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“Sing in the Darkness”

Acts 16:11-34

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There are times in the course of life when things are hard, and life is difficult. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. They didn't know whether they would be rescued or killed for their faith. Nevertheless, they “prayed and sang” to the Lord because God is worthy of our worship no matter our circumstances. It's easy to sing when times are good, but how easily do you sing when times are bad? In this teaching, we are invited to pray, “Lord, teach me to sing in the darkness.” In other words, even when things are bad in life, may we still have a song on our lips for the One who is worthy of our worship!

1. **Acts 16:11-34** - *“Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us. Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or*

observe.’ Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 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. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 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.’ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 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.”

2. Paul’s second missionary journey

a. Traveling companions

i. Silas

1. Jewish; leader in the church in Jerusalem

ii. Timothy

1. Had a Jewish mother but a Greek (Gentile) father
2. Around fifteen years old
3. Would become Paul’s protégé and later pastor the church at Ephesus
4. Paul would eventually write two letters to him (1 & 2 Timothy)

iii. Luke

1. Gentile and the writer of Acts

b. Paul and his companions visited the city of Philippi

i. Philippi was named for and developed by Philip II of Macedon (king 359-336 B.C.), the father of Alexander the Great

ii. Philippi was an important Roman colony as prestigious as Rome itself

iii. There was no synagogue in Philippi, so the men went to the river

1. A river would often serve as a place of prayer in the absence of a synagogue

iv. The men met a woman named Lydia

1. Lydia loved God but did not know Jesus
2. She became the first convert on European soil

3. An encounter with a demon-possessed girl
 - a. A slave girl with a *“spirit of divination”* followed them for days, crying out, *“These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”*
 - i. Through demonic forces, she could provide insight (potentially deceptive) into people’s lives
 1. God condemns this type of activity
 - a. **Deuteronomy 18:10-12a** – *“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD.”*
 2. Her owners were exploiting her to make a profit
 - b. Paul, *“greatly annoyed,”* eventually commanded the demon to leave the girl
 - i. Why was Paul annoyed?
 1. Bad theology
 - a. Some scholars believe the original language implies she was stating *“a way of salvation,”* rather than *“the way of salvation”*
 - b. It’s possible that the local people may have interpreted “Most High God” as Zeus
 2. She served as a distraction from Paul’s mission
4. Paul and Silas arrested
 - a. When Paul healed the girl, the slave owners lost their source of profit and were financially ruined
 - b. They dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities and began beating them
 - i. It is likely that the crowds left Luke and Timothy alone because they did not appear Jewish
 - c. The magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison
 - d. The men were placed in the “inner prison,” with their feet placed in stocks
 - e. They began to pray and sing
5. “Lord, teach me to sing in the darkness”
 - a. Prayer is a relatively normal response in crisis; singing is more challenging
 - b. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, the prophet Habakkuk focused on praising God
 - i. **Habakkuk 3:17-18** – *“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield*

no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

- c. Horatio Spafford
 - i. Horatio Spafford was a prosperous lawyer who lost his wealth in the Great Chicago Fire, lost four daughters when their boat sank over the Atlantic, and lost a son to scarlet fever
 - ii. In dealing with his grief over the loss of his daughters, Horatio penned the famous hymn **It is Well with My Soul**: *“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou has taught me to say, ‘it is well, it is well with my soul.’”*
 - iii. He, his wife Anna, and his two remaining daughters moved to Jerusalem
 - 1. They began charitable work with Jews and Arabs
 - 2. They opened an orphanage that later became a center to help children in need
 - a. The Spafford Children’s Center is still in operation today
 - 3. The Spafford’s turned their tragedy into a blessing for others
- d. **Hebrews 13:15** - *“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”*
- e. **Psalms 40:1-3a** - *“I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 16:11-34** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What does God’s Word say about using demonic forces to provide insight into people’s lives? (See #3a-i-1-a above)
3. How were the slave girl’s owners exploiting her? (See #3a-i-2 above)
4. Why was Paul *“greatly annoyed”* with the girl’s proclamation that they were *“the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation”*? (See #3b-i above)
5. Why were Paul and Silas thrown into prison? (See #4a and #4b above)
6. How did Paul and Silas respond to their circumstances? (See #4e above)
7. Why was the act of singing so significant? (See #5a above)

8. Discuss the challenges of praising God amidst difficult circumstances.
9. Read [Habakkuk 3:17-18](#), [Hebrews 13:15](#), and [Psalm 40:1-3](#). How can we learn to “sing in the darkness”?
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)