

Referenced scriptures throughout message:

Main Scripture:

- Acts 16:16-40

Supporting scripture: (in order of appearance in study)

- Acts 15:19-20
 - Deut. 18:9-12
 - Mark 3:14-15
 - Deut. 18:9-12
 - Ps. 145:15-21
 - 1 Peter 1:6-7
 - Psalm 42:8
 - Philippians 1:27
-

Opening: Good morning and Welcome Covenant Community Church, so glad you are here ...

Today we'll conclude our series on the People of praise to kick off the ministry year...

Carlton- WHY we praise (our DNA)

Lowell - HOW we praise (from our heart, personally like Jesus)

Ryan- WHEN we praise (in all seasons, especially the difficult ones)

And so, with that, we'll pick up in Acts 16 verse#16, then we'll pray over this morning

~ READ Acts 16:16-24 ~

~ LET US PRAY ~ (Unction, Clarity, God's Thoughts, His spirit and Boldness) ~

So, I've titled this morning's message "Shackled, yet singing!"

- As we conclude the series on the people of praise, it seemed only fitting for an example of when we as believers are to be praising.

○ It couldn't be an easy one but a hard one to help illustrate the purpose

So, for today's text the let's take the scripture in chunks so as to make it easier to digest, here's how we'll proceed...

- Busted! verses 16-24*
- A Holy commotion verses 25-29*
- Being set free verses 30-40*

Now, since we're starting in the middle of the story, I thought we should quickly summarize the events that have transpired to get us to Acts 16.

- *In Acts 15, A great dispute has arisen with the requirement of circumcision for Gentile believers, it's been escalated all the way to the Jerusalem Council
 - *It was agreed that it was not a requirement to follow Christianity*
~ Read Acts 15:19-20 ~
 - *This ruling would be sent with Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas to share with the churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia**
- *After this mission was accomplished Paul wanted to visit all the newly established "churches" to check in and exhort the brothers there.*
 - *A great contention arose regarding John Mark, so Paul and Barnabas split up and Paul and Silas continued on to eventually end up at Philippi (expound a little on a doubling of the efforts not a halving)
 - *... the Macedonian call diverting them from Asia to Europe**
- *Then in Acts 16 we see that the team seeks the place of meeting for the believers in Philippi (since there were not 10 Jewish men, and no synagogue it was elsewhere).*
 - *Through this they meet with Lydia and the establishment of a home church occurs in Philippi.*
 - *From all of this we have seen that God's people are praising in the open doors for ministry and the new converts. Definitely not an easy journey but a rewarding one!*

So, with all that to help set the stage for this morning Let's dive back into Acts 16 starting in verse 16...

~ read verses 16-18 ~

- A lot of commentators note that the woman was possessed by a spirit of the python, stemming from Greek mythology surrounding the Oracle of Delphi who could predict the future.

- Culturally these people groups would pray and worship to false gods and Idols and open themselves up to the demonic realm
- We see that this poor woman was a slave, possessed and exploited for financial gain
 - but even that wasn't enough for Paul to act...
- Why did Paul wait several days to act?
 - Could it be he was waiting on the Holy Spirit to give him permission as this was a slave and could stir up trouble
 - Could it also be that by having a demon possessed woman following them around was hurting the impact of the ministry, *the right message but wrong medium?*
 - Potentially, it could also be that Paul had no intention to act, as he'd been challenged in the ministry before and this was nothing new, just another attack of Satan to hinder the gospel.
- All that we are given is that after several days Paul grew annoyed and cast out the demon, exercising the authority given to him by Christ. He also calling upon the name of the only person that could free this woman, Jesus!
 - This was in line with **Mark 3:14-15**, Where we see this as a responsibility assigned to the Apostles so within Paul's role

“And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.”

- Side note here, it is not comforting to see that despite his ministry training and years of service Paul still gets annoyed? I am so grateful the bible does not shy away from the little nuggets like this. For if it were me, the story that would intentionally skip over these failure points.

- Now back to Paul, was he justified in acting? YES per *Deut. 18:9-12*

“When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you.”

- I think this, addresses one point where we as the people of praise can easily give the God of the universe all the glory and honor, when we are used mightily in the ministry. (*expound... part of someone’s restoration story*)

Now, surely nothing bad could come from this miraculous act of setting this poor woman free from her torment, Right? Let’s read on...

~ Read Verses 19-24 ~

- We see a great display of the worldview against Christianity here, as soon as it impacts them in a negative (personally/ financially), those Christians must be stopped at all cost!
 - The conflict between money and ministry occurs often in the book of Acts, [*Acts 5:1-11 (Ananias/ Sapphira), Acts 8:18-24 (Simon the sorcerer), Acts 19:23-41 Burning of the books of magic, and the maker of silver idols) and 20:33-34 (Paul defending not taking from anyone)*]
- Now these men were cunning as they intentionally lodged a complain to the Magistrates regarding proselyting Roman citizens.
 - Rome had a zero-tolerance rule about intrusion of foreign religions, we also see that they specifically call out “these men are Jews” playing on the harsh anti-Semitism that existed in the Roman colonies.

