

## TEXT: Acts 16:25-40 “Responding the Right Way”

**Main Idea of the Text.:** How we respond to trials and suffering can show others God’s glory, open doors for proclaiming the gospel, and advance God’s Kingdom here on this earth. Today, we will see this truth unfold in 5 ways:

- 1) Worshiping while suffering: faith is not revealed in ease, but in difficulty and hardship.
- 2) Freedom isn’t found in fleeing: true freedom isn’t found in running away from hard things.
- 3) Our response to difficulty can give gospel opportunities: gospel opportunities can lead into salvation.
- 4) The gospel transforms people: When Christ saves, transformation follows.
- 5) Using our freedoms to protect others: We can use our rights/freedoms to protect the future church.

### WE CAN WORSHIP GOD IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING (25)

Let’s pause and understand what’s happening here. Paul and Silas have just been beaten badly—this isn’t a typical “don’t spare the rod” childhood spanking. This is the kind of punishment Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 11:22-25, where he mentions receiving “the forty lashes minus one 5x” (Jewish punishment) and being “beaten with rods 3x” (Equivalent Roman punishment). They’re hurting, badly. But notice their response: **“25 About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”** Incredible, right?

Suffering is a part of the Christian life, and Paul understood this well. In Acts 9:15-16, God tells Ananias, **“Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”** So, it’s not a question of *if* we’ll suffer—it’s when. We all experience hardship at some point (raise your hand if you’ve been through suffering in any form). But here’s the key: Just going through suffering doesn’t automatically mean we’ll make a difference in others’ lives. The impact comes in how we respond to those difficult moments. It’s in our reaction to the pain, the trials, and the unfairness that we show the power of Christ working through us.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I have a childhood friend who, while drinking and high, got into an accident that left him a quadriplegic. His anger at God consumed him, and he now wants nothing to do with Him. I’ve tried to minister to him, but his bitterness is so deep that it’s blocking him from seeing how any good can come from his pain and suffering. And that’s the choice, right? We can either get bitter or get better. Let me share a story of someone who chose the better...

Have you ever heard of Joni Eareckson Tada? Joni was just 17 when a diving accident left her paralyzed from the neck down. Like my friend, she struggled with anger and depression in the face of immense physical pain and emotional turmoil. But over time, she chose to lean into her faith and find purpose in her suffering. Joni became an advocate for people with disabilities and continues to inspire others with her testimony. Despite her condition, she’s written books, founded a ministry for people with disabilities, and speaks about the power of God’s grace in the midst of suffering. She often says, **“God allows what He hates, to accomplish what He loves.”** One of her key quotes is: **“I would rather be in this wheelchair knowing Jesus than on my feet without Him.”**

**APPLICATION:** Suffering and trials are an opportunity to lean into God’s goodness and watch Him do amazing things through our contentment; just like Paul and Silas.

**Truth:** Our faith was never meant to be anchored in our circumstances. Being able to worship God in the midst of suffering and hardships glorifies God and is a strong testimony to His sufficiency in our lives. What does this mean? We must prioritize God above comfort. (PAUSE: Maybe bring up the difference between American church comforts and the threats churches in other countries face. How would we respond to death threats? We must prioritize God and His plans over comforts.)

**TRANSITION:** While in pain, Paul and Silas worshiped and God responded by allowing them to have part in a miraculous event; an earthquake that broke their chains. That’s the God we serve, He is a master at breaking chains. Breaking strongholds. Yet, Paul and Silas’s reactions demonstrate a far better freedom than being released from those chains.

## **FREEDOM ISN'T FOUND IN FLEEING (26-28)**

Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose. When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped.<sup>28</sup> But Paul called out in a loud voice, "Don't harm yourself, because we're all here!"

**BACKGROUND:** I want to pause here for a moment because it's a bit surprising that the jailer, who was in charge, suddenly wanted to take his own life. But let's remember something that happened earlier in Acts, when Peter was in prison. In Acts 12:18-19, after Peter was miraculously freed, Herod ordered the execution of the four squads of soldiers who were supposed to be guarding him, because they had lost him. While this was in a different place and time, word likely spread. Roman law was clear—if a guard lost a prisoner, it was a serious offense. In fact, we see this again in Acts 27:42, when the ship carrying Paul to Rome was shipwrecked. The soldiers were ready to kill the prisoners to prevent any escape, knowing they would face death if they let them get away. So, when the jailer realized the prisoners were gone, he assumed his life was over—he thought it was a death sentence. But, to his surprise, the prisoners remained.

