

“Paul and Silas Are Released”
(Acts 16:35-40)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We understand by now that all God does in this world He does according to His good pleasure and for His glory, and through these things He intends to move His plans forward, including using the sins of men: being Christians, this should really be an encouragement to us.
 - a. We see in every situation recorded in Scripture – at least if we understand each properly – that God does in fact bring glory to Himself and accomplishes His purposes in each of them.
 - b. That’s what we should expect to see in the situations that face us today, since what God is bringing about now is just as much a part of His plan (decree) as the things that took place then.
 - (i) God is just as sovereign over our circumstances, as He was over Paul’s.
 - (ii) And He has just as much interest in advancing His kingdom through our circumstances.
 - c. And so as we conclude looking at this account of the arrest of Paul and Silas, the conversion of the Philippian jailer, and the subsequent release of Paul and Silas, and see the good the Lord brings out of this situation, let’s remember He is doing the same thing today.
2. Let’s review what we’ve seen:
 - a. When Paul and Silas came to Philippi and began to preach the Gospel, Satan tried to stop them through a demon-possessed fortune teller.
 - b. When her constant announcements hindered their work, Paul cast the demon out, dealing a blow to Satan’s kingdom.
 - c. Satan fought back using this as an opportunity to stir up some of his servants – the men who would lose the most from the loss of the girl’s demon enhanced abilities – and they dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities and falsely accused them.
 - d. After their robes had been stripped from them, and they had been publicly beaten, they were handed over to the jailer, placed in the inner prison and fastened in the stocks.
 - e. But they were not discouraged – they knew this was God’s will – and even though they didn’t know what He intended by their imprisonment, they did know He would use it in some way to glorify Himself.
 - f. With this in mind, they set their hearts to worship the Lord and seek Him in prayer, and the Lord answered their prayer with a miracle: an earthquake, the opening of the doors, and the loosing of their chains – a miracle that wasn’t meant to free them, but to free the jailer.

- g. When the jailer awoke and thought his life was finished, he intended to kill himself, but the Lord mercifully spared him, brought His Gospel to him through Paul, and he and his household was saved.
 - (i) Who would have thought this was what the Lord had in mind through all these events?
 - (ii) And yet this was His plan to bring good things out of something that was outwardly bad.

B. Preview.

1. And yet we'll see the Lord intended further good through this event, both for Paul and Silas, the church at Philippi and ultimately for His glory.
 - a. Further persecution was still a possibility through the owners of the former fortune-teller, as well as from the authorities, and not just for Paul and Silas, but for the church as a whole, because of the Gospel.
 - b. But because of how the Lord brought these things about and what He gave Paul the wisdom to do next, this possibility became more unlikely.
2. This morning, I want us to consider three things:
 - a. First, God overrules the actions of bad men causing them to do good things, even though they may not do them for the right reasons: We see this in the order to release Paul and Silas.
 - b. Second, the Lord uses even the sins of men to further His cause: we see this when Paul temporarily rejects his and Silas' release.
 - c. Finally, God also uses the mercy He shows us in our afflictions to be an encouragement to others: we see this in the results of their release.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we see that God overrules the actions of bad men causing them to do good things, even though they may not do them for the right reasons, in the order to release Paul and Silas: "Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men.' And the jailer reported these words to Paul, *saying*, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace'" (vv. 35-36).
 1. They had them beaten and thrown into prison without trial. Now they were ready to release them.
 - a. Why?
 - (i) Apparently, they realized there were no grounds on which to hold them.
 - (ii) More likely, they were beginning to realize they had already gone too far in punishing them.
 - (iii) Their miscarriage of justice was making them uneasy, so when daybreak finally came, they sent their officers to bring them out and send them away secretly.
 - b. They certainly weren't releasing them for any righteous reason on their part, nor in a righteous way.

- (i) They were doing what unbelievers typically do when they injure someone else unjustly: sweep it under the rug – hide their sins and not admit their faults.
 - (ii) Something quite the opposite of what the Lord tells us to do, which is to go to the offended party, confess our sins and seek their forgiveness.
2. To carry out their plan, the authorities sent their officers to the jailer with the order to release them.
- a. This certainly made the jailer happy:
 - (i) He knew now that Paul and Silas had been imprisoned because of the Gospel.
 - (ii) The fact that they would be released means they would no longer suffer there, but would be free to continue the Lord's work: two more evidences of his sound conversion:
 - (a) He was concerned for Paul and Silas' welfare, as we are all called to care for fellow members of the body (1 Cor. 12:26).
 - (b) But he was also concerned that the Gospel continue to move forward: he wanted others to hear this message so they could enjoy the same reconciliation with God he and his family now enjoyed through Jesus.
 - (iii) So he came and told Paul, and encouraged him to come out and go in peace.
 - b. But this didn't make Paul happy.
 - (i) Even if evil men do good things, it doesn't mean that they're doing them for the right reasons.
 - (a) It was good the magistrates ordered their release, since they were being held unlawfully anyway.
 - (b) But their reason for so doing so, as we've seen, was not good.
 - (c) When unbelievers do good things, they always do them for the wrong reasons: For their own pleasure and welfare, not because they love God and want to glorify Him, or for the good of His people.
 - (ii) There had been a grave miscarriage of justice in their case, and Paul was ready to argue that point.
 - (a) Oftentimes, we overlook the sins of others, since it would be more than a full-time job to point out all that see everyday.
 - (b) But there are times in God's Providence when pointing out the sins of others is necessary and wise.
 - (c) It's especially at times like these the Lord intends to do something good through their evil actions.
- B. Second, we see the Lord uses even the sins of men to further His cause, in the temporary rejection of this release by Paul: "But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into

prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out” (v. 37).