- We see that immediate action is taken and that the crowd was stirred up against them and they tore off their clothes to humiliate them and then beat the 2 men with rods.
 - This violated the Roman rule, in that any person accused of something would be given a chance to plead their case, especially a Roman citizen
 - It's odd that again Paul does not speak up and immediately protest this gross injustice, commentators offer several different perspectives
 - Potentially in the chaotic mob scene that this turned into there simply was not time or no ability to speak up
 - Additionally, potentially Paul was waiting to state his position as a Roman till it was more advantageous (as we'll see Paul do later in Acts)
- Paul and Silas are sent to Jail with special instruction to ensure their safety, this may be a way for the Magistrates to cover their actions and ensure the 2 men are not accidentally “misplaced” while in prison.
 - Prison's during Paul's time were horrendously bad, little to no food, deplorable sanitation, and on and on...
 - The Jailer put the men in the inner prison sometimes called the dungeon as it would have little to no light and very poor airflow.
 - And to add injury to insult he placed them in the stocks which would force the prisoner's legs to be extended as far as they could and cause cramping and pain.

Now as we conclude our first section of the study it surely doesn't seem like a situation worthy of rejoicing, but let's continue on to see a holy commotion ...

~ Read Verses 25 ~

- How could anyone find a way to sing and praise in the trial that Paul and Silas were walking through?
 - wrongfully convicted, brutally punished, cast into darkness to suffer with an unknown fate
 - I think we have to go back to what Carlon shared from *Ps. 145:15-21*

*“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.
The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.
The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.
He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them.
The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.
My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name
forever and ever.”*

- As Carlon shared, it’s in our spiritual DNA to give Him praise. Paul and Silas were following the will of God that led to this trial so, they believe that God is bigger than their circumstances
- Commentators highlight 3 major reasons Paul and Silas could sing during this trial
 - Their abuse and imprisonment demonstrated the desperation of the enemy (Satan) in seeing the victory that the Gospel was winning in the hearts of the gentiles
 - It gave validation to their ministry *Col 1:21-24*

*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.
Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...*

- Demonstrated their own personal maturity, you never truly know how far you’ve grown from the old man till you take a beating.

(The trees in Biosphere2 (~2013 research project) grew more rapidly than those outside the dome but they also fell before reaching maturation. After evaluation of the root system and outer layers of bark, scientists came to the realization that the lack of wind caused a deficiency of stress wood)

- It's not the expected trial that reveals where you are in your growth journey, it's the one that sneaks up upon you.
- This may be one of the hardest times to actively be people of praise, especially unlike Paul and Silas when our escape doesn't come that very night.
 - So how do we praise in an extended season of trial? Here are some points to consider
 - Never trade what you know about God for what you don't know about your circumstance. *(elaborate...better understand)*
 - Lean into the trail and don't shy away from the struggle, and look for others to lift up as well. I think of *1 Peter 1:6-7* as a great verse to hold onto

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

- God gives us songs in the night, in our darkest and loneliness times he brings us comfort and even joy! Looking at *Ps 42:8*

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

- We need to embrace the fact that our lives are observed by the world around us, your witness goes far beyond your words.
 - You are Salt, but without flavor what good is it...
 - A city set upon a hill...

- A great point that a commentator made here is that prosperity often only creates jealousy (*elaborate...*)

