

Praise From Prison

Acts 16:22-34

The Church of the Covenant

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I. *Intro*

Helen Lemmel left America in the late 1800's to study vocal music in Germany. Eventually she married a wealthy European but he left her when she became blind, and Helen struggled with many heartaches during mid-life. She was forced to live on government assistance in a sparse bedroom and had only a plastic toy piano on which to compose her hymns.

When she was 55 Helen wrote the words and the melody for the hymn,

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his Glory & grace.”

She was able to look past her circumstances, and her life was full of joy and enthusiasm. When asked how she was doing, she'd reply, “I'm doing well in the things that count.”¹

One of my favorite blessings in ministry is the privilege of visiting members who are no longer able to come to church to worship. In 30 years I only remember two who were chronic complainers. All the rest were a joy and a blessing to visit. I am convinced that I got more out of visiting those saints than they received from me!

I remember one woman in her 90s who had to live in a nursing care facility because her body had become so crippled that even her hands were all gnarled and curled up tight. When her ear was itchy, she had to ask the nurse to scratch her ear for her. She had to let others feed her and bathe her. Yet when I asked her how I could pray for her, she had no complaints and no requests for herself. She praised God for all his blessings to her. Then she asked me to pray for the unreached peoples in foreign lands so that they would hear the Gospel and be saved.

Another time I visited a woman who was losing her vision and could no longer read. She was confined to a wheelchair. Yet when I visited her she talked about how good the Lord is, how He had always provided for her. She was peaceful and content with what she *did* have. She spoke with delight about the gift she had received of the entire Bible on CD's. Listening to God's Word filled her with joy.

These women are role models for me of a life filled with joy. They exhibit inner tranquility, peace, and the ability to trust God no matter what they are going through. They are able to Praise God from the prison of their circumstances.

The apostle Paul is another person who was able to praise God in spite of his circumstances.

II. *The Story of Paul & Silas in prison*

Paul and his friends Silas, Timothy and Luke, had traveled to the Roman city of Philippi, to tell people about Jesus Christ. When they cast a demon out of a slave girl, they were arrested, beaten with rods and thrown into prison. It was midnight. Their legs had painful cramps from being stretched awkwardly in the stocks. Where they had been flogged, their backs were torn raw and bleeding. It was pitch dark down there. Who knows what else was crawling around the damp corners of the dungeon.

Yet Paul and Silas were not complaining or cursing. They were not raging against the injustice of being imprisoned unfairly without a trial. They were not hollering to be set free because they were Roman citizens; nor were they threatening to harm the jailer when they got out.

Contrary to what most of us would have done in that situation, Paul and Silas were “praying and singing to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved – you and your household.” Then Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household.” (Acts 16:25-34)

Obviously the most important outcome of this event is that the jailer and his household believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized.

But the part that has fascinated me the most this month is recorded in verse 25: “*Paul and Silas were praying and singing to God.*”

What enabled them to do that? What were they praying about? How were they able to sing in such a dangerous situation?

The most accurate way to answer those questions is to check the Bible to see what Paul himself said.

III. *Paul’s Faith led to praise*

Paul was accustomed to this sort of abuse. He had been in prison frequently, had been whipped five times, beaten with rods three times, attacked by people throwing stones, shipwrecked three times, in danger from bandits, in danger at sea, in danger in the city, in danger from Gentiles, and frequently cold, hungry, and nearly naked.²

Nevertheless, Paul wrote to one of his churches, “*Be joyful always, pray continuously, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*”³

In his **letter to the Christians in Corinth**, Paul wrote, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves received from God.”⁴

This letter to the Corinthians is filled with determination and words of hope. Paul told them, “we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”⁵

Paul continued that thought in his letter to the Christians in Rome: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”⁶

To the church in Ephesus Paul wrote: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions ... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”⁷

“Therefore, we do not lose heart. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”⁸

My conclusion is that Paul was so confident in the promises of God, he had such a firm grasp of what had been accomplished by the life, death and resurrection of Christ, he had such whole-hearted faith and child-like trust in God, that he had learned to look at his situation from God’s perspective.

Dr. David Jeremiah explained that “although the trial is not a happy experience in itself, it is God’s way of producing something of great value. We are not expected to praise God for the pain, but we are to rejoice because God’s purposes are being accomplished in our lives.”⁹

IV. Conclusion

I doubt that any of *us* will suffer such extreme abuse. Neither will any of us be thrown into jail for breaking the law. But we have other prisons that are just as confining and just as frightening.

Your prison may be financial uncertainty or debt.

You may be imprisoned by diabetes or Parkinson’s or cancer.

Your disability or psychological troubles may feel like being locked in a cage.

Perhaps you are bound by the chains of sin and guilt.

Even though you are imprisoned for a time, I encourage you to keep your eyes upon Jesus. If you have put your faith in him, believing that God raised him from the dead, if you can say “Jesus is Lord,” then you KNOW that he has saved you¹⁰, he has redeemed you, he has cleansed you and made you whole. Nothing can ever separate you from his love¹¹. You will spend eternity with him in glory with all the saints in heaven.

That confident hope is what enables us to sing Praises from Prison.

Last Sunday we sang the hymn “*When Morning Gilds the Skies*.” Darla really raised the roof with that one! The choir was singing full strength, and by the last verse she had pulled out all the stops on the pipe organ! The music was so glorious that I got goose bumps! And when I was describing the experience to someone else, I got goosebumps again! In closing, I want to share a few more of the 28 verses of that hymn.

“When morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries –
May Jesus Christ be praised!

And at your work rejoice, to sing with heart and voice -
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Does sadness fill my mind? A solace here I find:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Or fades my earthly bliss? My comfort still is this:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this the eternal song thru all the ages long,
May Jesus Christ be praised!¹²

Amen!

¹ Then Sings My Soul – 150 of the World’s Greatest Hymn Stories, by Robert J. Morgan; p. 283

² 2 Corinthians 11:16 – 12:10

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

⁴ 2 Cor 1:3-4, 8-10

⁵ 2 Cor 4:8-9

⁶ Romans 5:1-8

⁷ Ephesians 2:1, 4-9

⁸ 2 Cor 4:16-18

⁹ Sanctuary: Finding Moments of Refuge in the Presence of God By: [*Dr. David Jeremiah*](#)

¹⁰ Romans 10:9

¹¹ Romans 8:35-39

¹² Then Sings My Soul – 150 of the World’s Greatest Hymn Stories, by Robert J. Morgan; p. 59