

ACTS | Jailer's Conversion | Story 23

Acts 16:25-40

Rob Rogers

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Introduction

In late September we kicked off a series working our way through the book of Acts. We're picking up today where we left off before the Christmas season, in Acts 16.

The book of Acts, written by Luke, documents the greatest spiritual revival in human history. It tells the story of the birth and life of the early church. What we've seen is that the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, was and still is an unstoppable force in the world.

This tiny group of nobodies who had no political power, no positional influence, no educational advantages, no economic power, started something that completely changed the trajectory of human history.

Studying this book is important for us because we're in a time in our world where there is a great amount of confusion about what the Church is, what it means to be a follower of Christ, why God put us here, and what our mission is. As we move into 2022, it is critical that we understand who we are to be in the world. How we are to live and conduct ourselves. And how to live as Christ followers as His Church in the world.

In Acts 1:8 is the whole structure for the book, and for the mission of the Church.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in **Jerusalem** and in all **Judea and Samaria**, and to the **end of the earth**.

Over the last number of months, we've seen the spreading of the gospel from Jerusalem out to the Gentiles in Judea and Samaria—and now to the ends of the earth...

When this was written, you and I were the ends of the earth—and now here we are.

Today, we're in Acts 16.

Jailer's conversion

BACKGROUND: Paul and Silas were in Macedonia, part of Greece, in the city of Philippi. They went there to plant a church, to preach the gospel, to make disciples. Everywhere they went they were followed by a slave girl who continually shouted that these men were servants of God and were proclaiming the way of salvation. This went on for days. Paul got so annoyed, that he turned around and cast a demon out of her. Only problem was, now that she was free from the demon, she was no longer able to foretell the future, so was no longer profitable to her owners. They had Paul and Silas arrested and severely beaten.

Acts 16:25-40

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and 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 bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And 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 wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Who was the jailer? We know the jailer probably would have been an ex-military man, a Roman soldier, because in those days the way you got a good retirement job was if you had served faithfully as a soldier in the Roman military. He'd served his country, he didn't need much, he had decent pay, he's well off and put together.

Most likely he would have been a very disciplined, practical man, tough guy. Maybe a bit cynical about life. He's seen it all. He's a pragmatist. What's so fascinating about this story is that God gives him an encounter that is so radically impractical, so absurd to him, that it throws the very core of His being, the foundation of his life into question.

There's a physical earthquake in the story, and God gives the jailer a spiritual earthquake....

Count it all joy

Paul and Silas have been severely beaten. As a Roman citizen, Paul deserved a trial, but instead he was flogged for delivering a slave girl from demon possession.

So that night in prison, beaten nearly to death—*they start singing hymns to God!* The other prisoners heard it—the jailer heard it. That alone had to be confusing.

One of the things that gets highlighted throughout the book of Acts is joy in the midst of suffering and persecution. Resilient joy.

James 1:2-4

Count it all **joy**, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1 Peter 4:12-14

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But **rejoice** insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also **rejoice and be glad** when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

What is being lived out in the life of Paul and Silas is this reality.

They had such an unwavering belief that God was at work in their suffering, in their wrongful imprisonment—that they could rejoice!

They could sing! They didn't scheme, or connive, or attack, or tear down—they rejoiced!

God fights our battles

**As they are rejoicing,
as they are singing in the face of their sufferings—
God moves on their behalf!
God fights their battle for them!**

Application: Every single person in this room is building your life on something. Career, success, reputation, power, sex, money. If you're put into a prison, thrown into darkness—all of what you've been living for is taken away. You're left empty—devoid of purpose.

But if you live for Him, if you build the foundation of your life on Christ, you become unshakable—and even in the darkest prison, you still have something to sing about. You gain a supernatural ability to rejoice, knowing that the Lord is with you, doing a work in you, and fighting your battles for you.

We sing about these things, we read about trusting the Lord to fight our battles—but when it comes down to it, we don't really trust Him to fight our battles. We're not okay, just sitting back and singing hymns to God when it feels like all hell is breaking loose. It doesn't feel responsible, or even reasonable. Yet, that is exactly what Paul and Silas did—and what does God do?

He sends an earthquake and breaks the prison gates wide open. Paul and Silas knew that our God is an earth-quaking, prison-shaking, chain-breaking kind of God. They knew it. Trusted it. And Acted on it.

What must I do to be saved?

BACKGROUND: It was a wonderful retirement perk for a soldier to get a job as a jailer—but there was one catch...

- If any of your prisoners escaped, the government killed you. So, when the jailer saw the gates open, he thought two things, "They're gone, and I'm doomed!" And he took out his sword to kill himself.
- Little did he know that Paul and Silas, even though they could have escaped, they stayed, and they stopped the jailer from taking his own life.

Why would Paul have done that? Why would Paul have kept everybody in, especially when he had every right to leave?

Think about who the jailer is—he's a brutal man, a Roman soldier, and all he's ever seen is to repay evil for evil, fight fire with fire, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. Yet—here are two men who have suffered incredible violence and brutality—and yet, they're unshaken. They're rejoicing!

The jailer knew that Paul and Silas had sacrificed their freedom—so that he would not have to sacrifice his life. He had never seen anything like it.

Acts 16:30-33

Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² And 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 wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

The jailer essentially asks them, “What is wrong with you people? I’ve never seen anything like this! I’ve never seen this kind of love or peace! What is it that you have?”

They tell him the gospel. They say, “Oh, you’ve never seen anybody overcome evil with good? Let me tell you about the ultimate example of overcoming evil with good, Jesus Christ. He went into the deepest prison, the darkest dungeon. He was a prisoner—and he wasn’t just beaten, he was killed. He could have left. He could have called 10,000 angels. He could have escaped, but he went into death and darkness to save me. And now I’m quite happy to stay in this darkness for a little while longer to save you.” The jailer says, “What do I have to do to get this Jesus into my life?”

What’s so beautiful about how this story is, that night, the jailer washed their physical wounds, and then in his baptism, he was cleansed of his spiritual wounds. God brought healing to both their physical and spiritual brokenness.

Acts 16:34

Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he **rejoiced** along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

The outflow, the evidence of the gospel in and around our lives is joy. Even in the darkest dungeon—there is reason to rejoice. ***Because the joy of the Lord is our Strength.***

Calling and sending

One of the beautiful themes throughout the entire book of Acts is the *repeated pattern of calling and sending*. God calls us in, raises us up, and sends us out...

- The measure of success for the church must never be *how many people show up*, **but how far the word goes out**.
- In the church there are times when the sending and going out is intentional and planned by us.
- And then there are moments where God Himself is doing the sending—and we do the work of getting on board with what He’s actively doing in our midst.

At this time in the service Jonathan and Allison Allen came to the stage to share what is going on in their lives. You will want to watch this online.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think God chose the jailer to be the central figure in this miracle?
2. How do you usually react when you are accused unfairly or treated unjustly?
How might you react differently?
3. Do you feel like you need to fight your own battles, or do you believe that God can/will fight your battles for you?

NOTES