paul and Silas were doing good. And David drew attention to these this morning.

I mean, they were declaring to people the way to be saved. That's not a bad thing. And what's more, they had just freed a slave girl from oppression from a demon.

And from the abuse of her rulers, or her masters as well. They were doing very good things. And yet, what happened to them? Well, simply because of greed and racism, they were dragged violently into the town square before a crowd.

Now that would already be embarrassing. Put yourself in their shoes. It might help you really feel what they would be feeling. They're dragged in front of a crowd. They're accused of being disruptive and of being rebellious against Roman society.

[6 : 09] Now that's interesting, isn't it? Accused of being disruptive. As David again mentioned this morning, disruption had been following them for a number of days. So that's not a lie.

There's a disruption following them. But it's interesting, isn't it? That the thing that initiated this, I wasn't going to say arrest, but this wrongful mob grabbing them, the thing that started it was Paul silencing the disruption.

The thing disrupting things was the demon and the slave girl shouting. And he had just silenced that. He had actually taken care of the disruption. But that wasn't the real issue.

They weren't really being disruptive. But the crowd joined in, didn't they? They joined in against these crazy religious salvation nuts. These Jews.

They're telling us to do things that we Romans can't do. These Jews, religious nuts, have been bothering our city for days. Now the magistrates, these military officials, with their officers at their sides, these officers would have been standing on either side of the magistrates, holding a bundle of rods, big sticks, probably sticking out of the middle of them would have been this axe head, symbol for power or justice, I'm not sure what exactly.

[7 : 24] And when the magistrates say, strip and beat those two men, these officers would have taken these rods out, gone into the crowd, grabbed Paul and Silas, and it says that they tore their clothes off.

Can you imagine that? Have your clothes just ripped right off of you in front of everyone and then beaten with sticks severely. We're told later that their wounds needed to be cleaned. This was a severe beating, indeed, in front of everyone.

Imagine the psychological and emotional stress they must have been under. Have you ever been misunderstood or accused of something that you didn't really do? I don't think that even really amounts to what they're experiencing at this moment, but you get a glimpse of it.

Then they're torn, dirty clothes or put back on their bleeding backs. And they're taken through the crowd, perhaps right next door to the jail. They're thrown into the inner prison, this dark inner prison, and their legs are fastened in the stocks.

These strips of wood that probably would have had a series of holes. A lot of them at that time had a series of holes getting wider and wider that the prisoner's legs could be fastened in any of these, however the jailers saw fit.

[8 : 37] It could be incredibly painful. We don't know how painful it was for them, but it wasn't good. And they were just left there. Left in the stocks, bleeding, bruised, bewildered, embarrassed, shamed in front of everyone, simply for declaring salvation and freeing people.

And they're left there all night. Now what did they do about that? This is the glimpse into something inside of them. What did they do in that situation? Well, we read that it was there in that inner prison, chained in the stocks, after all of that humiliation and abuse.

They were awake at midnight, probably from pain, and they were praying, and they were singing hymns to God. The other prisoners were listening to them.

Something is going on inside of these men that's tremendous. How could they be praying and singing hymns to God in a situation like that? Now what about the jailer?

That's what Paul and Silas experienced and then how they reacted to it. What about the jailer? What did he experience that day? Well, he's on duty when these two guys are brought in from the mob, ripped clothes, dirty, obviously criminals, troublemakers, otherwise they wouldn't be in this situation.

[10 : 02] He seemed to know who they were. It's not for certain, but later he asks them, what must I do to be saved? He seems to have had some understanding that these two guys are those ones that for many days in this relatively small city have been talking about the way to be saved.

He seems to understand who these guys are, so perhaps he thought of them as these crazy religious salvation people, obviously troublemakers brought in here. It's still daylight when they're brought into the prison.

We assume it is, it doesn't say, but people are in the streets, there's a crowd. This is probably, oh, perhaps in the middle of the day. Who knows when during the day, but the point I'm simply drawing out is that they were in the prison for a while.

