

† What does it take to ruin your day?

- *Children's book- "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day."*
- *IN OUR STORY today, Acts 16- Paul and Silas have just had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day!*
- *Ever had day like that? All had tough days, & some of you have experienced times when it seems like life itself has been ripped away. This can happen slowly over time, other times all of a sudden.*
- *But what about when we're just dealing with day to day struggles life can bring? When it's just another day, what does it take to ruin our day?*
- *Possibly not much. Irritation, frustration, slow buildup of things that just tick us off, leading to resentment, anger.. and it seems to all come together to give us a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.*
- *FOR P&S, days' events weren't just inconvenient. It had been dangerous, painful, and traumatic.*
- *For crime of freeing a spiritually enslaved girl, they were arrested, severely beaten, thrown in jail. AND YET, when we find them in stocks in prison's innermost cell, they are expressing a PEACE THAT...*

† Peace that doesn't make sense Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

- *This was a profoundly uncomfortable situation for P&S. Weren't just thrown in a cell- fastened into stocks- most likely a wooden device preventing leg movement, leading to extreme discomfort.*
- *But rather than wallowing in self-pity or seething with anger and resentment, P&S made the conscious decision to set their minds upon Christ- upon God's goodness, presence, and provision.*
- *They are doing this by engaging with God through prayer and singing hymns. The HYMNS, or musical poetry- were likely from the Psalms- AND, if you take time to study the psalms, you will see the great theme of God's faithfulness in the midst of suffering.*
- *I've wondered if this night was on Paul's mind when he wrote to the church in Ephesus years later- a church itself likely facing pressure and attack from its highly adversarial surrounding culture.*

Ephesians 5:18-20 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit (NOTE! The emphasis here isn't argument against alcohol, but describing the power of the spirit to influence our emotions and minds- could paraphrase 'be under the influence... of the spirit!')¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- *One of the great failures of evolutionary theory is its struggle to explain the human concept of BEAUTY- specifically in relationship to MUSIC AND POETRY.*
- *Music has the power- especially SONGS- to take a TRUTH, and give it power that is hard to describe.*

– **EXAMPLE- who here can quote Romans 3:23-24?**

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

- **That's one of the most precious statements in all of scripture- and yet, most believers would have trouble stating it with accuracy. AND YET, how many people- believers and non-believers alike- are able to sing the following verse- join me when you know it...**

“AMAZING GRACE, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me- I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.”

- **MUSIC IS A GIFT FROM HEART OF GOD to humanity He deeply loves. If we ask “HOW do we set our minds upon Christ- how do we CHOOSE to develop an ongoing conscious awareness of presence and goodness of God”.. a big part of that answer is MUSIC. AS THE SCRIPTURE SAID...**

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- **Think of how counter-intuitive this is! In the midst of everything- but specifically in the midst of hardship- of giving thanks. Gratitude. This is DEEP AND POWERFUL FAITH that God is present- HE KNOWS ME- I AM NOT ALONE- somehow HE IS WORKING FOR GOOD in midst of anything... and everything.**
- **I'm convinced Paul had this jail cell in mind when years later he would write back to same community...**

Philippians 4:4-7 ⁴ 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 every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- **SO there P&S are... locked in stocks, surrounded by the other prisoners- they are singing.. and a crucial detail here.. the other prisoners were LISTENING.**
- **I don't think P&S thought... hey, let's sing so these guys will listen. If they had wanted to share the gospel, they could have just spoke. MORE LIKELY- P&S were singing to focus their own hearts upon God in the midst of their own struggle... AND RIGHT THERE, because of their dependence upon God- they were a powerful INFLUENCE on those watching.**
- **Do I need to make the application here? We often think our lives speak of God's goodness when we are strong- “look how God has blessed me”... but very often God will speak of his presence and goodness by how we look to him in our time of weakness.**
- **ALL OF THIS SETS THE STAGE FOR A MIRACLE...**

✠ A miracle- just not the big miracle

Acts 16:26 *suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.*

- **Doubtless that Luke is summarizing here. This was an intense event. IMPORTANT- earthquakes were not uncommon in this region. In retrospect we clearly see God's hand at work- but for the jailer, this probably wasn't something he thought God was doing- at least not initially. Rather, this was a disaster that could ruin his life.**
- **Try to imagine the scene- we don't know of the jails construction, but it didn't involve rebar and cast concrete. The jailer was asleep in his house, and when the earthquake struck he**

immediately ran to the jail, in panic - not for the lives of the prisoners, but because he knew a severe earthquake could cause door frames to collapse, possibly parts of walls, and the attachments of chains into the walls may have pulled loose.

