

We're in Acts 16:25 tonight. So let's find that place, and we'll get started there.

Acts is a written account given by the Holy Spirit through the person of Luke and his pen that gives to us about thirty years' worth of the early church development. Because it is written in narrative form, we learn what God would want from the church by what He tells us about the church; what kind of people we should be by what He tells us about the kind of people that He used. And so whether it's ministry or evangelism or missions or salvation or the gifts of God's Spirit or the passion you need, this outpouring of God's Spirit, you learn them from the narrative itself. So this is what God wants us to know about the first-generation church.

We've endeavored, as we've been going through if you have been with us, to give you some idea of how far Paul traveled and how much time he took and the distances he covered and the sacrifices he made so that we would have a good feel for the labor that was involved and the months that passed. And sometimes the miles that kind of just churned on by without any salvations, without any miracles, it just seemed like Paul was out there waiting upon the Lord.

From the best that we can figure from what the Bible gives us as history as well, Paul's journeys all took place from Antioch in Syria; it is about 300 miles or so north of Jerusalem. It is where the gospel went out through the Hellenists. Barnabas went to check it out - spent a long time there encouraging the folks. The church grew, and he felt he wasn't the pastor; he went and found Paul, who had been out of the limelight for many, many years (a decade or more), and brought him here, and he began to teach. He spent a year with him there, and then they would go out on these missions trips.

The first one was only two years long, 46-47 A.D. Paul and Barnabas traveled, for the most part, in Galatia as you can see from the map. They traveled about 1200 miles during that time, planted some fellowships and all. Paul then came back to the church in Antioch and would spend the next almost four years there. In fact, aside from a couple trips up to Jerusalem (one of them in Acts 15 to discuss salvation by grace alone), Paul would go out this time with Silas (who replaced Barnabas over their disagreement about John Mark and his faithfulness or his

usability), and Paul and Silas would go out for what would be essentially six years. They would travel about 2700-2800 miles. They would spend quite a bit of time in one place or another, if you will, and he would have a larger team with him as well. If you haven't been with us, I would encourage you to go to the archives and get through the studies. I think there's a lot to be learned; they kind of compile one upon the other. So you can catch up or step in anytime, but there's a lot to learn about the progression of the gospel going out.

We certainly have learned that traveling with Paul was no picnic. Wherever Paul went, riots followed; beatings, stonings, imprisonment. But so did miraculous conversions and healings and deliverance. And we learn, I think, fairly quickly that the doing of God's work can be costly to the individual and yet extremely joyful.

We are currently with Paul on his second missionary journey. And, like I said, you can go back over last week if you weren't with us. Paul had left the church in Antioch in Syria which, by the way, was the missions church for the 1<sup>st</sup> century. After the gospel went out to the Jews first, really the center of the church moved 300 miles north to Antioch. And though we hear about the church in Jerusalem, the activities going out and preaching the gospel are almost all centered here in Antioch. Paul would take Silas, a fellow who had come from the meeting in Acts 15 and came to verify that the decision of the apostles was that salvation for the Gentiles was just by grace; you didn't have to become a Jew, you just had to come to Jesus. And aside from asking the consideration from the saints for those who were weak in their faith (as far as Jewish practices were concerned), no further burden, if you will, was laid upon them. So they wanted to go back and tell these churches that they had gone to the first trip, where already these Judaizers who had come to kind of subvert the gospel or add to it had already gone. And so Paul and Silas went back (if you look at your maps), and they went in reverse order - up through Tarsus and then to the west. And they went to these Galatian churches that Paul had visited before to encourage them, to visit them. Paul had a very pastoral heart to see that the churches were doing well.

