

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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.

This is God's Word.

Dear Friends,

When people are running for office, they seek endorsements. Sometimes that can make all the difference between success or failure. Unfortunately, they sometimes get endorsements from people or groups that have a bad reputation. While these people or groups might give them all kinds of praise, because of the background of these groups it does more harm than good.

That was the case with Paul and Silas. They were trying to share God's Word in the town of Philippi but this demon possessed woman kept following them around and shouting, **"These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."** (Acts 16:17) What she said was true but everyone knew she was demon possessed and so this was like getting an endorsement from the Devil – not helpful for a Christian missionary.

After a few days of this, Paul became so troubled by it that he cast the demon out of her. This was great for the woman, but she was a slave and her owners were quite upset because in her demon possessed state, she had made a lot of money for them by telling fortunes. Her owners wanted revenge on Paul and Silas. They were powerful men and so they were able to have Paul and Silas arrested, beaten and imprisoned.

I. The Word of God does great things but it seems like evil won the battle that day. So, what did Paul and Silas do? We are told, **"Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."** Rather than feel sorry for themselves and complain about how unfairly they had been treated they went to God in prayer and they sang hymns. I'm not sure what their prayers were about but I would guess they asked for deliverance and for the opportunity to continue to share the Gospel. The hymns they sang could have been Psalms from the Old Testament because these were the hymns of God's people. And the other prisoners were listening – even in prison Paul and Silas were able to continue their work.

Later in his ministry, when Paul was in another prison, he wrote to the Philippians, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”** (Philippians 4:4-6). These are words that Paul lived by and the Philippians knew it.

What about us? How do we handle adversity in our lives? Are we as optimistic as Paul? What do we do when someone wrongs us or when life just doesn't seem fair? Do we trust in the Lord to work things out for us? I would like to say, “Yes, all the time,” but there have been times when I have been wronged and my thoughts weren't very Christian like – my reaction was far from the kind of reaction Paul and Silas had to their situation.

So, what do I do – how do I get so that I can do a better job of handling the unfairness of life? By doing what Paul did – by listening to God speak to me through his Word and by trusting him. By praying and asking God to show me how he is going to work this out for my good. And when I know that I have brought some of this trouble on myself, by repenting of my sin and asking God for forgiveness. And if my trouble comes as the result of someone else's actions to ask God to help me to forgive them.

If you haven't figured it out yet, God's love and forgiveness are at the heart of dealing with the challenges life hands us. The Word of God did great things for Paul and Silas that day as it helped them deal with their situation and it also did great things for the jailer.

II. 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.”

The fact that the doors popped open during the earthquake might not have been so unusual but when the chains dropped from the prisoner's wrists that was quite unexpected – something out of the ordinary was happening – could it be that God was answering the prayers of Paul and Silas? The prisoners had been listening to Paul and Silas and it appears they were waiting for some direction from them before they were going to do anything so everyone stayed in his cell.

Then we are told, **“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!”** Obviously, the jailer thought the worse and he felt nothing but despair. The only solution he saw was to avoid punishment by taking his own life. Imagine his surprise when he heard Paul's words. Could there be hope?

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?” Since his house was connected to the jail, I would guess the jailer had heard Paul and Silas earlier in the night and since Paul had stopped him from taking his own life, the jailer was going to look to Paul for an answer – what next – what must I do to be saved?

The answer was simple, **“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.”** The Holy Spirit worked through the Word to bring the jailer and his family to faith and

they were baptized that very night. They rejoiced because what deemed like a disastrous night was changed by God's Word into a joyful night – a night of new life through faith in Jesus. God's Word does great things!

We don't always know down what path life will lead us, but God's Word does great things for us also. God's Word is here for us in good times as well as troubling times as our Lord journeys with us through life. He brings us the same assurances he brought Paul and Silas and the jailer and his family. Your sins are forgiven. You have the sure hope of eternal life through faith in Jesus as your Savior. You have no reason to despair because God is with you. Never will he leave you; never will he forsake you.

It would be easy to let the obstacles of life keep us from sharing the good news about Jesus, but you are the best and most effective way of getting the Word out. Paul and Silas had plenty of obstacles and could have easily given up but Paul and Silas were always looking for ways to praise God and share God's message of salvation. May you always look for opportunities to talk about your Savior and may you never be deterred by any obstacle Satan places in your way but like Paul and Silas, even turn those obstacles into opportunities. Amen.