The rest of the day, at least the afternoon, the evening, sunsets, all the evening, all the way up to midnight, this is quite a period of time here. That's the jailer's day. We don't have much to go on, but there's some thoughts.

What about his evening? Well, we know that by midnight they were singing hymns, and the other prisoners were listening, so it seems like they had been doing it for a time for the other prisoners to have tuned into this.

[11 : 16] As David mentioned, perhaps the jailer fell asleep to the sounds of these crazy guys singing. Very strange thing indeed. But midnight comes.

He's asleep, and an earthquake shakes him awake. He runs in. All the doors were open. It's pitch black inside. It's probably the situation, it seems to be, where there's this outer area where he's able to move about and go home, and there's the gate, or the main door, or whatever it would be called, the bars, the door that locks the prisoners in.

Inside of that, it's dark. I'm not going to put lights in there where the prisoners are. And even further back, the inner cell where Paul and Silas are, pitch black in there. You've ever stood inside of a dark room and looked out into the light?

You can see clearly. But if you've stood in a light room and you're trying to look into a dark room, you can't see a thing. Well, that's the jailer's situation at midnight. He looks. He can't see anything in the jail except that the door is wide open.

Now, naturally, he's going to think, the prisoners aren't going to be in there. The door is wide open. I've failed in my duty. I've absolutely failed.

[12 : 35] All the prisoners have escaped. We read that in verse 27. And that's where we come to what did he do about it. He's had an interesting day, not thoroughly eventful, but some strange things happening, certainly an eventful midnight.

And listen in verse 27. Look at that. When the jailer saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.

He thought he had failed in his duty and he was going to commit suicide. Now, why? Why would he go to that length? Well, there's something about that culture that it's not just an ancient thing.

Many cultures nowadays have this as well. This idea of honor and shame. It's a truly important thing, especially in that day.

Think about, there are a number of very important military moments where someone has lost the battle. A leader has lost the battle and they don't want to be captured alive.

[13 : 44] That's absolutely shameful. They're going to be humiliated if they're captured alive. They've been defeated and so what they do is they either get their servant to run them through with a sword or if there's no servant, they take their own sword and they fall on their sword and kill themselves.

Exactly what he was about to do. Now, this type of thing, I'm sure it wasn't normal, but it was an option. Instead of being publicly humiliated, shamed for failing at your duty, he was going to take that road.

It was actually a road that Brutus, who killed Julius Caesar, took himself when he lost the battle, which happened to be the Battle of Philippi. It took place just in the fields right outside of the city, Philippi, about 90 years earlier, probably in the day of this jailer's grandparents.

This is the mindset of honor. It's the most important thing. And when my personal honor is lost and I'm going to be shamed, what is there?

What is there in life? When that one thing that I hold to be more valuable than anything else is suddenly taken away. You can think about some of the Japanese culture in World War II era, similar thoughts.

[15 : 01] It's better for him to die than to be shamed and for shame to be brought on his family for his failure. Now, that's quite a drastic difference, isn't it?

Between what Paul and Silas experienced and what the jailer experienced, both are experiencing bad situations, social and emotional shame. Paul and Silas had been disgraced in front of people.

The jailer thought for sure that he was going to be. Physical pain, well, Paul and Silas are in that. The jailer's not. But it's still a rough situation. So what's the difference?

Why does the jailer despair to the point of suicide when Paul and Silas, who have been through more, are singing praises to God? Well, that difference is the one thing that these people are holding valuable to them.

For the jailer, that was honor. But when that's gone, there's nothing else to live for. For Paul and Silas, what is it? What is that one thing?

[16 : 04] It's something that could not be taken away no matter what, even when they were shamed. They still had this one thing. I wonder what your one thing is that keeps you going, your personal experience in the privacy of your heart.

What is it that you value more than all things? Let me read to you what Paul says his is. Now he happens to write these words from a different prison cell a few years later.

He's thrown in jail again for the gospel. And he writes what is most important in life to him. And he writes this to none other than the Philippian Christians.

So the jailer and his family would have been reading this probably. Lydia and her family and all the others who have been converted in Philippi are going to be reading this. What is the most important thing? Listen to Philippians chapter 3 verses 7 to 11.