When they began, Paul and Silas left together. By the time that they got to Lystra and to Derbe (you should find that on your map as well; Lystra and Derbe were pretty early on in the trip), they picked up a young man named Timothy, who we believe from all that we have in the Scriptures got saved when Paul came through town the first time. He was a man who was well reported of by everyone around there. It's also the place they tried killing Paul - stoning him and leaving him

outside the city for dead. So Timothy might very well have understood the cost involved in hanging around with Paul. And then these guys - the three of them, now - go out, and you'll find on your map, as they get to Antioch in Pamphylia, that there's this long line that has no stops. And it is covered by a couple of verses that we looked at last week, and it really was this attempt on the part of Paul and Silas and Timothy to discover where God wanted them to go next. And we are told in the Scriptures, in the narrative, they tried to go south, they tried to go north, they tried to head to a lot of places that the Lord prohibited them; the Holy Spirit forbade them. We aren't told how, but just they couldn't go. And there is conjecture that Paul again was very ill. It does explain that when they finally did get to the coast to Troas, Dr. Luke gets on board. The personal pronouns are changed in his writing from "they" to "we" and to "us," and so that's a theory. I can't prove that to you biblically. I just know that it took months for them to determine where God wanted them to be, and it wasn't until they ran out of land that God then spoke to Paul in a dream, and he saw a vision of a man that was standing over in Europe, saying, "Macedonia. Come and see us. We need you." And so that was kind of the guiding hand of the Lord. I told you, I think, a couple of weeks ago how encouraged I am that Paul and Silas and Timothy had such a hard time determining God's will because I have that problem sometimes. I would like to know. I wish the Lord would just send out emails and blasts every Monday, "Here's what I want you to do this week." I would be happy to do it. But that walking by faith can be hard on you! It can be difficult, and it certainly was for these men as well.

Well, in the vision - because they finally knew where to go - it says "immediately" they responded. They'd been trying for so long. And they were able to make the 140-mile trip from where they were, there in Troas, over to the coast of Macedonia, to Neapolis, the coast city; 140 miles in two days - they stopped halfway at an island 70 miles, 70 more miles they sailed on the second day. They then walked 10 miles inland to their first stop, Philippi. We told you last week that Philippi was a Roman colony, which meant that it was run (for the most part) by retired Roman policemen and army men, if you will. It was also a place if you were born, you were born free; you didn't have to buy Roman citizenship. Paul and Silas both were born in places that allotted that for them. But they came into town, but there were very few Jews there; in fact, no synagogue at all - which was right the way that Paul operated - go to the synagogue first, touch base with people who have an understanding or background of the Old Testament, hopefully win some converts quickly, and then establish a base from there. There weren't any. They

walked around the city for a few days. They found a wealthy businesswoman. The Bible calls her Lydia. It just means a woman from Lydda, which was a town back where Paul wanted to try to go. But in any event, they dyed beautiful garments by shellfish and all, and apparently she moved here as a businesswoman, had a house, was successful. And she was going outside of the city on the Sabbath to go pray with some ladies. And Paul eventually found out about her. He went to the prayer meeting, shared the Lord. God opened the heart of this woman, and over time (we aren't told exactly how long), when some time had passed, she was able to say to Paul and these men, "If you've found me to be faithful, can we meet at our house?" And her family and those in her household had come to know the Lord, and so she becomes the center of operations for the outreach to this town. That was the first of three conversions in Philippi that God sets before us.

The second one that we looked at last week as well was a very young slave girl who was possessed by the devil, and she had made great money for her masters, her owners, through fortune-telling. And for several days, she declared these were men of the Most High God. And we told you last week that was a name that God would certainly respond to, but it was also the name of their false gods. And so Paul didn't say anything for a couple of days. I don't know if the Lord just didn't give him leave, or he wasn't sure; but after a few days, he groaned in his heart, and he addressed the demon, and by God's power this young slave girl is delivered; which all sounds good except the slave owners were furious, and they brought Paul and Silas up on phony charges of political unrest and religious subterfuge. None of it was true. They were just upset that this woman no longer was going to be working for them. And they grabbed Paul and Silas; they gave them a public flogging, they threw them in prison. It was outlaw justice at its finest. And we read in verses 23 and 24, where we ended last week, "And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." This was one of these orders that this guy didn't take lightly. So into the lowest parts of the jail, into the dungeon, into the hole, if you will; their legs shackled together, forced to lie, maybe, in awkward positions. And we left Paul and Silas here wondering if they weren't, in their hearts, thinking to themselves, "Maybe we didn't hear the Lord so well." It had been weeks to find a direction at all. When they found it, they arrived quickly. They had a good experience with this woman from Lydda and her family. But that had been it. And one young girl was delivered from possession. And I don't know, but in the dark, left to their own thoughts - weeks and months had passed, to take

