

PAUL & SILAS

The Power of a Right Attitude

Scriptural Account: Acts 16:16-40

Story Background: The Apostle Paul was called in a vision to go to Macedonia, of which Philippi was the foremost city. There Lydia, a convert, offered Paul and Silas hospitality. A demon-possessed slave girl continually caused disturbances during their prayer meetings. Paul cast out her demon, and thus angered her masters who would no longer profit financially from her fortune-telling. They brought Paul and Silas before the Roman magistrates and accused them. They had them stripped, beaten and imprisoned – in an “inner” prison with their feet in stocks and under guard.

Macedonia was a Roman colony. The city of Philippi was founded in 358 BC by Philip II, father of Alexander. It dominated the road system of northern Greece. There were so few Jews in Philippi that there was no synagogue. It required 10 married men to form a synagogue. So the Jews who were there met for prayer along the banks of the Gangites River. It was customary for such places of prayer to be located outside near running water. Paul’s habit was to go first to the synagogue to preach the Gospel. If there was no synagogue, then he would go to the Jewish place of prayer. (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible notes*).

The Story: It was because of casting out the demon from the slave girl that Paul ended up in prison. A person who had a fortune-telling demon was called a “pytho” and was considered by some to be mad. The ancient world had a great respect for mad people for they said that the gods had taken away their wits to put the mind of the gods in them. This girl had fallen into the hands of unscrupulous men who used her misfortune for their financial gain.

“PYTHO” (Word Explanation)

Pytho or Python spirit was an evil spirit (demon) by which the slave girl in Acts 16 predicted the future. The *python* was a mythical snake (killed by Appollo) and worshipped at Delphi. The word came to be used of persons through whom this spirit would speak. Such a person spoke involuntarily and the term ventriloquist was used to describe them. (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible notes*)

The prison door was locked by a wooden bar falling into two slots. The stocks were used for extra security and also for torture. They were made of two boards joined with iron clamps, leaving holes just big enough for the ankles. The prisoners’ legs were placed across the lower board and then the upper board was closed over them. Sometimes wrists and necks were also placed in stocks. The earthquake shook the door bar free and broke the stocks of Paul and Silas.

The Rest of the Story: The jailer was about to kill himself because Roman law said that if a prisoner escaped, the jailer must suffer the penalty the prisoner would have suffered. *(Book of Acts, William Barclay)* Because of Paul's testimony, the jailer (and subsequently his entire family) believed in the Lord Jesus. Paul had the right attitude while he was in the stocks, deep in the prison, in the dark, and in pain – he focused on the Lord and prayed and sang with Silas. When the earthquake freed him, instead of escaping, he had the right attitude again, and showed concern for the jailer.

Spiritual Application: There is much we can learn about right attitudes in this story from the principle characters...

The slave girl's owners: These men cared more about their economic well-being than about the truth taught by Paul or the healing of the possessed slave girl. Theirs was an attitude of greed.

Paul and Silas: These men of God prayed and praised God in spite of their dire circumstances. No matter what our circumstances are we should praise God. Others may come to Christ because of our example of a right attitude.

The jailer: The jailer confirmed his conversion by his deeds. No sooner had he turned to Christ than he washed the prisoners' wounds and gave them a meal. He immediately practiced acts of kindness.

What are some of the bad circumstances we can find ourselves in?

Death of family member

Serious illness

False accusations

Financial troubles

Remember, some of our bad circumstances are consequences of bad choices, or of sin...

What are the ways we can show a right attitude in the midst of these?

Not complaining

Trusting God

Praying to and praising God

Conclusion:

*It is in times of darkness that the light of a Christian witness shines brightest.
Read Philippians 2:14-16*

The one thing you can never take away from a Christian is God and the presence of Jesus Christ. (William Barclay)