

Acts 16:25-34 (NIV)

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 everybody'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 family 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 family.

44-16-02-Jesus is Still Releasing People
slavery, bondage, release, freedom, liberation, salvation
Acts 16:25-34

A loving God's prescription for human bondage is liberation.

INTRODUCTION: (The **text** as the Scripture Reading)

–Today's passage talks about how *Jesus is still setting people free.*

That's a **loving God's prescription for human bondage: liberation.**

–Jesus came to fulfill the words of **Isa 61:1**, *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. He's still here, doing these things.*

His *indwelling presence* calls us to the *ministry of releasing people.*

Paul and Silas had cast "a spirit" out of "a slave girl," bringing her...

I. Release from Demonic Slavery– v.16-19, Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl 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." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled 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. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

A. Paul was "troubled" [lit., *worked up*] not by her words but their source: she spoke not from the Holy Spirit, but *from a demonic spirit.*

1. Satan exploits truth as a disguise– 2 Cor 11:14b, [he] masquerades as an angel of light. (He tries protecting his dark realm from God's light by presenting good and evil as being on the same team.)
2. This "slave girl" was helpless under this demon's control, but Paul knew Jesus wasn't finished casting out demons, so he "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. (Her demonic slavery was over!)

B. However, this didn't end her physical slavery! (Her owners hated her deliverance from a fortune-telling "spirit," because "their hope of making money was gone." (They were like *modern human traffickers: slaves themselves to the god of money* and treating their fellow humans as *objects, not as persons made in the Creator's image.*)

TRANS: Today, people talk of dealing with “*inner demons*” (*negative attitudes or emotional habits*). This girl had a *real one*: the kind Jesus used to cast out. Some teach that God *stopped* doing that, but this story shows that **Jesus is still liberating people from demonic slavery**. The *physical, spiritual or psychological* causes of such bondage must be addressed, but doing it *in Jesus’ name isn’t politically correct* now. Even Paul and Silas got in *political hot water* for it. Their liberating Gospel message seemed to be *curtailed for a while*, until their...

II. Release from Restraining Circumstances— v.22-24, The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- A. The circumstances surrounding the slave girl’s mighty deliverance became *their own limiting circumstances of imprisonment!*)
1. But in this harsh and painful situation, they didn’t give up or give in— v.25, “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”
 2. God can turn attempts to restrict the Gospel into opportunities to spread it. (Official efforts “to guard them carefully” put Paul and Silas “in the inner cell” where everyone could hear their words.)
- B. How can Christians keep *faithfully praying and joyously singing in situations that appear to be out of God’s control?* It’s **because...**
1. Appearances aren’t the ultimate reality. (Jesus told Pilate in John 19:10-11a, “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”)
 2. And what does He tell us?— John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (Do circumstances that seem to restrain us have the final word? No! *Jesus has the final word!*)

TRANS: Release from restraining circumstanceness begins with *peace in Christ*. It shows up in *prayer and praise*, but it ends up in *overcoming the world*. We may not always see our victory in this life, as Paul and Silas did.... While they were “singing hymns,” such an earthquake came that “*all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose*.” But that *release* led to a more important *release* for “*the jailer*” himself. *It was a...*

III. Release from Sin’s Bondage

- A. With prison doors open and prisoners liable to escape, *the jailer* was ready to kill himself. (*Circumstances had changed: what ended his control of the situation now imprisoned him in suicidal thoughts— v.28*, But Paul shouted, **Don’t harm yourself!** *We are all here!*)
- B. “*Don’t harm yourself!*” has been God’s message since the Garden of Eden. (People often *ignore Him, until He shakes them awake* with some upsetting *circumstance*, or He *sends them His messengers*.)
1. This man went from lethal despair to saving hope in an instant— v.29-30. *The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (What convicted him of his need for salvation? Was it...)
 - a. Paul’s unjust imprisonment by the system he was involved in?
 - b. comparing Paul’s kindness to his own *hardheartedness*?
 - c. that Silas and Paul’s faith in God exposed his own unbelief?
 2. We don’t need to know how the Holy Spirit brings *conviction*— we just need to know *why we’re there, what to say, and when to speak up*— v.31, *They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”* (That was the Gospel truth, but also a true prophecy of what would happen— v.32-34, *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.... then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer... was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.*)

CONCLUSION:

—**A loving God’s prescription for human bondage is liberation.** It may begin by *spiritual warfare* (to free people from demonic slavery.) But such freedom must lead to a relationship with Christ for them to experience true salvation. (The “slave girl” needed Jesus in her heart.) —*Divine liberation* may start with a release from circumstances that restrain us from “good” plans and programs. But that’s not God’s real objective. He’s after our *release from sin’s bondage*... and not just from our *personal sins* but from the *self-will* behind sin. God is still saying, “*Don’t harm yourself!*” The only way to stop that is *through Christ*. Through His *death and through His life*, we can die to the old, false self, and come alive to the new self, as “a new creation” in Christ Jesus. —No, *Jesus isn’t done yet!* He’s still *releasing people*, still *releasing us*.