the gospel out. They'd had such success in Galatia. It had been pretty tough in Europe so far. And I don't know if they had any conversation that night that said, "Do you think we made a wrong turn? Do you think maybe it wasn't the Lord? Maybe we just had a bad burrito there in Troas. We don't know." But far from home, in a strange city with an uncertain future, locked up on trumped-up charges, political rebellion, beat up, bleeding, you don't know what's coming next, I think strange things can occupy your thoughts. You know? And your imagination can run wild. Well, that's where we left them.

We don't want to leave them there anymore, so let's go to verse 25. So we read this. This is their response, "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Praying and singing hymns to God. Really?! Does that sound like something you'd do after this kind of a day? Wouldn't you be crying out, "God, why? What have I done? I left home and people and family to serve You, and this is what I get? This is the thanks I get? Wicked men lying about us, beating us, locking us up without a trial." I would expect to find some angry guys, maybe some vengeful men bent on getting even rather than deliverance. But what we find is they were worshipping God. Isn't that interesting? Here's the narrative God wants you to put yourself in as the church. "Silas, are you okay?" "No. My legs are so sore, and my back - I can hardly breathe. How about you?" "Oh, I guess I feel about the same way. Hey, Silas, do you know all the words to 'Ain't it Grand to be a Christian' or 'I got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart'? Let's sing that, shall we? Silas, you sing the girl's part. You've got that high voice." (Laughing) I suspect that these grim walls of a prison in this kind of justice town had never heard the likes of these guys before. And they weren't singing quietly or under their breath, reservedly; they were singing at the top of their lungs. The whole prison population heard their songs echoing down the hallways. I've always thought that the church should sing this way anyway; that if we're going to disturb the peace, we might as well serve our neighborhood with worship songs. We could open the doors, we could light up the neighborhood. This is the kind of singing that you see here; not the usual reaction that mirrors the world a little bit, where we sing softly or we look around or we don't sing at all or, "While we're singing, let me check my phone for messages" and a quick text, "Amen." Send. "Amen." It seems so different than this kind of worship, which is unrehearsed and unforced and pretty much out of place except in the heart of a believer. I mean, that was the joy. And I suspect that the prisoners wondered about these strange men that had been brought into D block that afternoon or evening. It doesn't seem like Silas and Paul were

concerned in the least about their grim-looking situation. How do you sing at a time like this? And the answer is very much direct - a complete confidence that God is in charge of your life. "All right. We're in the prison. We got beat up. Ain't it grand to be a Christian?" "What do you think God's up to?" "I don't know. Let's sing that tune again, though." And rather than complaining, they found that the Lord was still in complete control. They were here because they had faithfully followed His leading. They were in the will of God, bruises and all. And so they sing. So, in the bleakest of circumstances, nothing seemed to shake their joy and their rest. These guys were fully putting on display what kind of men they were. How do you stop men like this? The answer is - you don't! You cannot stop a guy that you beat up, throw in prison, and have him come up singing worship songs; men whose faith and dedication is this solid. It reminds me, and I know we went over it together, when Peter was imprisoned, and he was slated to die the next morning, having seen James already put to death; and yet he had a three-day or a four-day holdover because of the Feast Days. "But after we're done, man, you're gonna die." And that night (it was his last night upon the earth, as far as he knew), when the angel of the Lord came to deliver him, the angel of the Lord had to shake him to wake him up. I think most of us would be up. "It's not right. Call the governor." Oh, Peter's just snoring, and he doesn't really know until he gets outside, "Was that an angel or was that a dream? What happened to me?" I mean, he was just totally dedicated to the things of God and was resting in the Lord. Maybe it's because much of our trouble does not come from serving the Lord but from not serving Him that gives us less of an assurance when things go difficult for us. We're not used to having God have His way. Worship for Paul and Silas was a great tool in their spiritual warfare. Their situation was about to change; it was going to get a whole lot better. They didn't know that. They had no idea what would come of it the next day. But they knew God was in charge, and that was enough. We knew that God has a plan to reach another family, a third family, in town. But even that - would that have been the price of admission for you? "Oh, if we can just beat you up, throw you in prison for a while, and then someone'll get saved?" "Well maybe you could just share with them." Yeah, God's gonna use you some way. Sometimes we don't like how He does it, though. So they're singing in prison.