Paul says, But whatever I had that was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

[17 : 15] Like the jailer thinking he had just lost all things of value. Paul says, I consider all those things to be rubbish that I may gain Christ. That I may be found in him.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. Becoming like Christ in his death so that somehow to attain the resurrection from the dead.

I want to know Christ. The surpassing greatness of knowing the Lord Jesus. That's the thing that Paul and Silas had.

Which is why, no matter what they went through, they could praise God because they knew Jesus Christ. In a few minutes, we're going to develop just a tiny bit more who this Jesus is.

But just note that. So what about you? The one thing in your life that is more important than anything. This should shape our private experience inside of our hearts so that no matter what happens on the outside, no matter what comes against us, this cannot be shaken.

[18 : 28] We will stand firm because we know Jesus. Now that leads us to our second question that will guide us into public expression.

And that's this. If you have that one thing, if you have Christ, do you show it? Can people see it in your life? What does that even look like?

Well, that's what we're going to explore for a few moments now because you can see it in Paul and Silas. Now it's clear that the Philippian jailer was changed through coming to know Christ himself.

As David pointed out this morning, he was changed from putting them into the inner cell in the stocks with no care for their open wounds on their back, changed from that to himself washing their wounds with his own hands, inviting them into his own home with his family to talk to his family and himself about Jesus to feed them.

He was obviously changed. In fact, he was brought from suicidal despair to being filled with joy because he had come to know God. So he had obviously changed.

[19 : 46] How did he begin to change though? What was it that started the change in him? Now there are a few things that I'll simply draw attention to, things that David mentioned also, and then I'm going to focus on one particular thing that I think will help us as we think about our public expression.

Do we show that one thing? He knew that these guys were servants of the Most High God, or at least probably. He seemed to know that those are the salvation people that this girl had been shouting about.

Servants of the Most High God, they're telling you the way to be saved. He knew about that, probably. He knew about, that they knew about salvation, that that was their thing. Perhaps he heard them praying and singing and was intrigued by that.

And then the earthquake shakes him. David put it very well this morning, that God shook the very foundations of the earth so as to shake the jailer's foundations. And yet, none of that actually drew the jailer to Christ.

Christ. In this sense, it's after all of that that he still was about to commit suicide. So what was it that then made all of those things together make sense and bring him to the place of asking about salvation?

[21 : 06] What was that thing that made everything make sense? And I'd like to suggest that it was the attitude that Paul and Silas showed to him personally.

Think about them in the inner cell after the earthquake. The jailer is standing out here on this side of the open gate, standing in the light, can't see anything in the darkness, doesn't think anybody's there, he's about to commit suicide.

Paul and Silas being in the dark looking out can see this. They can see him draw his sword and about to kill himself. Now, there's nothing standing in their way of freedom.

They're wrongfully imprisoned anyway. The chains have been broken, the gates have been opened, nothing stands in their way of being free except for this figure of a man standing silhouetted by the light.

The only thing that stands in their way of freedom. And he's about to commit suicide. Suddenly, nothing is going to stand in their way. But what do they do? Well, they could just be silent.

[22 : 15] Let him kill himself and then there's absolutely nothing. They can walk out of there free, head to the next town, not have to worry about anything. But what do they do? Paul and Silas, they sacrifice their freedom to benefit him, the very person standing in their way.

They shout, don't! Don't harm yourself! We're all here! Now, we're not told what exactly it was that caused this jailer to fall down on his knees in front of them, to release them the rest of the way, to bring them out and to ask them, what can I do to be saved?

We're not told exactly what it was, but it seems like that moment when he's about to commit suicide and they sacrifice themselves and their freedom to help him, to preserve him, what they've just done for him.

That attitude that they publicly expressed, that he could see and feel, suddenly makes everything else make sense too. They've been talking about salvation, their claim to be servants of the Most High God.

That earthquake is done by the Most High God to prove that these are his servants. All of this is suddenly making sense. I need to talk to them about how to be saved. Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

[23 : 35] Now, have you seen that attitude in anyone else? Paul and Silas' sacrificial attitude to set aside their freedom to preserve and protect somebody.