1. Paul objected to this miscarriage of justice:
 - a. He and Silas were Roman citizens, entitled to trial under the law – but instead of a trial, they were beaten publicly, publicly humiliated, and thrown into prison.
 - b. Were these magistrates now trying to escape the consequences of their actions by ordering their release and sending them away secretly?
 - c. If Paul let this go by without a word, what would be the results?
 - (i) First, if they leaders weren't confronted with their sins, Paul would be passing up an opportunity the Lord might use to awaken them to their danger – if we aren't aware of our sins, we won't see our need for a Savior.
 - (ii) But second, what would these actions say about Paul, Silas and the Gospel they had been preaching? That they really were criminals for having preached it!
 - (a) Paul didn't object when he was beaten – although he could have, being a Roman citizen – perhaps because he didn't want to appear to be unwilling to suffer for the truth.
 - (b) But he did object when they wanted to push this matter under the carpet:
 - (i) Paul wanted them publicly to acknowledge that their charges were unjust.
 - (ii) He wanted them to come and bring them out as public acknowledgement that they are not the criminals they had been accused of being.
 - (iii) We certainly shouldn't conclude that Paul did this for revenge:
 - (a) By God's grace, Paul was always seeking what was good for all men, even for those who attacked and abused him:
 - (1) This is another important lesson we very much need to learn.
 - (2) Our Lord tells us that we are to love our neighbor, even our enemies, as ourselves (Matt. 5:43-45).
 - (b) But he was also seeking to gain an advantage for the church, for the Gospel in Philippi, and for the Lord's glory.
2. The net result of his objection was that the magistrates were humbled. “The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city” (vv. 38-39).
 - a. Government is ordained by God for the protection of those who do what is right.
 - (i) They are given the power of the sword by God to punish those who do wrong (Rom. 13).

- (ii) But when they abuse that power, they are also accountable, as these men realized they were, to God first, but to Caesar as well.
 - (iii) There are instances where the law can be used to protect God's messengers and promote the Gospel, as it does here.
- b. When the officers returned to the magistrates and reported Paul's words, they were faced with what they had feared.
- (i) They weren't going to be able to sweep this under the carpet.
 - (ii) It was actually worse than they had first thought.
 - (iii) Paul might appeal to Rome and then they would be in trouble.
 - (iv) The law stated that no Roman freeman could be beaten with rods or in any other way, but this is what they had done and without a trial.
 - (v) So they came personally and appealed to them not to make this known and that they might leave the city.
 - (vi) The sooner they left, the sooner this would be forgotten.
- c. Paul did what they asked, but not before he first visited the brethren to encourage them.
- (i) There wasn't much the authorities could do.
 - (ii) Though Paul didn't threaten them, he certainly had a period of time in which to appeal this matter.
 - (iii) In the meantime, the church would be safe, and he could safely move on with his work.
 - (iv) God here used the sins of men to further His cause: this is the reason He ordained this situation in the first place, to advance His cause and to glorify His wisdom by doing this through the evil actions of men.
 - (v) And so He continues to do today.
- C. Finally, we see God also uses the mercy He shows us in our afflictions to be an encouragement to others, in the results of their release. . "They went out of the prison and entered *the house of Lydia*, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed" (v. 40).
1. When they left the prison, they immediately went to Lydia's house.
 - a. By this time, it appears that Lydia's house was a meeting place for the church.
 - b. When they arrived, the brethren were assembled – perhaps they were praying for Paul and Silas, as the church had done for Peter earlier.
 2. They apparently went there to encourage the saints who knew they had been imprisoned.
 - a. They didn't come there to complain; they weren't discouraged by this event. They knew there was a price to pay in following Christ, and they were willing to pay it.
 - (i) Their purpose in life was not their own comfort and pleasure, but the Lord's pleasure – this orientation makes all the difference in the world.

- (ii) They knew that if they were willing to risk suffering, there would be fruit – souls converted and brought into the Shepherd’s fold, rewards in heaven, and most of all, bringing glory to Christ – and this made it all worth it.
- b. They didn’t come to complain, but to encourage.
- (i) When the crowds stoned Paul in Lystra and dragged him out of that city, after he was revived, he continued the work in Derbe, and then went back to Lystra to encourage the saints who knew what happened to him to continue in the faith.
 - (ii) And he said to them, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (14:22).
 - (iii) Certainly Paul must have encouraged the saints in Philippi with similar words.
 - (iv) But his and Silas’ testimony under suffering and the Lord’s merciful release of them must have spoken much louder.
 - (v) When we do what is right and suffer for it, if we endure, the Lord will use it in ways we can’t even imagine – especially in encouraging others to do the same. Real life examples are very powerful.
- c. The life Christ calls us to live isn’t an easy life, which is why we must be willing to lay down our own lives and to pick up the cross to follow Jesus.
- (i) It will cost us a great deal – or at least it has the potential to do this, according to God’s will.
 - (ii) But it’s worth it: it’s worth everything and anything He will call us to give in this life.
 - (iii) If we’re willing to pay that price, we will see the Lord do great things through us.
 - (iv) But if we’re not willing, it’s likely we won’t see the Lord use us at all.
 - (v) All of us are affected by fear, but we must not let it stop us: consider what he did here with Paul and Silas – He will work all these things out for His glory; He will bring good from the evil of men.
 - (vi) Consider what He did at the cross:
 - (a) He used the greatest crime in history to bring about our salvation.
 - (b) And through this sacrifice, He calls us to be willing to lay down our lives as well.
 - (c) As we come to the Table this morning, let’s consider what it calls us to do: to lay down our lives, pick up our crosses and follow Christ. Amen.