Verse 26 says, "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 chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm,

for we are all here.' " I love how, in the report of the first-generation church, all of creation seems to line up to do what God wants except for man. This is a selective earthquake, at best. No walls fell down. No roofs collapsed. Just some prison doors that rolled open and chains that fell off of prisoners that were being held in them. Every door opened, every chain falling off - kind of the way God works, isn't it? And yet this wasn't some freak accident. God had chosen to shake part of the place, and I love it. Well the jailer - the one on God's radar - had fallen asleep to the wonderful worship going on down the hall. But the earthquake had woken him up, and the first thing he saw was the doors to the prison open; and, in his head, the worst was immediately imagined - a full prison break was happening. He had already been told to watch these guys carefully. Verse 23, he had secured them, and verse 24, as well as he could because Roman law demanded that if you lost a prisoner, you, as the jailer, would serve their time or pay their price. And there were a lot of folks here that were obviously on death row. And so, when he saw what he thought had happened on his watch, his only concern was, "I'll just take care of it myself. I'm not gonna let them kill me. I'll save them the trouble. I'll do it myself." Rome was filled with stories of famous suicides. It was a big deal in the Roman Empire. He was going to join the ranks. But God had a much better plan for this man than to take his own life. And one that He had set in motion through this whole story. Paul, hearing the lament of the jailer - apparently he was vocal about what he was going through - cries out in the darkness words of great comfort. And he yells to him, "Don't hurt yourself. Nobody left." And I'm thinkin', "Really?! All of the prison doors opened, the chains falling off, and you're on death row. I don't know about you, but I'm leavin'." No one left. I love how God is in charge. Right? No one runs, though they're given the chance. Paul speaks in the nick of time; this guy was ready to take his own life. I guess Paul could have been hard-hearted and said, "Well, it's on you, buddy." It's all it would have taken.

But think about the story that we have. Imagine God's decision to allow His two men - these men, Paul and Silas - to go through this kind of suffering so that He might reach a jailer and his family. Because that's really what the outcome of the story is. Right? His value placed on the life of a man and his family who don't know Him was that He was willing to take what had to be, certainly, two of His greatest and most faithful followers and use them and bring them to the point; and this is how He determined to work so that this jailer could, first of all, be humbled and to realize his life was just hanging by a thread because when you get this desperate, you realize there's nothing left; and then to put His men there so that they might speak up. That's pretty expensive, isn't it? Evangelism can be pretty expensive to

your life. And a lot of times we're not quick to pay the cost of it. We don't want to be thought of as weird or criticized for our faith, so we find ways around it.

Verse 29 tells us, "Then he called for a light," (the guard did) "ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas." It wasn't the earth that was shaking now; it was the jailer. He jumps down into the cell. Seconds earlier, he had faced death. He realized now he wasn't ready. Ten minutes earlier, he'd been in power and the absolute word and control in this prison. Now he sees his failure; he realizes his weakness. He's confronted with his own life. "This isn't normal. I've got two singing prisoners who've somehow brought an earthquake. No one has left yet. Everyone's running around in the hallway." He wanted to know what was going on. It was this conviction of God's Spirit that left him trembling, but he knew that he was in front of the right people. "Not sure what the answer is, but everything was fine till you guys showed up." Now he wasn't going to be disappointed for long.