- *Go into slow motion here... when shaking stopped Paul and Silas saw a miracle of deliverance. They were unharmed, and their chains and stocks were broken around them. A door was open for escape.*
- *But for the guard, his worst nightmare had come true. From the moment he was shaken awake, his worst case scenario became reality, and in that moment, he experienced...*

† A catastrophic loss of hope

Acts 16:27 *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.*

- *We need to try and get inside the Jailer's head here, because in our western/modern world-view it can be hard to fully understand his situation.*
- *In that culture the concepts of pride, honor, and shame were deeply rooted and powerful. For Jailer, his very identity was bound up in his role as a roman guard. The loss of his prisoners wouldn't just be a failure at his job- it would be failure at life itself.*
- *In fact, his fear and despair probably wasn't that he would face execution- which he almost certainly would. That was job motivation Roman style- if you fail at your job, you will be killed.*
- *EVEN WORSE- he would be dishonored, and his family and household would be dishonored and covered in shame.*
- *SO-FOR THIS MAN- the circumstance of his life RIGHT THERE was one of utter and inescapable hopelessness, loss, fear, and shame- ALL of which combined into inescapable and crushing mental and emotional PAIN.*
- *FROM THIS KIND OF PAIN and loss of all hope, there was only one escape... SUICIDE.*
- *CHURCH- we must stop and see the importance of this for us. For the last 18 months we've been dominated by discussion of the covid-19 pandemic.*
- *But there is an even greater pandemic at work- causing more death and suffering than the disease itself. This pandemic was already present, and covid only made it worse and more visible. It is the pandemic of depression, mental health crisis, hopelessness and pain that leads to the terrible- and yet often preventable- tragedy of SUICIDE.*
- *Here in the valley there is a growing effort toward suicide prevention- I highly recommend everyone to participate class/training when it is available. IM NOT expert, but one thing you will learn is that a person doesn't choose to commit suicide because they are selfish, weak, or somehow morally deficient.*
- *Christianity does not have a good track record with the realities of depression and mental health crisis- specifically suicide. One reason is we tend to think that people just need to hear and accept the TRUTH of the gospel, and then they will get better.*
- *Make no mistake- Jesus is THE anchor in the storm, and Christ is ultimately the only hope of humanity. BUT CHURCH- people do not choose to take their own life because of unbelief or a lack of faith in God. People choose suicide because of the unrelenting presence of overwhelming loss, hopelessness, and pain- that from their perspective appears inescapable- pain from which there is no way out, and so suicide becomes the only way out.*

- *In response, the Christian response can often be- “Well, they just need to change their perspective. They need to move from a perspective of despair to a perspective of hope, and that hope is the gospel.”*
- *And THAT IS TRUE. But what we all too often fail to understand is that for a person trapped in either sudden or chronic hopelessness and pain, truth and hope isn’t something they can just be TOLD. It is something they need to be SHOWN.*
- *And church, perhaps most powerful way of showing a person THERE IS HOPE- that there IS ANOTHER WAY- is through our COMPASSIONATE PRESENCE.*
- *This is EXACTLY what happens next, and THIS is truly the big miracle of this story.*

✠ **The BIG miracle**

Acts 16:28 *Jailer was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped... But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”*