**Truth:** it's far too easy for us to forget this truth, spiritual freedom is far greater than physical freedom. Our desire for obedience to God should outweigh our desire for an escape from difficulties.

**Theological:** I believe one of the biggest struggles among professing believers is that we've fallen into the trap of thinking God's power is meant to deliver us from physical pain and difficulty. But that's not the main theme of the Bible. While God does sometimes deliver us physically, His power serves a higher purpose—it's meant to transform us spiritually. Take Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, for example. Jesus didn't need spiritual transformation, but His submission and obedience to the Father shows us that life isn't about always being safe and pain-free.

**ILLUSTRATION:** In the midst of difficulty, there may be an escape route, but that doesn't mean we should take it. Think of Jonah, trying to escape on a boat going in the opposite direction. How did that work out for him? Often, what God desires is for us to dig our roots in deeper and bloom where we're planted, not to bounce around seeking comfort based on our preferences. Paul understood this truth. In Romans 5:3-5, he writes:

"We also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." True freedom isn't found in running away from difficulty to seek an easier life. It's found in trusting God and His plan for our lives.

**APPLICATION:** So, what does that look like for us today? In a simple way, maybe you choose integrity at work by not cutting corners and doing it the right way because you represent God, even if it costs you. In a deeper way, how about not abandoning a difficult situation or difficult relationship. Consider staying and engaging to be a testimony of the love Jesus has for you. Just as Paul and Silas did for this jailer.

**TRANSITION:** Look, Paul and Silas understood the mission. The mission was not to run away to find freedom for themselves. It wasn't about escape; it was about salvation. They used this moment to point this jailer to the gospel. They knew...

## **OUR RESPONSES GIVE GOSPEL OPPORTUNITIES (29-32)**

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He escorted them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." <sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house.

This jailer went from suicide to salvation. How? I believe he recognized that the authority he had over Paul and Silas was nothing compared to the God they were worshiping and singing to moments before the earthquake. I don't think it was only the earthquake that got this guy's attention. It was also witnessing the integrity and peace that Paul and Silas were living out. **Truth:** How we respond to difficulties can be the vehicle which God uses to carry the gospel into a person's life which can bring salvation. God uses our trials and our responses as divine appointments to inject the gospel into the hearts of others around us. This is why Peter said in 1 Peter 3:13-15, "13 Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for

righteousness, you are blessed. **Do not fear them or be intimidated,**<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” That is exactly what God did through Paul and Silas.

**EXPLANATION:** This jailer went from suicide to salvation along with his whole family. Now, this does not mean that they came to know Christ based on his belief, but it does show us the impact the leadership of a husband/father can have on a household. (Maybe give the illustration of father impact here: 3.5% kids, 17% mothers/wives, 93% fathers/husbands)

**APPLICATION:** So, the next time something happens to us that we think is not fair, let us be reminded that responding in anger and frustration is not the best option. These guys responded with grace and it opened a door for the gospel to be presented when the jailer begged by asking, “What must I do to be saved.” Paul and Silas were ready to give the best answer ever “trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...” Why were they ready? Because they understood that....

### **THE TRUE GOSPEL CHANGES PEOPLE (33-34)**

In these verses, we see the incredible transformation of the jailer. “He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away, he and his entire family were baptized. He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God, along with his whole household.” Notice the change in this man. He went from being a commander to a caregiver.

The true gospel has the power to transform not just individuals, but entire families. It can break generational curses, undoing cycles of sinful patterns and destructive behaviors that have been passed down for years. Through the gospel, God offers the opportunity to break these cycles and bring healing. And not only does it change individuals and families, but it also turns enemies into family.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I have been locked up in jail, arrested several times. I was first arrested at the age of 16. I thought it was just part of my life because I was a criminal at heart. I hated law enforcement. It was a dangerous game between my family and the police. But then Jesus changed me. God opened my heart to the gospel, and the Holy Spirit renewed me. I went from being a criminal to being trained as a Special Officer for the NOPD. Listen, it was not as authoritative as it sounds. I was more like a glorified security guard for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. But they did give me a badge, a gun, and a ticket book.