We read, in verse 30, that he says to Paul and to Silas, " 'Sirs,' " (which is also not something you call prisoners, usually) " 'what must I do to be saved?' " The word "sirs" is the Greek word "*kyrios*." It is the word for lord but in small tense, I'm sure. "What must I do to be saved?" Why that question and not, "Why is everyone still here?" or, "Why are you singing when you've been beat up so bad?" He'd heard the songs, the prayers, the discussion, but I think he believed and understood that this was far beyond his understanding or his experience; this was far beyond what he knew. He needed help, and he didn't have the answer. It's a great question. Right? One that should occupy our hearts as the predominant question until we have an answer. Eternity depends on knowing the answer. The natural response to conviction, more often than not, especially of our sinfulness, is the willingness or the determination to make it right. The rich young ruler said, "What can I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17) This man says, "What can I do?" or, "What must I do to be saved?" In other words, the natural inclination of man when confronted with his sin is to volunteer to make it better. "Let me straighten it out. Whatever it takes. I'll do whatever you want." Right? And we make ourselves available to accomplish what we think God would want. The answer from Paul, or from them (in the plural), is (verse 31) that he should, " 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' " The answer is, "There's nothing you need to do, and there's nothing that you can do. Everything that is necessary for your salvation has already been done for you." Paul reduces a desperate man's cry for answers to one word - believe. He doesn't give him a list of accomplishments. He doesn't tell him to write up a resume. He doesn't ask about how much he's giving to

the poor or how much he's denied himself. "What is asked of you," Paul says, "is simply that you believe in Him, Jesus Christ, His Lordship. He'll save you. He'll save your family." He didn't say believe in a creed, he didn't say believe in a religious rule or good work. Just believe in a Person - who He is, why He came, and what He's done. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." When they asked Jesus (in John 6:28), " 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' " Jesus said, " 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.' " Pretty much levels the playing field. There's no advantage to anyone. God's paid the price. And here's the whole gospel contained in one verse. "Believe in the Lordship of Jesus," or, "Believe in Jesus, who's to be your Lord, the Christ." The word "*pisteuo*," in Greek, means to believe, and it's a word that is used to mean to depend upon something or to rely upon it. By its definition, it would say that you hang all of your weight upon one place or you put all of your eggs in one basket. You're not given the choice of saying, "Believe in Jesus, and then do this and then do these." There're not three doors or six ways; there's only one answer, one name, one Person. You've got to throw everything that you have that's valuable to you in the trust in that one Individual - His work, His accomplishment. Faithfully so. Surrender to the Lord. " 'This is life eternal,' " (John 17:3) " 'that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.' " That's life eternal. That's what God offers to us. It's all your eggs in one basket, for all of eternity.

On the other hand, God makes salvation extremely simple to understand. The gospel can be understood by a kid, little kids. We saw tons of these little kids coming to VBS for a couple of weeks this summer who just wanted to give Jesus their lives. They got it! They understood. He's the One! We complicate it, but it isn't complicated. Look at it again. " 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.' " Which one of those words confuses you? Now, you read the words "and your household," and everyone said, "Well, I'm claiming that as a promise." I don't think it is made as a promise, and the reason I say that is there is no biblical precedent for salvation by proxy. By that, I mean you can't believe for someone else, or you can't put in the good word with the Lord like, "Yeah, that's my dad. He's always not believed, but he's a good guy." Right? "We all have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). I don't think that this is a promise. I think this is a statement of extent. What I mean by that is - in the same way you get saved, your family gets saved. Or the answer for you is the same answer for everyone. It's available to you, it's available to your household, it's available to your children. It isn't one rule for you and another rule for somebody

else. There's one name, one faith, one Lord, one Jesus, one hope. And so it presses you to limit your hope in the one Individual - just believe in Him. It's your salvation, it's your kids' salvation, it's your parents' salvation. Yet there's a promise that, "If you raise up a child in the way that he should go, when he gets old, he won't depart from it." The Lord would say to you, "You want to give the kids the best chance at walking with the Lord" (Proverbs 22:6) "raise them up in the ways of the Lord so when they get older, that's what they'll reach for again, that's what they'll turn to and look back to."

