

“SINGING, SHAKING, AND SALVATION”

Acts 16:25-34

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INTRODUCTION

Here we have Luke’s third example of the wonderful power of God in salvation at Philippi. This third, most wonderful incident, likely helped Paul and Silas not to fret too much about their previous mistreatment; **all their sufferings were well worth seeing the great joy that had been brought to the jailer’s house!** Harrison makes an excellent observation: “Paul’s emphasis on joy, in his letter to the Philippians, was not something theoretical. It had been demonstrated in their community years before, under trying conditions.”(p. 256)

Rogers comments that this inner prison was in total darkness by midnight, what little light could be seen in daytime being long gone. Likely they had been beaten in the AM, since business transactions are usually completed by noon; thus, they had been sitting in the painful stocks for at least 12 hours! Bruce notes: “The double discomfort of the lictors’ rods and the stocks was not calculated to fill Paul and Silas with joy, but about midnight the other prisoners, as they listened, heard sounds coming from the inmost part of the jail—sounds, not of groaning and cursing, but of prayer and hymn-singing” (NIC, 337). James said, “Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray” (5:13). So they did. No such prayers and songs had ever come out of that miserable dungeon.

GOD CAN AND WILL GIVE YOU SONGS IN THE NIGHT IN THE MIDST OF YOUR MISERY. THERE IS JOY IN SERVING JESUS.

I. SINGING IN THE DARKNESS (25)

A. The Continual Singing of the missionaries

There is no indication that the men waited until midnight to begin praying and praising; they likely had been doing so for some time, maybe for hours. As the psalmist stated: “His song will be with me in the night, a prayer to the God of my life” (Ps. 42:8).” **“His presence turns a prison into a palace, into a paradise”** (Harrison, quoting John Trapp, p. 256). Rackham notes that night seemed to be the usual time for Christian worship (cf. 20:7).

“While praying they were singing.” The verb “singing” is literally “hymning God.”

B. The continual Listening of the other prisoners

Notice that these prayers and hymns were for praise, not for release! What a stark contrast this is to the “distress, complaint, and/or anxious petition which might be expected” in such a situation (Rogers, 271). **SUCH ACTIVITY WAS A VIBRANT WITNESS TO THE OTHERS IN PRISON.** Rackham is correct to note that they were not asking for an earthquake! Note how Elijah opened and shut heaven with prayer.

II. SHAKING OF THE DUNGEON (26)

God was listening to the singing and to the prayers. The earthquake was an answer to prayer, and a response to their praise—though they had not specifically asked for such an event to

occur, the event evidenced divine favor toward them, similarly to the ensuing earthquake in response to the prayers in Jerusalem (4:31).

But the prisoners likely were “panic stricken” by the events and did not think to flee—being stunned by the violence and suddenness of the earthquake. Paul’s influence was likely a factor also; Bruce notes that “the awed impression which the two missionaries’ behavior produced on the other prisoners ... enabled them to dissuade these others from making their escape while the going was good” (p. 337). Paul had similar restraining power over those in the ship in 27:30-32. Kent adds that their chains were still attached to their wrists even though loosened from the walls and that escape would be extremely difficult for them and recapture very easy with very harsh consequences (136).

III. SALVATION OF THE DESPAIRING JAILER (27-34)

A. Attempted Suicide (27)—he would be held accountable for escaped prisoners; also, he would be humiliated at his failure in his duty—he may have felt honor-bound to die.

B. Compassionate Cry of Care (28)

Note that his statement was not only about himself and Silas (both) but about “all.” Harrison suggests that the language here suggests that all the prisoners had gathered together. Seeing that their chains no longer attached them to the walls, and that the earthquake had likely “scared the wits out of them,” it would be very normal in such a situation for all to huddle together for safety in numbers. The doors were opened and the *inner prison was no longer secluded from the rest.*

Custer remarks that the other prisoners likely would have relished the suicide of the jailer; but, Paul wished to **save both his life and his soul!**

How did Paul see the jailer? Maybe he heard sounds and anticipated what was about to happen. But it seems more likely that there may have been “moonlight or even starlight” silhouetting the jailer so that Paul could make out his form from within his darkened cell, but **the jailer could not see within the dark cell. The jailer was likely standing at the** prison’s outer door at this point, about to drive his short sword into his throat or heart.

C. Earnest Call for Deliverance (29-30)

1. Trembling with fear (29)—fell before, a kind of reverential worship. (Paul likely had him get up—as Peter and John in similar circumstances.)

2. Need for Salvation (30)

Said” is the verbal form that really means “was saying”; this was continuous inquiry on his part, not merely a single question. He had possibly heard them preach, had possibly heard of their message of salvation as servants of the Most High God according to the slave girl’s statement, or maybe even heard them singing and praying in their cell.

