

Title: Unshakable Worship in Shakey Times

Text: Acts 16:22–34

Introduction

*In my ministry, I have always longed to lead people to a personal encounter with the majesty of our living, holy God. But for years, I fell far short of fully understanding what worship was and how it was to be accomplished. Out of personal frustration with my own failures in worship and a deep, growing concern for a contemporary church that seemed to know as little as I did about true worship, I sought a better understanding of the Bible's message on the subject. One of the first things I discovered is that authentic worship is not a narrowly-defined activity relegated to the Sunday morning church service—or restricted to any single time and place, for that matter. Worship is any essential expression of service rendered unto God by a soul who loves and extols Him for who He is. **Real worship therefore should be the full-time, nonstop activity of every believer, and the aim of the exercise ought to be to please God, not merely entertain the worshiper.** - John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 9–10.*

This understanding of worship helps to lay the groundwork for what God challenges us in his Word in the passage we are covering this morning.

Worship, thankfulness, gratefulness, and praise come easy when life is easy. When the pressure is off, the praise easily flows.

But what about when life gets challenging? What about when the wheels fall off, and you are unsure where to turn or what to do?

Do you and I have the same response as Job when he lost everything in one fell swoop of the Evil One's hand?

Job 1:20–22 ESV

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

I, for one, can be guilty of shaking my fist at God and saying, "Why are you doing this to me?" How about you? Can you still worship God when life gets really hard? What about when life gets hard BECAUSE you are serving the Lord faithfully?

This is exactly what we see in the life of the Apostle Paul. In fact, if you know about the life of this great apostle, you know he was destined to suffer throughout his ministry.

Acts 9:15–16 ESV

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Why would God say such a thing? Does God enjoy causing His servants to suffer? No, and here is why. Suffering in this life is far better than living for sin. Why? Because sin brings death while suffering refines and brings Christlikeness.

And so, it is because of this beautiful truth that we, followers of Christ, can actually Worship God in the midst of the most painful of trials - especially if those trials are a result of serving Christ.

Today we are going to study an episode in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. This particular account is found in [Acts 16](#) and takes place on Paul's second missionary journey. Paul is not alone, but has his sons in the faith, Timothy and Silas. And of course, Luke was there as well, recording this for us in God's Word.

It takes place after Lydia is converted to Christ.

Before her conversion, Lydia and other women would pray by the riverside. This is where Paul and his team met her.

Acts 16:13–15 ESV

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

What an amazing thing! A convert to Jesus Christ!

The next day they were on their way back to this place of prayer (most likely because there was no Synagogue in Philippi at the time) and a slave girl, who had a spirit of divination and told the future (in other words, she was possessed by a demon), kept following Paul and his team saying...

Acts 16:17–18 ESV

She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

And if you know the story, the demon did come out of her and she no longer was able to generate revenue for her masters and things escalated quickly against Paul and Silas in particular (Timothy and Luke didn't get captured).

The way these men were treated because of their faith, as well as their response, is the focus of the rest of this sermon.

As I thought through this passage in light of worship, it led me to this main thought...

Main Idea: Midnight Worship During Midnight Trials

Sometimes, each of us is confronted with the “Dark Night of the soul,” and we must understand and follow the Lord in those difficult times.

Let’s follow the rest of the account so we can learn to rest in the Lord and Worship Him well when life gets hard.

1. Worship God Who is at Work in the Hopeless Times (Acts 16:19-24)

Acts 16:19–24 ESV

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Friends, let’s be honest; all of us have journeyed through chapters in our lives where things seemed dire and hopeless, where our sufferings and trials were out of our control and were helplessly dependent on the great mercies of God.

The first thing we must understand is this - we are always out of control and helplessly dependent on the great mercies of God. Whether in a trial or when life is good - God is always in control, and we can and should rest in this.

That is what we see in this situation with Paul and Silas. The overarching control in Paul’s mind was God is working His plan, and he (Paul) was privileged to be a part of it.

I mean, Paul, by the power of the Holy Spirit, just released a young woman from the grip of Satan and brought her into a right relationship with God through Christ Jesus.

And what **thanks** does he get for such an act?

Well, the text tells us that Paul and Silas were **DRAGGED** into the marketplace.

They were **ACCUSED** of disturbing the city.

They were **LIED** about regarding the practices they advocated.

The whole city **ATTACKED** them.

They **TORE** their garments off them.

They **BEAT** them with rods (a thin straight bar of wood or metal).

They **INFLICTED** many blows on Paul and Silas.

They **THREW** them in the inner prison.

They **SHACKLED** their feet in the stocks.

(Show Picture)

*An instrument that secured the feet (and sometimes the neck and hands) of a prisoner (Job 13:27; Jeremiah 29:26). Stocks were usually constructed of wood with holes to secure the feet. They could also be used as an instrument of torture by stretching the legs apart and causing the prisoner to sit in unnatural positions. The Romans often added chains along with the stocks. Stocks were much used in medieval and later times during persecution of Christians. **The New Manners and Customs of the Bible 16:24 Stocks***

Can you imagine what that must have been like? Can you imagine the sense of rage and injustice you would feel well up in your heart?