Now, just reading the narrative here, we read in verse 32, "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." So at least we have to make the assumption that, at this point, they left the prison, or they went next door - wherever this man happened to live. And he took Paul and Silas to his own home. Don't know who he left in charge. Don't know if he relocked the doors. Don't know if he took a head count. Seems to me he was interested in more than just his job at this point; he was interested in his soul. It becomes primary. At his home, according to verse 32, the family listens intently to Paul and Silas who apparently more fully laid out the plan of God's salvation through Jesus. And like those over at Cornelius' house (with Peter, years earlier), it seems every heart in this home quickly accepts the Lord and believes in Him for eternal life. Hungry hearts prepared by the Lord. And through this tragedy and through this dangerous time, and through the suffering of these saints, get to hear the gospel. Philippi now has its third convert, and the second family who is standing for the Lord in this very Roman, not Jewish, secular colony amongst the Gentiles.

Verse 33, "And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized." The first act of a converted man was an act of love and compassion. He was going to service these men's wounds. You can always tell when someone gets saved. Their love changes. It is usually the first evidence of God's Spirit - the love of God that you can't reproduce without Him. His love is immediately seen, which is so unlike the world. It's kind of like Zacchaeus. When he came out and he converted, he began to give money back to people. That's not easy for a tax collector who lives off of taking money. The callous become kind, the drunk sobers up, the crooked walk straightly. You can't hide God's presence. And you couldn't in this man's life as well. But as they ministered to these folks in the middle of the night, baptism came up as part of the conversation. We had a baptism this Saturday. We so enjoyed the many folks who came and were baptized. Wonderful stories. I just love listening to how

people got saved. We had a young man there from the junior high, and I said, "What're you doin'?" and he goes, "I just want to walk with Jesus." And I thought, "I wish I'd have said that as a junior higher." Right? I mean, he's gonna have a great future. If the Lord tarries, this kid's gonna do great things because he's right where he needs to be. And so, in the conversation, not for the sake of salvation, "What can I do to be saved?" Paul didn't say, "Get baptized." He said, "Believe." However, for the believer, God's desire is that we would be baptized, which is why we make it such a big deal here in the church and invite all of you to be there and support those being baptized. It's such a.....it's like the sacrament. Right? It's the stand that you take publicly to identify yourself with the Lord. And so Paul and Silas, having heard the teaching of Jesus about being baptized, shared with these believers, "All right. Now you can go through baptism, and you can identify with Jesus." There's all kinds of baptizing in the Old Testament. For the Jews, it was always for the Gentiles to convert to Judaism. But amongst the Gentiles, there's all kinds of stuff that went on. "You can join this club or join that club." And Paul wanted to be sure these men and women understood that they were making their allegiance to the Lord in water baptism, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Follows salvation; isn't salvation but part of a new life that God has given. You identify. Paul will write to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:14-17) that he's happy that he didn't baptize many people because they started to brag about who baptized them. In fact, he said, "God didn't call me to baptize. He called me to preach the gospel." So he separated them, even in his writing to the Corinthians.

Well, nevertheless, they were baptized that night. And then we read, in verse 34, "Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household." So, he cooked them a meal in the middle of the night. You know that this guy's saved when he's already going to a potluck in the middle of the night. You know, Christians love to eat together, and here they are. Good thing Paul and Silas have no problem eating at a Gentile house. But they were excited to eat. And I can just.....we're not told what happened. You can just see them sitting around at night, in the middle of the night, at the jailer's house - eating together, and Paul saying, "Stop makin' me laugh. It hurts too much." God had certainly changed this night around for them, which begs the question - how well do you respond when you're faced with what looks like reversals in the Lord? You've done everything right. You've gone where you believed the Lord wants you to be. You've followed His Spirit. You're at it a long time. You've been faithful. You've spoken out. You've risked your own neck. And it

seems to blow up in your face. Right? And I hear that from people sometimes. "Well, I've tried so hard to do exactly what the Lord wanted, and this is what I get? How is this possible?!" But God was doing a great work even though their expectations might have failed to materialize. Because they stuck it out and waited upon the Lord, they would see God's plans nonetheless.

Well, we read, in verse 35, "And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, 'Let those men go.' So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.' But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.' And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans." So, a couple of assumptions. Everybody went back to prison. "We went on a field trip, we had dinner, we got our wounds clean, we did an evangelism service, we had a baptism. We made a long night of it, but now we've got to go back to jail." And so, in the morning, the judges felt like, "Well, we've made our point. These men are trouble. We're assigned to keep the peace. Rome will be out to get us if we don't. I'm sure that they're not going to cause us trouble again. So we're going to drop the charges and just send notice to get out of Dodge. You've got till noon. Clear out, and don't come back. I'm sure they'll, with panic, run for the state line." Verse 37 and verse 40 would tell us that Paul and Silas indeed went back to prison.

