

“True Freedom” | Rev. Craig Chapman | August 1, 2021

Old Testament Reading: [2 Kings 5:1, 9-14](#)

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper... 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." 11 But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'" 14 So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Reading from the Acts of the Apostles: [Acts 16:23-33, 40](#)

And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 and 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 bonds were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family...

Introduction

In Acts, the Holy Spirit comes like an earthquake, causing a ripple effect, moving beyond the Jews to the Gentiles. That pagan, divided world in which the gospel created a diverse community of Christians was not unlike our world today. The gospel still brings freedom from pagan cultures and creates a diverse community of those freed by Christ.

Background

1. **Slavery: All are enslaved to something.**
 - a. The jailer was enslaved to duty and honor.
 - b. Lydia was likely enslaved to accomplishment, success, and wealth ([Acts 16:11-15](#)).
 - c. The slave girl was enslaved to demons and her owners ([Acts 16:16-20](#)).
 - d. Like the jailer, Lydia, and the slave girl, we are enslaved to something. When we yoke ourselves to Christ, that is true freedom.
2. **Freedom: The gospel brings freedom.**
 - a. **Freedom to forgive:** Paul and Silas forgive in the face of cruelty, as Christ has forgiven us ([Ephesians 4:32](#)). Paul and Silas overcome evil with good ([Romans 12:21](#)).
 - b. **Freedom to show compassion for others' needs:** Paul and Silas show compassion ([Acts 16:27-28](#)). They show kindness to the unkind and mercy to the merciless ([Matthew 18:33](#)). The jailer then, changed by the gospel, shows compassion and shares the gospel ([Acts 16:33](#)).
 - c. **Freedom to know joy in all circumstances:** Paul and Silas sing of eternal realities with joy in the face of pain and suffering because they are enslaved to Christ ([Acts 16:25](#)).
 - d. By the power of God through the gospel, the jailer, Lydia, and the slave girl come to true freedom.
3. **Community: The gospel is for a diverse community.**
 - a. The Philippian jailer was likely a retired Roman soldier, brutal, concrete, and practical.
 - b. Lydia was a wealthy, successful, gentle, rational woman from Asia.
 - c. The slave girl was a deranged and erratic woman, earning money for others.
 - d. There is no Christian type, because the gospel of Christ is for all who look and believe ([John 3:14-15](#)).

Discuss

1. How does the gospel change lives in this text from Acts, and what does this show us about how we need to let the gospel change us today?
2. What strikes you about Paul and Silas' example to the Philippian jailer, and how can we exhibit a similar example and point others to joy in Christ?
3. Where does your joy come from, and how easily is it overturned? Is your joy so fixed that no circumstances can threaten it?
4. How can we act on our knowledge of the diversity of the Christian community? How can we share the gospel more broadly?

Conclusion/Application

The gospel brings freedom to forgive, show compassion, and know joy. That freedom is available to those who look and believe, creating a diverse community of people who can then share that good news with others as the Holy Spirit works through them.

Prayer

Dear Father,
Thank you for your forgiveness and compassion, and thank you for the joy you bring us even in difficult circumstances. Please let us extend that forgiveness and compassion to others, and let us share our joy by praising you in all circumstances, not forgetting your mercy. Please help us remember the diversity of those you call, and let us not be stingy in forgiveness or compassion, but let us share the good news of Christ boldly and freely. In Jesus' name, Amen.

40 So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Gospel Reading: [John 3:1-3, 9-15](#)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”...

9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”