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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
July 19, 2015  
8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 28:10-22, Matthew 13:44-46

Hymns: 23; 528:1-3,11,12,15; 305; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 16:22-33

22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 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 chains were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then 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 stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO: Acts of the Holy Spirit**

Our text recounts a familiar incident in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. We refer to this incident as the conversion of the jailer of Philippi, and we find the record of this event in the book of the Bible known as the Acts of the Apostles. What we really see demonstrated in this account is how the Holy Spirit acts through the people of God, including the Apostles. In this particular incident we see evidence of the Spirit's power in both the Apostle Paul and his partner in ministry, Silas, and then finally also in the jailer of Philippi. The lesson that we draw from this inspired record reveals for us –

**THEME: How the Spirit Shapes Christian Character.**

We begin with the difficult trial experienced by Paul and Silas, and we must marvel at their –

### **I. Joy-filled faith in the midst affliction.**

It all started with the Apostle Paul casting an evil spirit out of a demon possessed slave girl. She had been making a great deal of money for her masters by serving as a fortune teller among the people of Philippi. Depriving these men of their source of income upset things more than a little for Paul and Silas. They were arrested and dragged before the local magistrates where they were accused of teaching the people customs that were not lawful for Romans to observe. The crowd that had gathered went wild, and the magistrates tore their robes in horror, and ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods and thrown into prison. They were severely beaten, and, seen as despicable criminals that needed to be kept secure, they were thrown into the stocks in the inner dungeon.

This goes way beyond the cliché that “no good deed will go unpunished.” This was the devil himself breaking out against the

gospel, seeking to silence Paul and Silas who had been preaching about Jesus in Philippi for many days.

I'm afraid that about that time I would have been so full of self-pity that nothing more than grumbling and complaining and more than a little whining and whimpering would have been the sounds coming from me. That may be a rather charitable characterization of what my behavior would be like. Certainly that is what the enemies of Paul and Silas were hoping to achieve, with an ultimate goal of silencing them and being rid of them.

However, that is not the way of the Holy Spirit, and it was the Holy Spirit that shaped Paul and Silas' Christian character and their response to this affliction that had entered their lives.

**Acts 16:25** But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

They responded with faith and trust in God that led them to pray and sing hymns to God. That comes from the Holy Spirit working in their hearts with the gospel. They had hope and joy in the Lord in spite of the pain and suffering they endured for Jesus' name sake. They praised the Lord that they were found worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake. They rejoiced in the Lord and looked to God for comfort and deliverance. And the prisoners were listening to them.

Joy-filled faith in the face of affliction is one of the fruits of the Spirit that is present with children of God. No, we are not always perfect in our rejoicing in the face of sickness, trial, persecution, or hardship. We find ourselves battling our old adam who wants to complain, and doubt the Lord's love. It is the Spirit of our God that reminds us of God's love in Christ, and the hope of everlasting life that we have in Him. We are led by the Spirit to recall that He who delivered us from sin and its curse of death and hell will not leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Then the Spirit lifts us up in our hearts. We are content knowing that in all things God's love is present with us, and we have His peace. He does not deal with us according to our sin, but only and always according to His grace. And we rejoice and give thanks to God in all things.

And people hear us, no matter who they might be, people observe the hope that we have within us. That is the way the Holy Spirit works, who blesses all things which come our way in life. This includes the persecution of the world, which in coming years may very well become more intense than we have known in our lifetimes.

And God hears us as well, even as the Lord heard and responded to the prayers and praises of Paul and Silas. In the events that followed we see once again the fruit of the Spirit evident in how Paul and Silas were led to --

## **II. Love their Enemies.**

Yes, it happened that the Lord intervened to deliver Paul and Silas from their dungeon cell. At midnight God caused a great earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison, and the doors to all the prison cells flew open, and the prisoners' chains were all loosed. Of course this woke the chief jailer, and of course he would rush to check on the prison to be sure that the prisoners left in his charge were all secure. When he saw all the cell doors standing open he quite naturally assumed that the prisoners had escaped. It was his worst nightmare. The penalty for losing any prisoner could be a slow and agonizing death. To see that all the prisoners might be gone was cause for despair! He would rather die quickly by his own hand than to suffer shame and great pain at the hands of the Romans. He drew his sword and was about to take his own life when something remarkable happened. Paul called out and stopped him from taking such a harsh and foolhardy action. Paul assured the jailer that all the prisoners were actually still in their cells. A mass escape had not taken place.

If you are wondering what this has to do with loving your enemy, remember that Paul could very easily have remained quiet, and this despicable man would have been out of the picture and no longer a problem for their leaving that dreadful prison. But that would not have been the loving thing to do. Love dictated that Paul cry out and stop the man from taking his own life. In loving concern for his enemy Paul intervened, and brought the jailer back from the brink of despair.

We may easily see many people in the world as our nemesis, people that not only don't do us any favors but are very adept at making our lives miserable. It is easy to find a sense of satisfaction in seeing things going against them from time to time. We may even be tempted to rejoice over the thought that they may be getting what's coming to them. But why should that bring us any satisfaction? What if the Lord were content with us receiving our just deserts? But the Lord has not given us what we have coming. He has given us grace in His forgiveness. When our sins abound, His grace abounds much more! When we were still His enemies, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). The Lord intervened in the course of human events to lift us up out of sin's despair, to lift us up to life and salvation.

This is the gracious truth of the gospel with which the Spirit has shaped our Christian character, even as He had shaped the Christian character of Paul and Silas. It is this good news of God's love and forgiveness for us that leads us to follow Jesus' counsel from the Sermon on the Mount,

**Matthew 5:43-45** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

Paul also encouraged kindness toward those who were cruel toward us.

**Romans 12:20-21** "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

So when we see disaster coming down upon our enemy let us not rejoice, but intervene to rescue him, even as the Lord intervened to rescue us from eternal death. The greatest intervention comes with the testimony of the gospel. It becomes apparent that also the jailer had been listening to Paul and Silas as they prayed and sang hymns

from their prison cell, for he turned to Paul with the one greatest question of all: “**What must I do to be saved?**”

**Acts 16:31** “So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”

They immediately directed this man to Jesus. The message was intended not only for this individual but they brought the hope of everlasting life and salvation for both this man and his entire household. What we see is amazing. It’s amazing because we see the –

### **III. Spirit Blessed Results.**

**Acts 16: 32-33** Then 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 stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

This man didn’t have any background in Jewish religion or culture. He had all his Greek or Roman gods. Why would he believe anything Paul and Silas had to say? For the same reason we have believed and been saved. It wasn’t because he had a natural inclination to believe. It wasn’t because he resisted less others upon hearing the gospel. It was because the Holy Spirit worked faith in his heart, as well as in the hearts of his household members. The Spirit regenerated them with the new spiritual life that was instantly evident in his changed behavior toward Paul and Silas. He treated their wounds. He desired to be baptized. That night he and his family were brought into the household of God.

That is the lesson we need to comprehend. We still live in the age of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit continues to act as powerfully as He did through the apostles. The evidence is abundant as we see the wondrous results to the testimony of faith that is presented to people in the different countries of the world. Thousands of people who had their own gods, gods which left them in darkness and despair, have heard the testimony concerning Jesus, and the Spirit has enlightened them with His gifts. Thousands upon thousands have come to faith by the Spirit’s working within them, and sought

the blessing of baptism, and have produced fruits of faith themselves.

And so the kingdom of God comes. We pray that it might come among us also! This prayer will be heard, and the Spirit will be present with us, and act upon our words of testimony and Christian character shall be built in the hearts and minds of as many as the Lord our God shall call.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.