**PP Acts: To the End of the Earth**

**Part 45 Acts 16:25-40 *Your greatest witness*  5/21-22/2022**

I’ve never seen one up close, but I have heard that wildfires are absolutely terrifying events, able

to travel through a forest at over 14 mph, destroying everything in its path

You watch the forest fire scene in Bambi and you know, you don’t want to be in one

A wildfire had started and it was heading straight for the church, and it was going to have an

unanticipated result

In one of his sermons, Goerge Whitefield drew on the words of Tertullian, an early church father,

who said the church in the second century was like a mowed field; **PP** *the more frequently it is cut, the more it grows. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church’*

In the 2nd century, Christianity was illegal and Rome tried to stamp it out through persecution

Sunday afternoons then, weren’t spent watching the NFL, it was spent at the Coliseums where

Christians were being fed to lions for sport, beheaded, soaked in tar and impaled on poles

to be lit at night…all because they faithfully followed the Son of God, Jesus Christ

For 300 years, Rome tried to stamp out Christianity, and I believe we are going to increasingly

experience the same pressure in our country

What we will see throughout this passage is that **PP** ***Our greatest witness will often be in our***

***darkest moments***

Faith shines brightest in the midst of darkness, hope is strongest when life looks bleak

Perhaps **16:25** gives us the detail of ***‘About midnight’*** to underscore the brightest of light in the

backdrop of our darkest of moments, nevertheless, we see the faith of our missionary duo

They had been beaten bloody, not by whips, but rods, after they were stripped nearly naked

The Jews scourged with 39 lashes, but the Romans didn’t necessarily have a numerical limit

**PP *“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was***

***beaten with rods.”* 2 Corinthians 11:24-25**

A rod was made from Birch wood, like a cane, but notice it is ***‘rods’*** in **16:22**

Soldiers were beating them, and they would do so all over the victim’s body, not just the back

Then they were handed to the jailer who ***‘fastened their feet in the stocks’* 16:24**

These stocks forced the prisoner’s body into a contorted position, producing excruciation cramps

over the entire body

The magistrates ordered the jailer to ***‘keep them safely’***, securely, so the jailer took it upon

himself to use all the means at his disposal

Philippi was a Roman colonial town (**16:12**) where faithful veterans of the Roman army were

sent as a reward for their service, creating outposts securing Roman areas

These towns had special political status, the ones resettled there were exempt from taxes, given

land rights, rewarded for their loyalty and dedication to Rome

Almost certainly this jailer was a former legionnaire, an experienced soldier, and his life was

about to change

***“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them…”*  Acts 16:25**

Persecution is pressure, and that pressure squeezes our hearts bringing to the surface what lives

in there, and what lived in the hearts of Paul and Silas, was faith

In fact, **PP** George Müller once said that *"Trials are food for faith to feed on."*

Look what came to the surface: they were ***‘praying and singing hymns to God”***

**PP** The word ***‘singing’*** means a celebration and praise

Anyone can sing when they get out of prison, but Paul and Silas sang while in prison!

Instead of cursing those who wronged them, they were blessing God!

Now think for a moment on these questions:

What comes out of your mouth when you are treated wrongly by others?

What mental fantasies get stuck on repeat when you suffer unfairly from others?

What deep, unspoken attitudes come to the surface about God when you suffer?

Suffering and persecution put the squeeze on your heart, what comes out of your life?

They literally had a *captive audience* as ***‘the prisoners were listening to them’***

Their faith in Jesus was their anchor, and it was expressed in prayers and song

**PP** ***Your greatest witness will often be in our darkest moments***

But the ***‘jailer’...***watch his reaction to his moment of darkness

***“and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.’ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”* Acts 16:26-34**

The region of Philippi was known for earthquakes, but that doesn’t take away from the fact that

God sent this one, for it was a precision strike opening prison doors and bonds

Seeing what happened, this hardened soldier of a jailer was about to fall on his sword

The penalty for any Roman soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape was death

Later in Acts we will see a ship bearing prisoners that sinks in a storm, and as the ship was going

down, the soldiers plotted to kill all the prisoners to keep them from escaping

Knowing this, the jailer pulls out his sword to end his own life, but Paul shouts for him to stop

