

Problems, Pain, Praise & Peace

Acts 16:16-40

Problems & Pain

Read Acts 16:16-24.¹ The owners of the slave girl grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities (16:19).



1. What accusations did they make against Paul and Silas? What was their motivation for making these accusations?² (16:16, 19-21)



- Everyone turned against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates (governmental authorities) had them severely beaten and thrown into jail (16:22-23). No trial took place and apparently no questions were asked.
- The jailer was “commanded to guard them carefully” (16:23). So “he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks” (16:24, NIV).
- After being severely beaten and fastened in stocks, Paul and Silas would be in great physical pain.

Prison & Praise

Read Acts 16:25-26.

2. Considering their painful situation, *what* do you think Paul and Silas were praying? Why were they singing hymns? How could they sing at a time like this?! How can we apply their example to our lives today?

📖 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7, NIV).

3. What were the effects of their prayers and singing?³

¹ The girl had a *pneuma pythōma* – ‘spirit of divination’ (ESV) that supposedly could predict the future. Can a spirit (demon) really know the future? Only God *knows* the future, but demons may have the knowledge and resources to predict and influence future events. Anyway, God’s people must stay away from fortune telling! (Deut. 18:10, 14) Though her words about Paul and Silas were not false (if ‘Most High God’ means the one true God), Paul became troubled. Maybe he just got tired of her crying out, but more likely he did not want his mission to be associated with a demon possessed girl. In any case, the girl needed to be set free, so by Christ’s authority, Paul cast the spirit out.

² They began by saying, ‘These men are Jews.’ Anti-Jewish feelings were common. Their accusations were twofold: 1) they were causing a public disturbance; and 2) they were advocating un-Roman customs. Christian teaching did not have legal recognition. However, their main motivation was selfishness. They had lost their slave-girl income!

³ Their prayers may have affected their circumstances, but their praying and singing also affected the people in the prison. Of course, Paul and Silas were positively affected, but it is likely that others were affected too. People notice when Christians face problems and pain with a deep trust in God, characterized by peace, joy, and thanksgiving.

Personal Crisis

Read Acts 16:27-30. The jailer was ready to kill himself,⁴ but Paul intervened. Though the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose (4:26), no one ran away.⁵

4. After he realized that no one had escaped, the jailer asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" Why do you think he asked this question at this time?



Peace & Joy

5. Read Acts 16:31-34. How did Paul and Silas respond to the jailer's question? (16:31)⁶

- 📖 "...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9, NIV)
- 📖 "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to [many]."⁷
(1 Corinthians 15:2-5, NIV)

The jailer and his family believed, and they were immediately baptized (16:33-34).

6. What immediate changes were evident in the jailer? (16:33-34) If you are a Christian, share what similar changes you experienced when you believed.

Propriety

Read Acts 16:35-40. The authorities wanted Paul & Silas to leave town quietly. But the injustice they endured needed correction, for the good of the Christian message and the church in Philippi.

Reflection/Application

- When you face problems and pain, what do *you* think about? As a Christian, do you turn to God with an attitude of trust and praise? Reflect on passages like Romans 8:18-39 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, which teach us to focus *not* on our troubles, but on God and his good purposes and promises. We never know how God might use our troubles for good!
- The jailer realized his need to ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Have you asked that question? Do you need to ask that question? If you want true peace and joy, "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." If you have any questions, ask Jay.

⁴ In his panic, the jailer failed to see if the prisoners had escaped. He feared that he would be considered negligent in his duties and face shame and punishment. 'For a man brought up to a Roman soldier's ideals of duty and discipline, only one honorable course was open – suicide' (F.F. Bruce, *Acts* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 317).

⁵ It's not too surprising that Paul and Silas did not flee. They realized God had another purpose. But what about the others? Maybe they were so impressed by what God was doing in and through Paul and Silas, they could not flee.

⁶ Biblical 'belief' is not mere intellectual belief. True belief is evidenced by human action, including a willingness to turn from our sin and invite Jesus Christ to take control of our life. Faith without action is dead (*James 2:17*).

'saved' – set free from sin and death, including the controlling power of sin and God's judgment; resulting in transformation to wholeness (in both body and spirit) and everlasting life in fellowship with God in the new order.

⁷ Christ died for our sins. He paid for our sins, so we could be forgiven. This was necessary for us to be reconciled to God (restored to relationship with God). He was raised from the dead, thereby defeating sin and death.