- *It’s easy to miss just how profound this is. FIRST, there is the fact that Paul and Silas didn’t flee. I mean, put yourself in their shoes. Here we are on a mission to take the gospel to the world, and that work had been brought to a FULL STOP.*
- *Based on what had just happened to us, it was VERY POSSIBLE- if not PROBABLE- that the next day would be worse. Our ENTIRE project could END here. SURELY THIS WAS GOD’S DELIVERANCE! If that had been me, I don’t know if I would have interpreted this in any other way.*
- *THIS ALSO sheds light on the content of Paul and Silas’ prayer earlier in the evening. IF WE HAD BEEN THERE, what would we have been praying for? FOR DELIVERANCE! God, this is hard! Get us out of here!*
- *BUT THAT WASN’T their prayer. Based on what happened, it’s almost certain their prayer was “GOD- give us your strength. Sustain us. Give us your peace. Lord, it would be really great to be delivered from this circumstance, but most importantly Lord, we want to be part of what you are doing.*
- *Give us the wisdom and courage to be USED BY YOU. LORD, may this Jailer, these men around us, come to know your hope and life. Lord, may you be glorified.*
- *WITH THIS mindset, when they suddenly found themselves able to escape, their thoughts did NOT first go to their own safety, but to the safety of the one for whom their freedom would be a tragedy.*
- *AND WHAT really makes this a miracle is that the other prisoners stayed as well. WE ARE ALL HERE. HOW was that possible?*
- *I think THIS is why earlier Luke pointed out these other prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas as they sang and prayed. Through the witness of Paul and Silas’ peace and hope in a place where peace and hope made no sense, these prisoners SAW and understood they were witnessing God at work.*
- *And so Paul was able to cry out- WE ARE ALL HERE. Those four words changed everything for the jailer, for his family, and all his household.*

- **Don't miss this. In just a moment this man is going to hear the truth of forgiveness and new life through faith in Christ. BUT IN THIS MOMENT, IT WASN'T DOCTRINE that saved him. It wasn't knowledge of his sin and his need for Christ that opened a light of hope back into his heart. That would come.**
- **WHAT KEPT HIM ALIVE in the moment of his crisis was that these people who should have run from him, STAYED WITH HIM. THIS is beautiful picture of-**

† The redeeming power of presence

Acts 16:29-30 *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?"*

- **What a moment. Think of this- for multiple years now, Paul had been traveling throughout the Mediterranean world proclaiming the gospel of Christ. In almost all the records we have of this, Paul is preaching to people- telling anyone within earshot of their need of salvation and the hope of salvation- whether they asked to hear it or not.**
- **BUT HERE, this man comes to Paul and himself asks the question- "How am I to be saved".**
- **THAT IS A RARE QUESTION FOR A PERSON TO ASK on their own, and man was brought to this point as the Holy Spirit worked through three key choices on the part of P&S...**
 - **When they were being treated unjustly, they chose not to defend themselves, but trust that God was at work**
 - **There in the prison, they chose to set their hearts up God, and they did so through prayer and worship.... Which was witnessed by the other prisoners**
 - **When they had the opportunity to escape, they instead chose to first show compassion to the person holding them prisoners**
- **God worked through this entire series of events to open the jailers heart to the true message of hope and freedom.**
- **You see, with their compassionate presence, Paul and Silas brought the jailer from a place of safety. The immediate danger to his life had passed. But they didn't stop there. NOW, having met him at his place of hopelessness and protected him from the threat of self-imposed death, they now showed him the way to a God given LIFE**

† From hopelessness to safety- and from safety to Life

Acts 16:31-34 *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 household 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 household.*

- **AS WE CONSIDER THIS STORY.... Lessons to take to heart...**
 - **In times of hardship, the power of prayer, worship, and gratitude- specifically the power of music to open our hearts and minds to the presence and goodness of God**
 - **The powerful witness of how we live in dependence upon God in our own times of weakness**
 - **Our need- as the church and Christian culture- to have a better understanding of depression, mental illness, and the dynamics that lead to suicidal behavior**

- *The great power of being a compassionate presence to a person going through pain and suffering. There are times when the words of hope are as simple as “I AM HERE... we are all here”*
- *Finally, how God will use this to open a person’s heart to the message of ultimate hope, redemption, and new life that comes through faith in Christ.*
- *By our presence, and by our testimony, may God use us in such a way*