

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – October 6, 2020

The Lord be with you.

If you are facing difficulty of any kind today, I think I have something for you that you're gonna wanna hear. It's something that helps me when the going gets tough, and something that we see in the Bible that God's people do in times of trouble. Now, it's something that's going to sound almost counter-intuitive, it certainly is countercultural, but it is something of great power and potential for your life and mine.

I'm looking at the book of Acts chapter 16, in which, well, things are not going well for the Apostle Paul and his colleague in ministry Silas. They have been ministering in what is today modern Turkey, planning to go ever deeper into Asia, when the Holy Spirit interrupts their plans. The Holy Spirit does that sometimes, doesn't he? The Holy Spirit interrupts them in order to send them on what is the first missionary venture into Europe. So here they are now in the city of Philippi, Acts 16. They're preaching the good news of Jesus. They have just cast out a demon from a slave girl, and to prove again that no good deed goes unpunished, it says that a mob is stirred up against them, and the mob drags them into the marketplace. Let's pick up at reading in Acts 16:23, "The Crowd joined in attacking Paul and Silas, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods, after they had given them a severe flogging they through them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. And following these instructions, that jailer puts them into the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks." For the crime of preaching the gospel. Paul, Silas are beaten with rods, severely flogged, that would be a loss of blood, their backs are laid open bleeding, and then it says that the jailer put them into the innermost cell, that's a dungeon. They are let down into the dungeon by one opening, there's no window, there's no outlet, except that opening that is closed, it shuts out the light, it shuts out the air, and once more it says that their feet are fastened into stocks. Now we know something today about these Roman stocks, they were intended as instruments of torture, not just confinement, their feet are put into a rack to stretch their legs apart, and the rest of their body lies on the ground, it's painful, and we could imagine that along with the flogging that their backs are open wounds and, well, sleep and rest, it's going to be impossible. And policies that they don't know what's gonna happen next, are gonna be more beating or are they gonna be executed.

Now, verse 25, it says, it says, "about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." The Greek text here literally reads praying, they were singing praises. It's all one action. Praying and singing are one, they are expressing prayer by singing, singing praise. So, their prayer is not just something mental, their prayer is not just something in their hearts, they break forth into singing praise to God. And the tense of the verbs here indicates that it is something that they just keep on doing, they keep on praying and singing praises to God. Now, look at what happens next. In Verse 26, "suddenly there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison was shaken, and immediately all the doors were open, and everyone's chains were un-faceted." Paul and Silas, they're praising, and God shakes things up. God doesn't send an angel like when Peter was in prison, but God shakes the ground, and the jailer and his family end up coming to know Jesus. And they become the first Christian converts in Europe.

Paul actually mentioned the jailer by name in 1 Corinthians 16:15, he is Stefanos whom Paul

Water from Rock

praises as having become a leader in the church. So see, the Bible is filled with stories of praise of God leading to the release of God's power. Sometimes I think we have the idea that praise is something we do for God. Well, God certainly desires our praise, but he doesn't need it. It is we who need to praise God, praise gets the focus off of ourselves and our problems back unto God and to the power of God.

Praise changes us. Praise grows us, and that is why I think probably some of the greatest Christians you know are people who are praising God. Some people seem to think that praise is something we offer in response to the moving of God's spirit, but it's really the other way around, that the spirit of God moves as we praise. And you know, we don't have to wait for everything to be just right before we decide to praise God. The Bible talks about a sacrifice of praise, praise is a sacrifice we offer to God, not because we necessarily feel like it, but we offer it because we believe in God, we love Him, and we know that He is worthy of all praise.

I began today thinking that you might be facing difficulty. A lot of people are... The last weeks and months in our country have been one train wreck after another, and it's time more than ever for us to praise God. So, let's close out today joining David in Psalm 145, praising God, "I will extol you, my God and king, and bless your name for ever and ever, every day I would bless you. And praise your name for ever and ever. Great as a Lord and greatly to be praised. His greatness is unsearchable."

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler on the pilgrim way. Thanks for listening until next time.

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