**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 7-18-2021
How Can I Keep From Singing Your Praise**

This week I was listening to a Christian radio station and heard a very powerful testimony from a Christian lady named Jill. Jill shared about how she had cancer and experienced the fears and the worries that come with that. And the cancer was treated and she was made well.

But then, the cancer had returned and now had spread over her body. And this woman was speaking about how God had given her the peace that passes understanding. She did not know if she was going to be made physically well again in this life, but had made up her mind that no matter the circumstances, she would live to praise and worship God. And she was sharing about how much she felt the Lord’s presence with her today. Nothing is going to keep her from singing the praises of her God and loving God.

Friends, Jesus didn’t promise His followers that their lives would be easy and comfortable. In fact, He promises His followers that there would be challenges in following Him. But it is so worth it. For in Jesus alone we can have true life and eternal life.

There are popular pastors in America today that often teach about how Jesus can improve your life. They speak of financial prosperity and divine health.

In essence, these leaders preach that we should worship the Lord because He offers to improve the quality of your life.

The only problem with this teaching is that it is false. Now, granted, the Lord is not against people being financially prosperous, as long as they are rich towards God. And Christ does want us to be good stewards of our physical bodies and to seek to be in good physical health as much as possible.

But the gospel is not a self-improvement course. The gospel is the good news offer of true life. People can be very wealthy and physically very healthy, but spiritually dead in their sins.

To put it another way, Jesus didn’t come to improve our lives, but to give us new life. He offers to make us new creations through our surrounding to Him as our Lord and Savior.

And when we have Him, we have more than enough. When we have Him, we are very well off indeed.

This is an important truth, friends, because if we view the gospel as a self-improvement strategy, we will ultimately be disappointed.

Today, in our passage, we will clearly see that Paul & Silas were following Jesus for the right reasons. When things would become difficult, they didn’t turn away from Jesus, but instead kept right on praising His great Name.

Today’s powerful text from the Book of Acts is found in Acts 16:16-34.

Let us hear God’s words through Luke once again.

**16Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” 18She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.**

**19When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”**

**22The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.**

**25About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26Suddenly 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. 27The 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. 28But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”**

**29The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”**

**31They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” 32Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34The 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 this passage begins, we find Luke was now with Paul & Silas in their ministry in Philippi. And he was a firsthand witness to some of the events that will be described in these verses.

You may recall from last week how the Lord clearly had called Paul and the others to travel to Macedonia. After getting two clear no’s from God on not going to the province of Asia and not going to the province of Bithynia, God gives Paul a clear vision to go to Macedonia.

And for Paul, who loves to preach in the large cities, going to Macedonia, meant that he needed to travel to Philippi, which was the leading city in that region. But just because God directed Paul to Philippi did not mean that Paul’s stay in Philippi would be a pleasant one.

First, we read of the slave girl that was able to make money for her owners through fortune-telling. A demon had gained control over this girl and was using its power to earn money.

And we read that for many days she just kept following Paul and the others around. And while she spoke the truth, and said “**“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved,”** itclearly was not of God by which she was saying these things.

It reminds me of how some of the demons were behaving around Jesus during His earthly ministry. They recognized who Jesus was, but they were fully evil. And Jesus would shut them up or cast them out, similar to how some teachers would tell their students ‘put down your pencils’ and the students would listen right away. That’s how the demons acted around Jesus.

This demon-possessed girl became increasingly annoying to Paul and eventually he tells this evil spirit to leave the girl and instantly it does.

But Paul’s struggles do not end with the annoying evil spirit being cast out of the girl. In fact, his struggles in Philippi were really just now beginning. For as you can imagine, the owners of this slave girl were not very happy that their property was now not able to succeed in fortune-telling. The slave owners did not care about the girl. They were just greedy and wanted money.

But now they were ticked, so to speak. Someone’s got to pay for their loss of income, they thought. **So they** **seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”**

Suddenly, a crowd is stirred up against Paul & Silas and the Roman magistrates decide to order that they be stripped and beaten with rods.

You can imagine that the wealth and wealth preachers would have difficulty with passages such as this one.

We read that after being severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, a guard was ordered to guard them carefully, and this guard decided to lock them up in the inner cell – the most secure part of the jail. And they had their feet fastened to the stocks.

We can only imagine how Paul & Silas would have responded to this if they equated the gospel as a message of self-improvement and the way to live a better and more comfortable and prosperous life.

But thankfully, they did not follow Jesus for these reasons. They followed Jesus because He is Lord, because He alone is the One who can free us from our sins and give us eternal life, because only He can give us true peace and joy.

And so despite their circumstances, Silas and Paul continued to worship God. We are told that **about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.**

Just picture that scene. It’s midnight and here Paul & Silas have their feet fastened to the stocks in the inner cell and they are praying and signing hymns to God.

I think of that powerful praise song “How can I Keep From Singing Your Praise” by Chris Tomlin --- (read the song).

And there were other prisoners listening to them. What they must have been thinking?

And then another supernatural action of God takes place. They are praying and singing unto the Lord when suddenly a violent earthquake shakes the foundations of the prison. Coincidence? I think not.

And this leads to Paul leading this prison guard into the Christian faith.

The guard was about to kill himself when it looked like the prisoners would have escaped, for he knew that his life would be taken for his failure to keep the prisoners in jail.

But then, when he sees that everyone was still there, this man was so undone by the example of Paul & Silas that he asked them, “**what must I do to be saved?”**

And they reply with the correct answer. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.” Friends, truly the good news of Jesus is available for all to believe.”

And by the end of this story, the jailer and his family are all now Christians. Isn’t that amazing?

So looking at our passage today, we have this supernatural exorcism at the beginning and we have this supernatural earthquake at the end, but the most important part is found right in the middle --- and this is when Paul & Silas are praying and worshipping the Lord in the inner cell of jail.

See friends, although they were chained to the most secure part of the prison, Silas and Paul were the freest people around.

And this was because they not only knew Jesus as their Lord and Savior, but also did not let their circumstances hold them back from worshipping and praising God, just as Jill did who we spoke of earlier.

And there lies the key to this text. We are to be so thankful for our salvation and the good news for all that we cannot help from singing His praise.

So never stop celebrating the good news of Jesus, friends. Let His love grow in our hearts each and every day. And may his love cause us to sing and to be thankful in the midst of all the circumstances of life.

Let’s pray…