Although we cannot rule out superstition on his part here, and he likely regarded the earthquake as a “supernatural vindication of their right” to be so described as messengers of salvation (Bruce, 320), he evidently was still very sincere and Paul

treated him so. Kent suggests that the jailer's response here was the "cumulative effect" of: the earthquake, Paul's previous preaching in the city {and maybe the slave girl's testimony}, and Paul and Silas' conduct in the jail (136). As Bruce notes in NIC, "**he was thoroughly shaken [as by an earthquake!], in soul as well as in body, and there was something about these two men that convinced him that they were the men who could show him the way to inward release and security.**" Note that he failed to secure the prison and prisoners, but now he sought spiritual security! What was it that the slave girl had said about these men "proclaiming to you the way of salvation" (v. 17)? Such was "on his mind supremely just now" (Harrison, 257).

D. Passionate Sharing of the Gospel (31-32)

1. Basic statement (31)

"Believe on the Lord Jesus." **Jesus is Lord!** So did Peter tell Cornelius in 10:43—He is exalted as Judge, and you need to believe on Him; this is the heart of the matter for both the jailer and his house.

Harrison notes that in this statement we almost have "the atmosphere of the gospel of John" (257). He pits **believe** against the jailer's **do**. A "DO" RELIGION VERSUS A "DONE" RELIGION:

"Human achievement is worthless and needless as well. The Lord Jesus has done it all. What remains is to appropriate His saving work by faith" (Harrison, 257).

2. Careful teaching (32)

- Jesus Christ, crucifixion, resurrection, Lord of all, forgiveness of sins, salvation, gift of the Spirit believe, repent, be baptized. Surely included would be all that Christ has done for man's salvation—as in Pisidian Antioch—but now not with special information of interest primarily to Jews as in Antioch.
- Paul *does not imply that the salvation of the jailer's household would be automatic*. If so, why would Paul also proclaim the "word of the Lord" to them also? They were required to believe as well.
- "House" here, i.e. "household," would include servants as well as immediate family members. The issue of whether babies or young children were involved is a moot point here since we are told in this verse that 'they spoke the word of the Lord' to them' as well, and in v. 31 that they also must believe in order to be saved.
- However, in addition we must add the fact that this man was likely a retired soldier and would hardly have babies or even small children, and even if he were younger, would a house joined to a prison be a proper place to raise small children?
- Remember, their wounds had never been tended to and could even get infected.
- Now the preachers face the entire household—who are likely as fearful as the jailer. Here was an opportunity for testimony—"and they embraced it. Other things could wait. When the Spirit of God convicts, everything else pales into insignificance compared with the necessity of becoming right with God" (p. 257, Harrison). This is true for the listeners—as well as the preachers.

E. A Double cleansing (33)

1. Jailer washes Paul's wounds

2. Paul and Silas baptize him

Paul was washed from his wounds; he was washed from his sins! Many refer to Chrysostom for this comment. But (we must clarify) it was not the water of baptism that washed his heart. It was the repentance from sin and faith in the shed blood of Christ. Baptism was the outward symbol of the inward reality. Note that **baptism followed Paul’s physical treatment—there was a delay for that, but not for the preaching of the word and the faith response.** If baptism had been essential for salvation, they would not have delayed it, even for a brief time. Moreover, the “having believed” of v. 34 was already a “settled state.

F. A Joyful Fellowship (34)

1. Eating food—in some sense a “love feast” here—they are “brothers in Christ.”

Likely the men had not eaten all day. The jailer may have risked his life in doing this. **But I add, Paul and Silas had already saved his life in two ways—physically from suicide, spiritually from sin, death, and hell.** However, Bruce, *Gk. Txt.* 321, says that the jailer “did not act illegally in doing this; his responsibility was to produce his prisoners when called upon to do so.” He may be correct, for the jailer “had now no reason to fear that they would run away.”

2. Exultant Rejoicing

3. Steadfast faith—**the issue of salvation is settled.**

The whole household (“family, warden, slaves”) “heard the word of God, believed in the Lord Jesus, made confession, were baptized, and rejoiced.” *Hosts and guests rejoiced together, united in Christian faith and love.* Some may consider such haste in baptism unwise; but as Robertson asks, “why delay?”

Although it is clear that the head of the household had a profound influence on the decisions of the members of it, yet we must not assume that these persons merely followed the jailer’s lead; for, this passage clearly demarks their common listening to preaching (v. 32), faith (this verse), their common baptism (v. 33), and their common rejoicing (this verse).

CONCLUSION

Oh how we need the **divine shaking** and the **divine salvation** to be evident in our midst!

Great faith, great Joy. For **the first time in the jailer’s life (their lives) he was right with God!**

OH WHAT JOY!

The Lord has turned the missionaries’ misery into a joyful feast of celebration of God’s grace.

OH WHAT JOY!

Joy for Christians who serve and joy for those being reached with the message of salvation

THERE IS JOY IN SERVING JESUS!