

A **ND THE PRISONERS HEARD THEM**

“And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them” – Acts 16:25 KJV

Picture this. You are an unsaved person, and you keep hearing about this God that brings joy, peace and love. You have friends who say that they are Christians but you have yet to see any evidence of joy in their lives. All you can hear about is how difficult life is, they hardly ever smile and never have anything positive to say. Why on earth would you want to embrace the Christian life if this is the evidence of it?

As Christians we are supposed to be evangelizing, going out into the world and making disciples of all men according to the instructions we received in the Great Commission.¹ This means we are to preach the good news of the Gospel and drawing people to Christ. How can we achieve what is required of us if our spirits are downcast, if our countenance is low? Would you be attracted to the lifestyle of the person above? I think not!

Paul and Silas after being accused were locked in the deepest part of the dungeon and this was after they had just had “many stripes laid upon them “ and “their feet fast in stocks”². So beaten, placed in the inner part of the prison with their feet made immovable, they did the most unlikely thing...they began to pray and out of their prayers came praises which they sang unto God, doing the very thing for which they were jailed.

So you are in the dungeon, experiencing the similar conditions and a strange sound reaches your ears. “Who in their right mind could be singing in this place, at this time of the night?” “Are they aware that this is a prison?” “Isn’t that sound coming from the innermost part of the prison where the worst punishment takes place?” Here you are in your most miserable of conditions and someone in a worst position is singing? At first, you would probably wonder if the conditions they are experiencing have gotten to their heads. As you listen, you realize this is not the crazy maniacal sound of someone slowly going off their rocker. This is pure unadulterated joy.

You cannot understand it, but as the sound penetrates your mind, it touches something deep inside of you and you listen. You want to catch the rhythm. Suddenly you find yourself swaying to the beat. You don’t know the song but deep down something bubbles up inside of you. You feel as if there is a foaming fountain coming up from within your belly. As you continue to listen, a shout escapes you, you become somehow involved in what is happening and you feel tremors. Something earth shaking, soul shaking is taking place. You don’t know what it is. You have never experienced anything like this before, but you definitely feel it and you know change is coming. Suddenly your chains are loosed, broken off of you, fallen to the ground.

Your praises to God are not just for you. Your praises need to be heard by others to bring deliverance to them. The praises to God from you cannot remain in your thoughts, they must come

¹ Matthew 28: 19-20 KJV

² Acts 16:22-24 KJV

from the utterance of your lips to bring change to someone's life – not just yours. At the midnight of your life, beaten and chained to immovability, when you think that you are at rock bottom, you have no idea where the next meal is coming from, how you are going to make it the next day, facing life or death surgery, facing deathlike situations – trust God and praise Him.

Your praises can bring about the greatest move of evangelism in your life. Trials are always an opportunity to demonstrate God's power. When someone who is not saved sees you praising your way through your situations, sees you feeding yourself with the Word, sees the manifestation of God's peace in your life, they see you sleeping, unmoved by the storm and they wonder "how can I get some of that peace?" They move from "how can I" to "I want", and before you know it you are being asked "where do you go to church?"

Years ago, I went to visit a friend at her home. As the day passed and I was enjoying my time with her, there was a knock on the door. When she answered, there were about five policemen with a search warrant. I was told that I could not leave, nor was I allowed to make any calls. Well I just simply turned around, lay down on the carpet and went to sleep. This was not a restless, tossing and turning kind of sleep. This was deep comfortable, snoring kind of sleep. I woke up periodically and they were still there every time I woke up. The last time I woke up, one of the policemen asked me how come I am able to sleep. I told him that I was at peace because I know I was not involved in anything. He allowed me to leave.

When you praise, you are at rest. All the encumbrances become loosed from your life and the enemy can find nothing in you.

"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 bands were loosed." - Acts 16:26 KJV



WHO ELSE SEES/HEARS YOUR PRAISE?

“Through the praise of children and infants, You have established a stronghold against Your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger” Psalm 8:2 NIV

It is not only those who are distressed and in need of hope that sees your life of praise. Your enemies are thrown into confusion³ when they realize that you are not fazed by what comes at you. You leave them wondering “why is this person so happy despite everything I am throwing at them?” You are not behaving according to what is expected of you. Instead of depression, there is joy. Instead of tears, there is laughter. Instead of complaining, there is a song on your lips.

You are in a place where you cannot be touched.⁴ The songwriter puts it this way:⁵

*He will hide me, He will hide me,
Where no harm can e'er betide me;
He will hide me, safely hide me,
In the shadow of His hand.*

Psalm 91 declares: “He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” When you are in that secret place – nothing moves you. You are prepared to believe the promises of the Word of God no matter what you see happening around you. When His Word says “a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand on thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee”⁶, you **ARE** believing that the God you serve is a God that cannot lie⁷.

In 2 Chronicles 20 – King Jehoshaphat is faced with a dilemma. Three vast armies are coming against him. Is he fearful? Of course he is!! But does he allow fear to overcome him? No, instead he cries out to God for help. In the NIV version of the Bible it says in verse 3, “Alarmed, Jehoshaphat

³ 2 Chronicles 20: 22 KJV

⁴ Psalm 91:1 KJV

⁵ Words: Mary Servoss, 1878. Music: James McGranahan. Title: He will hide me

⁶ Psalm 91:6 KJV

⁷ Numbers 23:19, Hebrews 6:18, Titus 1:2 KJV

resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.” *Alarmed* means he was experiencing a sudden fear, or distressing suspense caused by an awareness of danger⁸. Despite feeling fearful, he decides to put the case for himself and the people of Judah before the heavenly court. “Are You not the God who is in heaven?” He declares his stand and the stand of the people, “If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in Your Presence before this temple that bears Your Name, and will cry out to You in our distress, and You will hear us and save us”.⁹ The word *stand* in the Hebrew text was *`amad (aw-mad’)* which means to remain, to endure, to stop moving or doing, stand still, stand firm, maintain¹⁰.

Here Jehoshaphat is declaring “no matter what the circumstance, no matter what happens, we are crying out to You, knowing that You hear us and depending on You to save us!” Can you come to that place? The place where you can say “though the seas roar and the earth moves¹¹, I am standing firm on this Rock and believing You for everything You say in Your Word?”.

The rest of the story is history. The prophet declares to Jehoshaphat a word from God, “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.¹²” Upon receiving the Word, the king and the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down and worshipped the Lord **IN A LOUD VOICE**. On the morning when they go to face the enemy, he appoints men to “sing to the Lord and to praise Him for the splendor of His Holiness.”¹³ Upon hearing the noise, the enemies are thrown into a state of confusion and kill each other.

God does not want us to hide from our enemies. He wants us to face them without fear, knowing that He is with us at all times. Indeed, if we live a life of praise we carry the Presence of God with us. So when we face our enemies in this confidence, they do not see us, they see Him.

“I will glory in the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord, let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together” Psalm 34:1-3 NIV

⁸ www.dictionary.com

⁹ 2 Chronicles 20:6,9 NIV

¹⁰ <http://lexiconcordance.com/hebrew/5975.html>

¹¹ Psalm 46:2 NIV

¹² 2 Chronicles 20:17 NIV

¹³ 2 Chronicles 20:21 NIV