May this bring you encouragement as you walk through the trials of this life, knowing that you are not alone in this journey through the refiners fire. Now lets continue on with Paul and Silas...

~~~~~ **AT APPROX 20 MINUTES** ~~~~~ (10:20am) ~~~~~

*~ Read verse 26 ~*

- This earthquake was unlike any had seen, reminiscent of the one that struck Jericho. A targeted event that demonstrated to power of our God ...
  - Most peoples at Paul's time would attribute an earthquake to a specific deity being displeased, which I guess could ring true here as well
- This also captured the attention of the prisoners in the jail as they had witnessed Paul and Silas singing and praising then an earthquake that set them free... or did it?

*~ Read verse 27 ~*

- The Roman jailer took the logical approach that the prisoners fled and in turn Rome's displeasure would be played out on him.
- We see several times in the book of Acts that a Roman would rather fall on his own sword then let the punishment come to him from his failure. It was considered noble to die in battle or at the hand of ones own sword.

**But Paul intervenes here, in a miraculous way...**

*~ Read verse 28-29 ~*

- Coming back to the prisoners, none ran to freedom. A miracle in itself. Some of these men must have been serving life sentences yet none ran... why?



- I would suggest fear and respect...
  - Runaway prisoners that were caught would face some of the harshest punishments up to death
  - The absolute awe of what had just happened may have been an instant point of conversion to the faith of Paul and Silas
  - And if not conversion at least respect for the men and their faith and therefore obedience to stay

**The impact this has had on the Jailers heart is profound, we now transition to our last section on being set free...**

*~ Read verse 30-31 ~*

- When the Holy Spirit moves on your heart you don't wait, there was nothing that would stop this man from turning to Christ in that moment.
- His eyes were open to several facts...
  - First that he was lost, he needed to be saved (*Christianity isn't added to who we are but replaces how we begin*)
  - That there was salvation through the God of Paul and Silas, think Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in the Lion's den. Those leaders knew that the God of these men was the way...
  - Also, in his zeal, he desperately needed all of those in his household to hear this message. He was set free and set on fire for Jesus!

**We see that he makes a bold first step in verses 32-34**

*~ Read verse 32-34 ~*

- Taking prisoners out of jail in the middle of the night was not wise move, but it demonstrates how much this man's life was changed.
  - He would risk the severe punishment that may come because he needed his family to hear this message, that's a sign of a spiritual leader!

## People of Praise: Shackled, yet singing!

Acts 16:16-40

- We see that the Jailer embraces his new faith in that he immediately demonstrates acts of service towards Paul and Silas with washing their wounds and offering them food.
  - Warren Weirsbee puts it so beautifully here, *“It is touching to see the change in attitude of the jailer as he washed the wounds of these two prisoners who were now his brothers in Christ. One of the evidences of true repentance is a loving desire to make restitution and reparation wherever we have hurt others. We should not only wash one another’s feet but we should also cleanse the wounds we have given to others.”*
- A great lesson for us all to remember, to avoid becoming set in our ways, so rigid to the unexpected that we come off cold. (*expound...*)

**Now let’s see how the misadventures of Paul and Silas end, as we transition back to our text we pick-up in verse 35**

*~ Read verses 35-36 ~*

- The men have been returned to jail after the evenings events and lo and behold the Magistrates have had a change of heart
  - No clarity given on the why...
    - potentially they were made aware of the earthquake and wanted to get these guys out of town before word spread.
    - Maybe they felt the beating and a night in the slammer had been punishment enough

**The Jailer (who is now a new man) is ecstatic at the news and conveys the message to men, but the response isn’t what he expected...**

*~ Read Verse 37-39 ~*

- Paul has finally decided to strategically make it known that they are Roman citizens, why?

- We see several times that Paul uses this approach, so it may have been a way to diminish hostilities towards Christianity by forcing the Romans to honor their own laws.
- He sought justice and no doubt a reminder for the magistrates that they had violated Roman laws on the proper treatment of Roman citizens and would be punished for that violation.
- It also would leave a sense of mystery and deceit if the Christians snuck away with no explanation after the previous day's events. Paul would be living out his own exhortation to the Philippians in *Philippians 1:27*

*“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,”*

- Additionally, it could also hurt the budding new church that was forming and make it hard for it to grow, so he wanted to resolve this issue publicly and in an upright manner.
- We see that the Magistrates apologize, as requested, and ask that the men to leave the city so as to squash this whole issue and not stir up more controversy

**And we see in our last verse that they certainly don't rush off, but stayed to say their farewells**

~~~~~ **AT APPROX 35 MINUTES** ~~~~~ (10:35am) ~~~~~

~ Read Verse 40 ~

- Paul and Silas went right back to the work of the ministry, despite the pain and sleepless night, they continued doing what God called them to do.
- A beautiful take point to hold on to is that this small church grew and was a constant supporter of Paul's additional missionary journeys. When a foundation is laid in Christ it will surely stand and bear good fruit.

So what do we take away from today's message as the worship team comes up?

- *Looking at the Focus of a People of Praise and the emphasis of When to praise, it's evident in the scripture that there are of more hard times than easy times. That on this side of heaven we will face trials and our faith will be tested. Therefore, we need to learn how to give God praise as we suffer, just as Paul and Silas did.*
- *Whether that's through recalling the seasons of blessings as an anchor to allow you to weather the storms of life*
- *Or maybe it's pressing deeper into your prayer life, and surrendering the burden directly to the one who promised to take it*
- *Yet still for others it's to call out to like-minded brothers and sisters to avoid the temptation to become inwardly focused and run from the love and care of God's church.*
- *One final thought to leave you with. That if Jesus, on the eve of his death could gather with the disciples knowing what was about to come.*
 - *The pain that he and his people would endure for generations to come and yet HE still sing hymns then we surely know that we have no excuse to not lift our voices and our hands to the one who gave it all.*

~ LET US PRAY ~

(Pray for the strength in our faith to find opportunity to praise the Lord despite my circumstances)

KNOW GOD, LOVE OTHERS, LIVE THE GOSPEL