But here's what it did in my life: I went from hating the police to working alongside them as brothers and sisters. Only Jesus can turn enemies into family, and that's the power of the true gospel.

**APPLICATION:** True salvation, like we see with Lydia, the jailer, and their families, produces a visible transformation. If someone claims to understand what Jesus did on the cross for their sin and says they've trusted in Him, but there's no noticeable change in their heart or actions, I'd encourage them to examine their heart before God. They might not truly be saved because Jesus says, “If you love me, you'll do as I command.” That kind of obedience and change comes from a renewed heart.

**TRANSITION:** We can see the change in Lydia. We can see the change in the jailer and his family. Next we will see Paul and Silas turn their attention towards Philippi's leadership.

### **WE CAN USE OUR FREEDOMS TO PROTECT OTHERS (35-40)**

<sup>35</sup> When daylight came, the chief magistrates sent the police to say, “Release those men.” <sup>36</sup> The jailer reported these words to Paul: “The magistrates have sent orders for you to be released. So come out now and go in peace.” <sup>37</sup> But Paul said to them, “They beat us in public without a trial, although we are Roman citizens, and threw us in jail. And now are they going to send us away secretly? Certainly not! On the contrary, let them come themselves and escort us out.” <sup>38</sup> The police reported these words to the magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. <sup>39</sup> So they came to appease them, and escorting them from

prison, they urged them to leave town.<sup>40</sup> After leaving the jail, they came to Lydia's house, where they saw and encouraged the brothers and sisters, and departed. **Truth:** Paul's demand for a public release wasn't about personal gain. If it had been, he could have used his Roman citizenship to avoid the beating and imprisonment in the first place. No, this was about protecting the fledgling church from future mistreatment.

**Background:** Paul and Silas had every legal right to bring punishment against the magistrates. Publicly beaten and imprisoned without due process, despite being Roman citizens by birth, but notice Paul's response:

**He doesn't seek revenge.** Instead, he works to protect the church.

Think about it: If Paul had confronted the magistrates directly, what might have happened? Would they have seen Christians as a threat? Would they have retaliated? Paul had been on the front lines in persecuting believers, like when he oversaw Stephen's stoning in Acts 7. I believe Paul's actions make the magistrates—and other Romans—think twice before persecuting Christians without investigating the claims from others. He was protecting the church and giving it space to grow in Asia. How did he do this?

**He stood up for his rights.** Paul didn't use his freedoms for personal gain, but to protect others, specifically the fledgling church. **What about us?** Do we have opportunities to do the same?

**Application:** While we are called to suffer for Christ, we must also be aware of the world around us. Church, we live in a nation with incredible freedoms—the best in the world. There will be times when we need to stand up for our rights, not for personal gain or revenge, but to defend others and defend our right to worship God. Let us use the freedoms God has given us to protect and strengthen those around us.

**TRANSITION:** I love how Paul and Silas end their time here. They go to Lydia's house to encourage them. Later he writes one of my favorite letters, Philippians. In which he reminds them about joy and contentment in all circumstances. I can't help but think that when they read that letter, Lydia, the jailer, and their families smiled big time.

**CLOSING:** This story is more than just a historical event that we get to read over and over—it's a model for how we should respond to difficulties today:

- 1) When trials come, will you worship or worry?
- 2) When given an easy way out, will you choose faithfulness or convenience?
- 3) When others survey your life, will they see Jesus in how you respond to difficulties?
- 4) When the gospel comes to you, will you be shaped by it and live as new creation?
- 5) When you are given influence and freedoms, will you use it for personal gain or for God's glory and the protection of others?

I want you to leave with this, freedom is not about taking the easy road and escaping trouble, true freedom is found in Jesus who is the Messiah. Life may have you feeling like you are in a dark place, like a prison, difficulties that are hard to bear. Understand that it is not about escaping those things, it's about glorifying God through them and finding refuge in Him.

Remember, you get to choose, so choose to worship, choose faithfulness, choose sharing the gospel, choose transformation, and choose to do what is right because your response very well may lead someone right to the feet of our Jesus. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. The only path to reconciliation with our creator.