



Actgs 16:25-34 “Check Out the Power of God!” January 9-11, 2021
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Acts 16:25-34

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 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. 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. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” ²⁹ 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?” ³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.” 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.

Introduction

A number of years ago Joanne and I visited Bucieras just north of Puerto Vallarta, on the west coast of Mexico. One evening after we went out for pizza, we decided to go to a super market nearby for groceries. I was driving. The highway to the store was a nice four-lane road. When we came to the intersection where I would have to make a left turn to the store, I got in the left lane, signaled for a left-hand turn and at the green light, turned to the supermarket. Just after making the turn I saw a police car right behind me with the flashing lights. Out of the squad care came a little came a big tough-looking policement and a smaller but tough-looking woman. She took my license and explained to me that I made an illegal left turn. I was supposed to turned from the frontage road to the right of the highway where there was a left-turn signal. My son Joel got involved. As we talked and she explained the money we would have to give right there and that we would have to be in court the next day, I begin to have visions of sitting in my underwear in a Meixcan jail. Long-story short, because Joel paid a \$35 bribe, I didn’t end up in jail. But Paul and Silas did in Phillipi. Let’s go there and

CHECK OUT THE POWER OF GOD!

A Tough Situation

The reason Paul and Silas were in jail is that Paul, by the power of God, in the name of Jesus had cast out a demon from a femaile slave who made money for her masters by fortune-telling. The slave owners, made because they lost a source of income, created a riot and took Paul and Silas to court. The powers-that-be had Paul beaten and thrown into jail – very difficult circumstances.

What very difficult circumstances have you experienced lately or in your life? You may not have been thrown in jail but you may have been confined to a hospital or your home with Covid-19 or some other serious disease. People in your family for friends may have turned against you and emotionally beat you up. You may have found yourself in some other diffcult circumstances.

Did you notice how Paul and Silas dealt with their situation? Check out the power of God in them. Even though they were in tough circumstances and probably in a lot of pain, they prayed and sang hymns to God. God’s love in Christ that resulted in their forgiveness, the faith the Holy Spirit worked in them, the eternal life they had before them, and the power was at work in them, turned them to God in prayer and praises. What a powerful witness to everyone there!

How do you cope with tough situations? Isn't there the temptation to accuse God of not being fair to you a faithful Christian? There may be the temptation to doubt God's wisdom and love. There may be the inclination to turn to despair, or drugs, or drinking or some other self-destructive reaction. None of this is good or godly.

On the other hand you may remember the love of God for you. You may think of the gift of Jesus as your Savior and God's Spirit's giving you faith, and you turn to him. Paul and Silas did what they did because they focused on the love and blessing of God's word, and as a result positively and powerfully dealt with their situation. Do the same when it comes to the tough times you experience. Let God's power work in you.

The Earthquake

God certainly showed his power in nature that night Paul and Silas were in jail. God suddenly caused an earthquake to shake Philippi. The result is that the prison doors flew open and the chains fell off the prisoners hands – a miracle. That was very dramatic!

We may not see things quite some dramatic in our lives. But God still works miracles. Check out the miracles of human conception, birth, and development. Think of the miracle of the human body! Think of the laws of nature that provide order in the universe. Year after year seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, sunshine and darkness regularly occur. Think of faith created where you think it's impossible; disease and conditions suddenly disappearing or patience, endurance, and joyful suffering when God doesn't change conditions. Think of good things happening in the world that experts say could never happen. Check out God's power.

The Jailer

When the jailer checked out the jail after the earthquake and saw the doors open, he assumed all the prisoners escaped. If the jailer allowed that to happen the Romans would make him die a slow and painful death. So we was going to die a quicker and less painful one by stabbing himself with his sword.

Sometimes as people go through tough times suicide seems to be the answer. But it is not. It violates God's authority not only to give life but to end life. It's robs God of the opportunity to show his power in giving patience and endurance, to show his love through word and sacrament, and to show his glory as his touches and the hearts and lives of all involved. If done out of unbelief, suicide ends one's time of grace. Sisters and brothers, suicide is not the answer to tough times. Don't do it!

The Change of Heart

The jailer didn't kill himself. The Apostle Paul called out to him, **"Don't harm yourself. We are all here!"** When the lights were lit and the jailer realize that Paul's words were true, he asked, **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**

Why would he, probably a Gentile and a pagan, ask that? The power of God was at work! All through the end of the day and the darkness of night he couldn't help but hearing the talking, praying, and singing of Paul and Silas. Through the Word of God he heard the Holy Spirit brought him to this point where he hungered for the gospel.

We know that that not everyone is going to heaven. Jesus said that. But never give up on the power of God's word to change hearts whether it be in our fallen-away family members, the friend who doesn't believe in Jesus, the co-worker who doesn't have time for God, or anyone to whom you witness. God's word works. It did with the jailer

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved – you and your household." Note that Paul didn't give the jailer forty steps to being saved. He simply said, **"Believe in Jesus."** The power of the God was in those words. He did. It wasn't rocket science.

Remember this as you tell others what you believe and why. You don't have to convince them. You tell and the Holy Spirit takes it from there. He changes hearts and lives.

His Household

We see the power of God at work also in the jailer's family. When Paul said, "You and your household" Paul wasn't saying that if the Jailer believe in Jesus, but his family didn't they would still be saved. He was pointing to the fact that just as the jailer would be saved through faith in Jesus as a result of hearing the gospel, so would his family.

So, the jailer cared for Paul and Silas. He took them to his family. There Paul and Silas shared the message of Jesus. They baptized the jailer and his family. God's power worked through word and sacrament The jailer believed in Jesus and so did his family. By God's grace they were saved! What power! What amazing grace! The result was great joy. Faith in Jesus makes for joyful people.

Baptism

Here we have the baptism of the jailer's household. Literally, Luke wrote, "And all his." Note the word "all." He doesn't say all but the babies. Note that Luke He lumps the proclamation of the word and the application of baptism together as the means the Holy Spirit worked faith – the means of grace.

Many within Christianity look at baptism as something that should be only done to believers and that it is an act of submission, obedience, and a figurative picture of what happened when they came to faith. But baptism is not a means whereby God works faith.

Following the pattern of Scripture, we teach adults about sin and forgiveness in Jesus. Then we teach about baptism and baptize so that the Holy Spirit works in them. But when it comes to babies, we baptize because the Holy Spirit uses the word in baptism to give God's grace and work saving faith. Think of how in the Old Testament God used circumcision and other required rituals to bring babies under his covenant of grace and make them part of his Old Testament family.

"But babies can't believe!" some say. That's not what Jesus said. In Matthew 18 he talked about the "little ones who believe in me..." The Greek version of the Old Testament used the same Greek words Jesus used to talk about babies circumcised on the 8th day. In Luke 18 when people brought "babies" for Jesus to bless them, Jesus said that the kingdom of God belongs to them used them as an example for receiving the kingdom of God. Why would he do that if they couldn't believe simply by the power of God's grace. They don't do anything to earn God's love. They just receive it. That's power.

While we don't rely on science, history, or archeology as the basis of our faith, it's interesting that in the early centuries after Jesus there are many references to the practice and universal acceptance of the baptism of infants. Even though there were those several centuries after Christ thought that Christians should wait to baptize children until they were older, their writings acknowledge that it was the practice of the early Church to baptize babies.

So, that's we do we do. Through baptism the Holy Spirit works faith, gives forgiveness, makes babies God's children, and gives eternal life. Every time a baby is baptized, the power of God is at work! So, keep doing it!