But at this time, Paul speaks up, and he says, "Not so fast. You beat us publicly without a trial, you've thrown us into jail, and you've done that to us who are Romans citizens. Now you want us to disappear without a sound? Not on your life! We now want to demand our civil rights according to the law." And Paul went tough. According to 1<sup>st</sup>-century Roman law, every Roman citizen had a right to a fair trial. No Roman citizen could ever be flogged. And to mistreat a Roman citizen would be to bring the wrath of Rome upon you without mercy. So all of a sudden the table is completely turned, which is why you read that suddenly these rulers now were completely afraid. "Oh, no." Paul says, "You come tell us to get out. Come face us. You're the ones who beat us. And we're Roman citizens." "Oh, no!" The question I would ask, reading through the Scriptures, is (had he just brought that up the night before, he didn't have to get beat up) - how do you know when you should demand your rights, and how do you know when you shouldn't? Because we're real big. We live in a culture where everybody wants to demand their rights - whatever

they are. "That's my right!" Great. What about God's right to tell you what to do? Because Paul takes it on the chin. And just everything I've ever read about Roman beating - this wasn't an easy path. This would have been harsh and bones broken and bloody heads. And who knows? Concussions and unable to walk for days on end. It's a horrible thing that they had to go through. And they didn't bring that up. When they started the trial, they didn't bring it up. Had they brought it up, it could have saved them a real measure of suffering. But they didn't bring it up. And my only conclusion has to be - God, somehow, by His Spirit communicated to them that they shouldn't. "It's not a good time. Just take it like it is." And both of them agreed - two guys. It's one thing to do it for yourself. I've had people say, "Well, this is what the Lord told me." I go, "Well, go ahead then with your bad self. I don't see it, but you go ahead, buddy." But to have two guys go, "Yeah, that's good. Let's just take a beating!" "You sure about this?" "I haven't been surer in my life." I don't get it. But he took it. Just because we have rights is no reason to always demand them in your discovering of the will of God. If you are dead to yourself, you might be able to hear God say these kinds of things; otherwise I think it'd be awfully hard to hear at all. I do know that there's a jailer and his family that are certainly glad Paul and Silas did not speak up; because it seems to me the price that they paid for this evangelism was quite a hefty price.

The second question becomes - well, then, why speak up now? And I think that the answer is in the text, and certainly, as we continue reading, I think that we'll get it. I don't think Paul did it for spite. I don't think he did it to justify himself. I really think he did it to buy a bit of protection for these new believers in this young church that had just been born. I mean, they were just attacked and beaten and jailed for praying for a young girl to be delivered from the devil. That was liable to happen again because God was in the business of delivering people from sin and from darkness and from possession and all. But I think, in their minds - or Paul thought, "If they realize that we could lodge a complaint in the way that they treated us, they, as rulers, at least for a while, are going to be kind of hesitant, reticent to do so, and maybe I can buy some peace and rest for the church." I think that's probably what happened here. So, Paul said, "No way are we just disappearing quietly. You beat us. We're citizens. Have them come talk to us."

We read, in verse 39, "Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and" (rather than leave the city) "entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed." "All right. We'll leave in just

a little while. We'd like to go meet with the church, tell them everything God has been doing." I don't doubt they took the jailer and his family and introduced them to the church, give them a bulletin. No, I don't have any idea. But there were at least three families involved in this home fellowship now. "Hang in there, guys. Follow Jesus. Be faithful. We'll be back someday. But we're gonna leave now. We've caused so much trouble as we can. Pray for us." And they leave. And this nucleus for a young church has been planted here.

