

Sermon Acts 16:16-40

"A Surprising Night at Work"

June 2, 2019

Ever had a day or night that started off great but then it tanked?

The worst thing ever happened?

That one thing you were supposed to do and you failed?

Or a time when it seemed the worst thing brought an end to something you'd planned for?

Then you can identify with the jailer.

And maybe like the jailer, you too discover that the worst thing is never the last thing when God is at work.

Put yourself in the jailer's shoes. Word is going around the city of philippi that a group of men had cured a demon possessed girl. Think in today's terms of a female teenager homeless, street prostitute working for a hustler.

When Paul and Silas removed this so called talent from the girl, the men cut into the owners' business.

The owners were angry and wanted them punished.

They didn't want any money, they just wanted to discredit Paul and his group. They alleged that the Jews were rabble-rousers and disturbing the peace. Well, that got everyone riled up. The crowd started beating them up and the judge sent them to jail. They are now in your charge.

It is your job to keep them in jail for the night.

These two men arrive at the jail all bloody with open gapping wounds covering their backs, head, arms and leg after being beaten with rods like baseball bats.

You're ordered to guard them carefully.

You know the very best place for them. There is a cell deep in the middle of the jail where there is no way they can escape.

you decide to keep the heavy chains & shackles on their wrists.

In order to put their feet in stocks, they must sit on the bench next to the wall. As the locks close around their feet, their bloody backs press against the hard stonewalls, torturing them even more.

You leave them in their jail cell, knowing they are as safe and secure as humanly possible.

A bit later, you hear the two men singing hymns to God. They're praying out loud to their God of salvation.

Worrying this could agitate the other prisoners you walking down into the cell area.

There to your surprise, you discover the other prisoners are calmly listening.

All was well in the jail that night and you confidently return to your post.

In a few minutes you nod off as you wait for the morning.

And that's when the worst thing that could happen, happened.

An earthquake shakes the jail.

Door hinges are released from their frames.

All the doors fall to the ground as the earth shook.

the chains holding Paul and Silas and all the other prisoners fall off.

There is nothing holding the prisoners inside anymore.

Naturally, The jailer expects they've run off.

He's sure they've taken advantage of this surprising freedom and gotten out of jail.

He knows he has failed at his 1 responsibility, to keep the prisoners in jail.

the jailer's reaction is to kill himself out of shame.

you see this joe jailer was very likely retired Army, given the job in recognition of his service. Being a jailer was a Good job, a stable civil service job with minimal responsibilities. Now, the jailer is sure that he's failed at his job.

While throwing himself on his sword seems excessive to us, the jailer knew that by Roman law he himself would suffer the same punishment that was set for the prisoners, if they escaped from jail.

He would be executed for his failure.

rather than putting himself and his family through that, he decided it was in his best interest to just go ahead and do himself in.

and that's when the jailer discovers that the worst thing was not the last thing.

Suddenly the jailer hears Paul yelling to him.

He hears Paul shout **stop! we are all here.**

The jailer finds not just Paul and Silas, but **all** the other prisoners are right where the jailer left them a few hours before.

The jailer is saved by Paul and Silas.

While the jailer appeared to be free, he was bound in chains then Paul and Silas who were physically chained.

the jailer was bound by fear & shame.

What about you, what is your prison?

What is it that it keeps you bound up?

For some, it's fear. Fear of what might happen ties them up.

for others it is habits and traditions.

it could be hopelessness or self-centered ego or pride.

This morning, like the jailer, we ask what must I do to be saved?

How do I find redemption, restoration, healing & hope from all that is broken in me and in the world?

The answer is this: Believe in the lord Jesus.

That's it.

Just believe in Jesus.

Paul and Silas didn't give the jailer along list of things you must do first- no requirements.

they shared the word of the lord with him.

And the jailer believed.

This joe jailer who woke up that day, went to work that night, returned home a very different man. He was changed.

In Acts, we meet a lot of people who come to know Jesus as their Savior. There's the eunuch, Cornelius the Roman centurion and Lydia and her household and friends. They were already believers in the most high God, the one God of Israel. They were converted to understand that Jesus was the son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, their savior.

But this joe jailer was very different. if he had any religion at all, it was probably worshipping all the different pagan gods found in roman cities at the time. He had no interest in their god of Israeli, all he wanted to do was do his job.

But, something about Paul and Silas got his attention.

No doubt it was their reaction to being in jail. Paul and Silas, in the middle of their pain and suffering, were praying, they were singing.

They weren't complaining, blaming other people, or stirring up the other prisoners.

Instead, they were calm.

They were joyful in all circumstances, giving God all the glory for his son Jesus Christ. They were so compelling and surprising in their attitude and gratitude that they held the attention of the other prisoners & the jailers too.

Paul and Silas could sing and pray because they loved Jesus so much, they were obedient to his call to go out into the world and save sinners and they knew the joy of the lord deep in their hearts.

Well, if their singing didn't get the jailer attention, their actions after the earthquake certainly did.

There, in the middle of an opportunity to run, Paul and Silas stayed.

They chose not to return evil with evil but to return evil with good.

Paul wrote about that in Romans 12, 1st Thessalonians chapter 5 and his first letter to Peter. Maybe as he was writing those words Paul remembered this night in the Phillipian jail.

Those 2 men stood by the jailer.
 They saved that man from sure and certain death.
 They wouldn't trade their life for his.
 Paul and Silas did this, standing on Jesus own sacrificial death for them.

By the grace of God, the jailer was freed, saved and became part to be part of God's family in Philippi.

That is truly surprising and remarkable. The rich Lydia and the average Joe jailer and all their household slaves and free, all became children of God. That is something to sing about!

There is another surprising element here in this passage.
 As a Jew Paul and his friends would have spoken a traditional morning prayer that ended like this: "Blessed are you O God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me...", "a goy [Gentile]," "a slave," and "a woman."
 The gospel of Jesus Christ is so powerful it over came this traditional blessing that Paul himself prayed for years.

Paul himself declares this in Galatians 3:28 when he said. 'There is no longer Jew [Paul and Silas] or Greek [Lydia, the demon possessed slave girl, the jailer], there is no longer slave [the girl] or free [Lydia, Paul], there is no longer male [Paul, Silas, the jailer], or female [Lydia, the slave girl]; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'

All are invited. all are welcome there is no restriction. Who then are we to allow the bonds of fear, tradition or ego to stand in the way of the gospel being for all?

The power the Holy Spirit will continue to shake and loosen those bonds as surely as the earthquake felt in the jail on that surprising night at work. The spirit is an unstoppable force.

The power of the Holy Spirit will continue to work in the worst times in your life. The worst thing is never the last thing.

Just read Acts and discover God working in surprising ways to bring truly the best things-God's love, restoration, redemption, healing and freedom to you.
 To God be the glory Amen.