Have you ever been accused of something that simply was not true? what was your visceral response? I bet it was to defend yourself.

I bet you were inclined to go around and tell your side of the story to garner support for yourself so you could prove your innocence.

I know that would be my initial response. I would want everyone to know how innocent I am.

By studying Paul's writings, I am convinced that, although his initial human response might have been fleshly, he ultimately responded in the Spirit. By the grace of God, he was led by the Spirit, motivated by his desire to honor Christ with his body, come what may.

Philippians 1:18–21 ESV

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Galatians 2:20 ESV

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul and Silas were going through some major suffering. Suffering and trial greater than most of us have ever experienced. The question is would they be able to worship God when everything and everyone was against them?

The single most important thing to understand about worship is that the only worship that is acceptable to God is worship that proceeds from a heart that is trusting in God, and in God alone.

R. C. Sproul

What is going on in your life this morning? Are you experiencing the Dark Night of the Soul? Does it seem like everything, and everyone is against you?

Well, take heart - this is where your theology can help you navigate through the hardships of life.

1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Followers of Christ - Do you see this beautiful promise here? Do you see what God is telling us?

When tempted to sin we do not need to fall into this temptation. Why? Because God is faithful and HE will not allow the temptation to draw you into sin, but you can actually, by the power of the Holy Spirit, say NO to the temptation and YES to responding to the temptation that pleases your Heavenly Father.

So, think of it this way.

Paul and Silas are in a terrible situation, and they could be tempted to sin by complaining, questioning God's motive, becoming angry at the situation, or any other sinful response that could easily crop up when under pressure from trials and temptations. But they don't! And neither do you. You can actually worship God when everything seems hopeless because you have a relationship with the Author of History (His Story).

As long as you are breathing, there is hope!

Review - Midnight Worship During Midnight Trials

- Worship God Who is at Work in the Hopeless Times

2. Worship God When All Hope is Gone (Acts 16:25)

Acts 16:25 ESV

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

Okay, let's come at verse 25 one more time. Paul and Silas were beaten to a bloody pulp unjustly. Thrown in jail unceremoniously and shackled in chains unwillingly.

Yet notice their response.

About midnight - It was a long day, and they had to be exhausted considering what they had been through.

Praying and singing hymns to God - They had every right to sleep or at least quietly reflect and nurse their significant wounds. But that is not the story. They were praying our loud.

Can you imagine what their prayer must have been like? Give example...

They were singing **hymns** to God - We don't know what they were singing, but the lyrics of a Christian hymn often include references to Bible verses, Christian theology, and themes of redemption, salvation, gratitude, and reverence. Hymns play a significant role in Christian worship, serving not only as expressions of faith and devotion but also as tools for teaching and reinforcing the tenets of Christian faith among believers.

And these men, exhausted, bleeding, and in great pain, said no to their negative feelings and emotions and yes to the opportunity to worship God by publicly praising Him.

People witnessing their response - This, perhaps, is the most profound aspect of this account. "The prisoners were listening to them."

Now think about this - Paul and Silas were now fellow prisoners.

In my experience of visiting people in jail or prison, many of them believe they were put there unfairly or unjustly. They believe they don't deserve such treatment. And so they complain and fuss and fuss and complain.

Paul and Silas were actually put in prison unjustly and beaten unfairly, and instead of complaining, they prayed and sang. They worshiped God publicly!

Can you imagine?

What a powerful testimony to worship God with thankfulness and joy in thankless and joyless circumstances.

Why do you think God allowed this story to be in His Holy Scriptures?

Maybe as a powerful example to future generations of Christians? Maybe as an example to you? So, you and I can know how we are to respond when we are treated unfairly and unjustly? Especially when it comes to serving the Lord.

How could they respond in such a way?

Spurgeon has an idea for us to ponder...

When your heart is full of Christ, you want to sing.

Charles Spurgeon

Everything connected with him always leads to an outburst of praise and of singing and of thanksgiving from those who are nearest to him, those who see him, those who know him as he is.

Singing to the Lord, 48

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

So, Paul and Silas must have been close to Christ if their response was Worship and praise, having received such horrible treatment.

When faced with difficulty or mistreatment, do we let our circumstances dictate our joy and peace, or do we, like Paul and Silas, choose to praise God amidst our trials?

What does our response to adversity reveal about the depth of our relationship with Christ?

Let me encourage you to turn to God in worship and prayer, no matter the situation. This will deepen your faith and will serve as a powerful witness to others.

You will experience God's peace and presence in profound ways.

It will transform how you navigate the inevitable challenges, difficulties, and trials life brings.

Review - Midnight Worship During Midnight Trials

- Worship God Who is at Work in the Hopeless Times
- Actively Worship God When All Hope is Gone

3. Worship God for the Fruit He Brings from our Suffering (Acts 16:26-34)

Acts 16:26–34 ESV

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. 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. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 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. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Do you think that Paul and Silas knew that the earth would quake when they were worshipping God in the middle of the night, in the middle of great suffering? No, I do not believe they did.

Yet God surprised this faithful duo in seven significant ways.