Have you seen that in anybody else? Now, this is where, again, I want to draw your attention to something Paul writes, again, to the Philippians, where he describes Jesus. He describes Jesus' attitude.

Now, see if you recognize this attitude. I'm going to read Philippians 2, verses 4 to 11. Again, remember, the Philippian jailer and his family probably would be listening to this.

Philippians 2. Listen to what Paul says, again, from in prison, writing this to the Philippians. He says, each of you should look not to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

your attitude should be that as Christ Jesus, who being in the very nature God, did not consider his equality with God as plunder, but he made himself nothing.

[24 : 48] Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in the appearance of a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And therefore, God highly exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves, Christ, who had the very rights and privileges of being God, the right to be served by his creation, set that aside so as to serve his creation, even to the point of dying for it.

that attitude that Jesus has. Paul and Silas demonstrate to this Philippian jailer. And that, I think that's what changes him.

At least that's the linchpin that changes him, that causes him to ask what he can do to be saved. But how about you? Do you demonstrate publicly so that people can see, do you demonstrate Christ's attitude especially that of sacrificing for the benefit of others?

[26 : 21] Maybe even others who don't deserve that. The third point, passionate evangelism, this is actually the conclusion.

So don't worry, it's not a third point and then another conclusion. This is me wrapping it up, but I want to draw your attention to this third thing. Would the jailer, have been saved?

Had he been brought to the point of desperation and yet then attraction to Paul and Silas' character, had he been saved, had they not then mentioned Jesus?

They demonstrate Christ's attitude. What happens if they had just not mentioned Jesus then? the eternally good news that we have, that Jesus and knowing him is available and is the most important thing in all of life, that eternally good news, it doesn't go out unless we Christians show it and explain what people see.

Explain it to people. that Jesus, that knowing him is of surpassing worth. So it's one question to say, do we have Jesus' attitude and do we present it publicly, especially in all circumstances, in those circumstances when we're in pain and discomfort and perhaps we feel justified in simply coddling ourselves or maybe asserting our own personal rights, regardless of what it means for other people.

[28 : 03] in those situations, when we display Christ's attitude of laying aside our personal freedoms to benefit other people, what does that do if we then don't explain that to others and don't mention Jesus?

Now sometimes we need to initiate friendships and initiate those gospel conversations. This situation that Paul and Silas were in, God placed them in a situation beyond their control and they needed to demonstrate his attitude no matter what and explain this attitude.

And so that's the situation that we can focus on here. That's the situation that Peter mentions. Remember that verse that I read at the very beginning? I'm going to read it again because it summarizes very well some of these thoughts from tonight.

Peter says in 1 Peter 3 verses 14 and 15, Peter says, but even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

Do not fear what they fear. Do not be frightened, but in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord, always being prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

[29 : 21] Do this with gentleness and respect. Did you catch those three things that we've been thinking about tonight? Peter mentions them too. You have a hope in you.

That's the personal, the private experience inside. Setting apart in your heart Christ as Lord and this giving you this hope inside that anchors you. You have that personal experience of hope, but also be ready for those people who ask you about this hope.

It needs to be publicly expressed. People to ask about this hope. They need to see this hope in us. But then he doesn't stop there. Peter, like Paul, says you need to be ready to give an answer for that.

To give the reason why you have this hope. Personal experience, public expression, passionate evangelism, all of these three things are rooted in the exact same thing, the exact same source, and that is Jesus, the Lord, knowing Jesus and valuing Him above everything else in life.

I'm going to pray now, and I'm specifically going to pray for us that hope, the hope that Jesus brings would fill our hearts, our private experiences, as we look for unshakable contentment in the only unshakable source, who is Jesus.

[30 : 51] I'm going to pray for that, and I'm also going to pray that we would show and explain this hope to other people so that they, like the Philippian jailer, can be filled with joy because they come to know God and are saved by Jesus.

So please pray with me these things right now. Lord, I'm going to pray for prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.