He demonstrated the merciful love of God to a man who did not deserve it, who had treated them

severely and unfairly

Greater than his own freedom was the freedom that the jailer need, for he was the true prisoner

Now I want you to begin letting this truth deeply settle in your heart…if you live on mission as a

witness for Jesus, you will experience some forms of persecution

It may be loss of friends, loss of a job, loss of property, loss of life, or a loss of freedom

Yet Christian, you are the one who is truly free while your persecutors are imprisoned in sin

Their freedom, not your own, is the priority, and to that priority your witness is directed

Begin to practice it now with little mistreatments to get ready for greater ones…**PP** ***Your greatest***

***witness will often be in our darkest moments***

Earthquakes in that day were seen as the judgments of the gods, inspiring great fear in the people

The power of Paul and Silas’ witness dropped the terrified jailer to his knees with the greatest

question anyone can ever ask: ***‘What must I do to be saved?’* 16:34**

Some have written that he jailer was looking to be saved from trouble with the Roman authorities

but that cannot be it for he had already confirmed that he none of his prisoners escaped

His question is clear: What must I do to be saved?

There is a booking process for prisoners, and he would have learned about the fortune telling

girl, and what she kept shouting in **16:17, *“These men are servants of the Most High***

***God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”***

Now the jailer pleads to know how he can be saved and Paul gives the best, and only correct

answer to his question: ***‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’* 16:31**

For anyone who wants to be saved, including every member of his household, ***‘Believe in the***

***Lord Jesus’***

Singing and praying in the midst of prison did not save the jailer, but it was a witness to the jailer

What saves a person is clearly and consistently the proclamation of the gospel, the good news

that salvation is near, it is available to any and all who believe

Any and all who believe is really what is in view in this event, for a Jewish man would pray

every morning this prayer, *‘Thank you God for not making me a Gentile, a woman or a*

*slave’*

In Acts 16, we see salvation come to a woman in Lydia, a slave in this fortune-telling girl, and a

Gentile in this Roman jailer

**PP** ***“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and***

***female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Galatians 3:28**

Salvation can come to anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus

**PP** What does it truly mean to ***‘believe’*** in the Lord Jesus?

**PP** To believe is to have some understanding of the message of the gospel, but not necessarily at

some profound or educated level, for a child can understand it

But also, **PP** a person who believes must have an agreement to that message, believing it be true

Finally, **PP** a person who believes must commit his or her life to the message of the gospel

But what is that message that a person must believe?

Paul and Silas make it clear, as one must ***‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’***

You must understand, agree, and commit to Jesus is both Lord and Savior, trusting in the Person

and work of Jesus in His life, death and resurrection

He lived in perfect obedience to the Law, died as a sacrifice for our sins and was raised from

burial as evidence that He was indeed the Son of God

To believe Jesus was the Savior but not willing to commit to Him as Lord is not saving faith

To believe He is the King of kings, but insufficient to save me without my good works is not

saving faith

The answer Paul and Silas gave to the question, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ was simply

believe with your mind, your agreement, and your surrendered life that Jesus is the Lord

and Savior and the only way to be saved

Can you do that?

Maybe you aren’t a theologian, maybe you aren’t articulate, but if you can say what Paul and

Silas said, then you are an effective witness of Jesus

Afterward, **16:32**, they explained the gospel further, but the answer to the greatest question that

can ever be asked is ***‘Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved’* 16:31**

It is to commit your life to the One whom you believe is your Savior and God, trusting that that

He has forgiven your sins and given you eternal life

What was the result for the jailer and his household?

***“And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized***

***at once, he and all his family...Then he brought them up into his house and set food***

***before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in***

***God.”* 16:33-34**

Gone was the man of cruelty as he washed tier wounds, and fed then at his own home

He immediately was baptized, publicly declaring his faith in Jesus

And he was full of joy, because he and his family believed and were saved!

Church, persecution is coming, **PP** ***Your greatest witness may come in your darkest moment***

Have faith, trust your God, let you heart rejoice, and be a witness to the unsaved all around

Pray