

Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, on John – Acts (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981),

Acts 16: 19-34

19-21: What Paul did for the slave girl was not appreciated by her masters. In exorcising the demon, he had exorcised their source of income. Because of interference with what they claimed as their property rights, and with callous disregard for the girl's welfare, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place to face the city's authorities. The charges laid was that Paul and Silas were advocating a religio illicita and thus disturbing the Pax Romana. But the charge, being couched in terms that appealed to the latent anti-Semitism of the people ("these men are Jews") and their racial pride ("us Romans"), ignited the flames of bigotry and prevented any dispassionate discussion of the issues. ¹

As a Roman colony, Philippi had a form of government that was independent of the provincial administration headquartered in Thessalonica. ²

Though both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and politically exempt from such treatment, the frenzy of the mob and the rough justice of the colonial magistrates overrode their protestations. ³

One would expect that after such brutal treatment, Paul and Silas would be bemoaning their plight. Certainly they were suffering pain and shock from the flogging [매질] they had received. But about midnight, as Paul and Silas were "praying and singing hymns to God," an earthquake suddenly shook the prison, opened its doors, and loosened the chains of all the prisoners. ... The praying and singing, the earthquake, the opening of the doors, and the loosing of the chains all have special significance as vindicating God's servants Paul and Silas and preparing for the jailer's conversion. ⁴

SUMMARY FOR SERMON

Acts 16: 25-26: ²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

Sermon theme: Music and Healing

In order to understand the text in Acts we must hear its background story:

Background story of the text

Paul and Silas were in the area of Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. They were staying at the Lydia's for a while after she and her household were baptized by Paul.

One day, as they were going to the place of prayer, they were met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed them she would cry out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the

¹ Frank EGaebelein, ed., Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, on John – Acts (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 463.

² Frank EGaebelein, ed., Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, on John – Acts (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 463.

³ Frank EGaebelein, ed., Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, on John – Acts (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 464.

⁴ Frank EGaebelein, ed., Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, on John – Acts (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 464.

market-place before the authorities. Because in exorcising the demon, he had exorcised their source of income. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, ‘These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.’ The crowd joined in attacking them. The magistrates, after giving them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16: 15-24).

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While they were in prison, about midnight, they were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened and freed them.

Commentators would point out the two aspects of the story that stand out in Luke’s striking summary. One is the strong anti-Semitism that puts their being Jewish as the first charge against them. The other is the tough Roman nationalism apparent in accuser’s smug reference to themselves as *us Romans*. They do not mention their real grievance against the apostles, the loss of profits from this closing down of a questionable business. Instead, they cloak it under emotionally charged religious and racial accusations. Added to this is the fact that just the previous year (A.D. 49) Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome, the impact of which is no doubt sharply felt in this Roman colony. This is why Paul and Silas can be so viciously attacked even though there is nothing against Rome in the things they have been doing – attending Jewish worship, making converts to Christianity, casting out a demon. Not content with simple imprisonment, the authorities consign Paul and Silas to the *innermost cell* of the prison (16:24). They instruct the jailer to keep them safe, and this he does by shackling their feet in stocks, wooden fasteners bolted to the wall. This is either in the dungeon or the most remote inner cell. The jailer is likely a centurion, disciplined, trustworthy, and eager to carry out these orders. One would expect that after such brutal treatment, Paul and Silas would be bemoaning their plight. Certainly they were suffering pain and shock from the flogging they had received.

But about midnight, as Paul and Silas were “praying and singing hymns to God,” although they were uncomfortably bound to the chains. The sounds of their singing were carried throughout the prison. Here are seen in action the Christian ideals of praying and rejoicing under all circumstances.

Then without warning, an earthquake strikes. It is so powerful that the prison foundations are badly shaken, door fly open, and individual fetters come unfastened (16:26). Earth tremors are quite common in this area, yet the timing and effects of this massive one are seen as a divine answer to prayer and singing and, both by the prisoners and by Luke himself. God has intervened and nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37). The praying and singing, the earthquake, the opening of the doors, and the loosing of the chains all have special significance as vindicating God’s servants Paul and Silas. It is a story of a miracle that prayer and singing had brought.

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