



10/2/24

Welllllll...if you got confused by yesterday's passage, I'm sorry. It was correct in the subject line, but I accidentally referenced Acts 9:26-40 at the beginning of the email when it should have said Acts 8:26-40. I hope that didn't mess you up!!! 🙏

*Blessings and apologies,
Jonna*

Acts 16:16-33

I have a sense of justice in my bones, and when I see something that isn't just, I get mad! I am amazed by how much injustice God sees and He doesn't just blow us all up! I see in this passage that He has a greater plan... not to make heaven on earth, but to draw people to Himself so that we can experience heaven with Him forever.

Paul and Silas and other believers were in Philippi. This is actually the time Paul met Timothy and then took him under his wing. Timothy must have really loved Jesus because what took place while Paul was there would have sent any man with superficial faith running the other direction!

Paul and the other believers were going to the place of prayer. A demon possessed slave girl started following them around at this point and yelling, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation!" Why would a demon want that to be the message??? Probably because people were so annoyed by her that they avoided Paul's message of hope. Evil strategy can use even truth to turn people against God.

After a few days of the constant yelling, Paul got annoyed. I love that. Luke told it like he saw it. Finally, Paul commanded the demon to leave the girl. "I command you IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST to come out of her." Not by Paul's power, but by God's power, the demon came out.

Here's the first injustice. The slave girl's owners didn't care about her at all. They only cared about the money she could get them. They were fine with her being ravaged by a demon

because they made money off of her fortune telling. She meant nothing to them, but she meant a lot to God. He set her free, and they got mad.

Here's the next injustice. The owners grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the magistrates. And then they lied. They didn't say, "We were using this girl for selfish gain and they set her free." They said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They are going against YOUR Roman laws!" They used what would make the Roman government mad. It was a lie. And the people around them joined in!!!

This is an injustice I'll never understand... though if I look close enough, I'll probably find that I'm guilty of it, too. But... I don't understand why people join in on persecuting others when they don't even know if it's true! Sometimes they even KNOW what's true and they join in anyway!!! This reminds me of Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful ABOVE ALL THINGS, and desperately sick. Who can know it?" Yikes! If that doesn't prove how badly we need Jesus, I don't know what does.

Here's the next injustice! The magistrates didn't even ask Paul and Silas for their side of the story! They just tore off their clothes and started beating them with rods!!! They beat them and beat them and then threw them into prison! They didn't even know exactly what they were being accused of... not specifically. I'm so mad!!!

And then they told the jailer to keep them safely in prison. This does not mean that he was to protect them, but to protect the world FROM them. He put them in the inner prison with their feet in the stocks. What an injustice!!! They hadn't hurt anyone... they even helped that poor slave girl. Their message was one of hope and life and they were being treated as thieves and murderers!

If I were Paul and Silas, the first thing I would do would be to question God's love and goodness. "WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? We have been faithful to You! Don't You care?" But clearly, God has work to do in my heart because that's not what happened. Paul and Silas, with feet in stocks and blood dripping and drying from their wounds... with bruises and swelling all over their bodies... having been in the stocks for hours and hours... were praying and singing praise songs to God!!! How is that possible??? I think one thing we don't know until we experience it is... God never leaves us alone in our suffering. First, Paul had his good friend Silas with him... and Silas wasn't even mad about it. He could have been really upset because he wasn't even the one who cast out the demon!!! But God didn't leave either of them alone. They had each other. I'm sure all the believers were also praying. And even more so, God was with them... giving them His peace, His comfort, His joy. They were not alone by any stretch of the imagination. So... they sang and prayed. Of course they did!

Paul and Silas weren't concerned about the injustice. They were focused on loving Jesus and being a light to all the prisoners in the prison. The prisoners needed Jesus, too. That was Silas and Paul's focus. O Lord, change my heart so that I think like them!!!

It was midnight. Paul and Silas were singing. The prisoners (and the jailer) were listening. I'm surprised the jailer didn't forcefully silence them. He must have been drawn to their peace and joy that made no sense under the circumstances.

Suddenly!!! There was an earthquake! The prison doors flew open and EVERYONE'S chains were unfastened!!! The jailer knew that if all these prisoners escaped, he would die a very painful death. So, he decided to end his life quickly and with as little pain as possible. But... nobody moved!

Paul and Silas had experienced such terrible injustice, and instead of thinking, "That's right, kill yourself. You deserve it!" Paul cried out, "Don't hurt yourself! We're all here!"

What kind of amazing thing must God have done??? I can see that Paul and Silas wouldn't have moved, though I might have if I were them. But none of the prisoners moved either? This is only by the hand of God.

As soon as the jailer saw that no one had escaped, he fell before Paul and Silas. He showed them tremendous respect as he said, "Sirs..." He didn't call them "scum." He didn't ignore what just happened. He said, "Sirs...you who are prisoners but are so free... what must I do to have what you have, to be saved?"

I can only imagine the look on Silas and Paul's faces. I bet they started laughing and celebrating. They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. And not only you, your whole family can turn to Jesus in faith, too!" The jailer got his whole family. Paul and Silas spoke the word of God to them, the good news of the gospel. Then the jailer took them and washed their wounds. And then they had a big baptism celebration with all his family as they all turned to Jesus.

While I get stuck on the injustice of things, Paul was stuck on the grace of God. While I might question the goodness of God when I suffer, Paul saw every trial as an opportunity. God blessed his faithfulness.

In John 15:8 Jesus said, "By this My Father is glorified, that you go and bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples." He gave no qualifications for what that would look like. Why were Paul and Silas so willing to face this suffering? Why didn't they say, "If I ever get out of here, I'm done with missionary work"? They understood the gravity of their need for a Savior and the immense sacrifice Jesus offered up when He gave His own body so that the suffering we face on earth is only temporary... so that we can be saved from our sin.

Being completely surrendered to Jesus may bring suffering. But I would bet that Paul and Silas never regretted that night. They got to see people set free from chains that would have lasted for all eternity. How many lives has God changed over the last 2000 years using the faithfulness of Paul? I would say... that is bearing A LOT of fruit! O Lord, please give me that heart!