1. A sudden great earthquake -
2. Doors were opened -
3. Bonds were unfastened -
4. The jailer didn't kill himself -

5. The jailer asked the way of salvation -
6. The jailer ministered to Paul and Silas -
7. The jailer and his household believed in God and were baptized -

Seven surprising fruits from agonizing suffering. Do you think Paul and Silas would have asked God for this kind of suffering? No!

Do you think they were grateful for the suffering when they realized the beautiful fruit that came from it? Yes!

This is what hindsight does for the Christian. It helps the believer see clearly the providential, caring hand of God.

Think about this from Paul's godly perspective. As he went through the suffering, he may have understood that God was at work, but trials can be really hard, and it can be very easy to get off track emotionally when you are in the middle of the trial.

Paul and Silas, in their Christian maturity did not allow the trial to get them off track, but instead worshiped and praised God during the trial.

The trial still was painful on many levels.

But when the jailer and his household, because of the way Paul and Silas handled themselves, came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul and Silas had to be over the moon excited because they now understood what God was up to as they looked at their horrible trial from a backward perspective.

Do you know how to read Hebrew? From our perspective, reading Hebrew is backward.

Genesis 1:1

הָאֵרֶץ: וְאֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֵת אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא לְבְרָאשִׁית

The Christian life is like reading the Hebrew text for the Christian...

That's what John Flavel believes...

"Some providences, like Hebrew letters, must be read backwards." - John Flavel

Christian, you may be going through something right now that you do not understand. It doesn't feel good and frankly, you would have never chosen it for yourself (to be honest, we would never pick the trials we go through because we would always go easy on ourselves).

But never forget that if you are a true child of God, He is working His providential plan in your life.

Romans 8:28–29 ESV

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also

predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Remember, your suffering is not always about you.

Like Paul and Silas, how you handle your trials in front of others can influence their understanding of God and may even cause them to turn to Him.

The opposite is true as well. If you handle your trials in a fleshly way (anger, wrath, clamor, hatred, etc.) you can drive them away from God.

It's your choice.

Paul and Silas, while going through the trial and not understanding all that would come out of the trial, **CHOSE** to worship God amid the trial, and many were saved as a result!

We have to know this fact - Whatever you are going through. No matter how difficult, this trial has passed through the hand of a sovereign God who not only wants to mature you through the trial but also draw others to Himself as they witness you handling the trial.

This is why we can say amen to...

James 1:2-4 ESV

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

My challenge to you this morning is to change your perspective on your trials. Stop complaining to others about your pain and anguish and start worshipping God.

When you do, you will be amazed at not only how God will use you, but how He will make you like Jesus!

Review - Midnight Worship During Midnight Trials

- Worship God Who is at Work in the Hopeless Times
- Actively Worship God When All Hope is Gone
- Worship God for the Fruit He Brings from our Suffering

Conclusion

As we journey through the narrative of Paul and Silas in [Acts 16:19-34](#), we've witnessed an extraordinary testament to the power of unshakable worship in the midst of life's shakiest times. Their story is not just a historical recount; it's a blueprint for our lives today.

Let us take from Paul and Silas's example the strength to worship God fervently, even when our circumstances seem hopeless. Worship is not just for the moments of joy and peace but is a powerful testament of our faith during our darkest trials.

This week, I challenge each of you to find a moment of 'midnight' in your life—be it a struggle at work, a personal loss, or a moment of uncertainty—and choose to worship.

Turn on a worship song, pray, or simply declare God's goodness over your situation. Let worship be your first response, not your last resort.

Corrie ten Boom, a woman who knew suffering and hopelessness firsthand in a Nazi concentration camp, once said, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still." Like Paul and Silas, her worship and faith in God's love were unshakable, even in the most despairing circumstances. Her story reminds us that our worship has the power to transcend our trials, transforming our darkest nights into dawn.

Imagine, for a moment, what our church could look like if we all embraced this practice of midnight worship during midnight trials. Picture our church, not as a building filled with people on Sundays, but as a vibrant beacon of hope, shining brightly in Allendale. Picture our homes, workplaces, and schools as places where the worship of God overflows from our hearts, influencing those around us, drawing them closer to Him.

What if our worship in the midst of trials became our most powerful testimony to the world? What if our unshakable worship in these shaky times led to a revival in our hearts, our homes, and our community?

(Drive Worship Home Series)

So, let us not forget that worship is not confined to the walls of our church or the comfort of peaceful moments. It is a weapon, a beacon of hope, and a declaration of our faith in God's sovereignty, especially in the face of adversity.

May we go forth, embodying the spirit of unshakable worship in shaky times, trusting that God is at work, even when all hope seems gone, and knowing that He brings fruit from our suffering. Amen.

Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. What did we learn about God from the text or Sunday's message?
2. What did we learn about true worshipers from the text or Sunday's message?
3. What can you do to improve in the area of worship during difficult time?
4. What does God desire from us at ABC, or you personally as a worshiper?
5. If you or we as a church were to practically apply what we learned from this passage or message, what would that look like? What changes will we or you make this week?
6. Summarize what you learned in one sentence, and how does God want you to respond in obedience?
7. This week, who would benefit from this truth, and who will you share it with?