With that as the background (all of these last two hours that we've been in the book of Acts), you should probably give yourself ten or fifteen minutes, and go read through the book of Philippians; a book that Paul wrote while he was in prison in Rome, which must have reminded him a lot of this experience here. And so he writes a book to them about the joy of the Lord. Paul will mention in that letter that by the time he and Silas got to the next town of Thessalonica (which we will pick up in chapter 17:1), there was already an offering from the saints in Philippi sent after them to help support them in their efforts. In fact, for the next many years, this church in Philippi would send financial help (and it was a small church) to a very big ministry, if you will, and they supported Paul for years. Even in Rome, they sent one of their own - a fellow named Epaphroditus - to come and be an aid to Paul. Years later, they still loved and had a relationship with Paul. They fell in love with his work, they showed it by their giving. And, like I said, if you have ten minutes tonight before you go to bed, just read the book of Philippians since you have all of this information in your mind.

So, we read, in verse 40, that they now get ready to leave. We know from what follows, and I'll just jump ahead with you for a little bit, they leave Luke here to be what would appear to be a pastor or an elder, an overseer, in this young, fledgling church. We know that because the narrative which Luke wrote changes back from "we" and "us" again to "they" and "them." It just flips over. He's not with them. In fact, he won't be with them until the third missionary journey when Paul will pass through here again (in chapter 20:5-6), and then Luke will join them again, and you'll read the "us" and the "we" rather than the "they" and the "them." So, for now, the three head down the highway - Paul and Silas, Timothy - down the Roman road, wondering what God had in store for them. We don't know what it will be, but it won't be boring because none of this trip has been.

So, the Philippian church is an interesting picture because it's the early church reaching out with the gospel, and you see people from all kinds of lives getting

saved: a very rich, successful businesswoman who, out of her town, bought a house in another town. I mean, she's got it "made in the shade," and she needs Jesus. And then there's this poor slave girl, manipulated by others for the sake of income, and God delivers her. And then there's this middle class jailer (and his family) who takes his job seriously, and yet God meets him there. And everyone gets saved in all of the different kinds of economic or social statuses. But there was fruit. And with the fruit comes a price to the saints sometimes. The church is growing. Another church is left behind. It is a church that we will see a lot in the years that are coming. You have a letter that Paul wrote to them, so you have correspondence with a church that will go on for many years later. And off the road they go. Next week, we will follow them down the road (on your maps) to Amphipolis and Apollonia, and we'll stop at Thessalonica. They actually pass through two very small but very significant towns and don't do anything there at all; they just pass through. In fact, verse 1 of chapter 17 says they're just going to pass through. God hadn't given them leave to stop there either.

So, what do we learn? Well, God will use you to reach others with the good news, but it may cost you something. But they've got to hear your voice. And who knows if God doesn't put you in a difficult spot so that you can witness to somebody that wouldn't otherwise get to hear it. But you're there. I had a guy a couple of months ago tell me that he had a flat tire on the freeway, and he was so late for his meeting and so angry. And he said, "Lord, I can't believe it!" By the time the guy got there to help him (because he didn't have a tire in his trunk), the guy got saved on the freeway. So I said, "Well, how do you think this guy would ever have.....?" "I don't know, man, but I was late and I was in trouble....." Yeah, he's goin' to heaven now. Not bad. Right?

So next week, would you read ahead? Go through chapter 17, at least a little ways. I don't know how far we'll go. Maybe to there. Okay. To there. (Laughing)

You can pray for us. We're sending some folks out to Nashville in the morning. We are meeting with a group of people. Our radio program does very well in Nashville. We have several church families that have moved there. We are working with them to start a satellite church of Morningstar in Nashville. Looking for some buildings, places to have people meet. There're some really excited folks. There're lot of churches in town there that are not teaching the Bible; they're just big. It's the Bible Belt. You would expect that to be so. But then, if things go well, we're going to try to send a team of people out every month from here to spend

Thursday, Friday, Saturday kind of ministering and seeing what God'll do. So, keep in your prayers that we find the right place and do the right.....we'll be meetin' with a dozen or two people tomorrow night for dinner and be back again Saturday morning. But just keep that in prayer. We're gonna send some folks out there and see what the Lord'll do. Be kind of fun, wouldn't it? Wear a cowboy hat to church. It'll be just fine.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
August 19, 2018