

# Jailbreak

## Acts 16:16-24

Last week we covered part 1 of Paul and Silas in the city of Philippi

“Philippi... Part One ... the fortune teller who wouldn’t stop talking and wouldn’t stop stalking”

And this week we come to the sequel, “Philippi.... Part Two... The Great Escape”.

Paul and Silas have been put in jail for casting a Spirit out of slave girl,

A spirit which had enabled her to tell fortunes and make her owners make a lot of money.

The slave-owners, who don’t sound like kind of people you would ever want to go into business with, stir up trouble in their home city, the Roman colony of Philippi.

The mob haul Paul and Silas before the magistrates

Who have these poor innocent men stripped, and beaten with rods.

Covered in wounds they are dragged off to the city jail, to the innermost part of the jail,

Their feet are fastened in stocks...

And what to do Paul and Silas do,

With their wounds,

Their sense of injustice,

Their loss of liberty....

And what to Paul and Silas do... they pray and they sing hymns to God.

If you remember nothing else today, remember this simple truth,  
Which is true, despite sounding so simple and so truthful,  
There are few situations which are not improved by praying and singing hymns to God.

And remember that the hymns these Jewish men would have sung included praise songs

Like Psalm 103

“O bless the Lord my soul”

And they would have sung psalms like

Psalm 13

“How long will you forget me forever”

And prayers like Psalm 25

“Let not my enemies triumph over me”

And then at midnight,

The grounds starts to tremble

The walls start to shake

Everyone hears a noise like thunder

And the foundations start to shake,

And this would have been frightening to anyone

But to prisoners who were chained to walls and could not move

This would have been terrifying, except....

The minute the earth shook, the chains of the prisoners fell off

Not just the chains of Paul and Silas, the Christian martyrs

But also the chains of the thieves, and the murderers and the debtors

And those who had had the misfortune to make enemies of powerful people.

Everyone's chains fall off,  
And what do you expect?  
You expect that everyone will run away...  
But here is the second very strange thing...  
That as well as taking off these men's chains,  
Some kind of mind-calming spirit has taken over these prisoner's minds  
And none of them try to run away.

The jailer bursts in  
And he is shaking  
Because the rule is that if any of his prisoners escape  
He will be killed  
He has one job  
Keep the prisoners inside the prison.  
He doesn't have to treat them well,  
He doesn't have to earn good marks with a prison inspectorate  
He only has one job  
"KEEP THESE MEN INSIDE"

So when he bursts into the jail  
Having been woken up by the earthquake  
And sees shattered chains on the floor he knows that nobody will have stayed put  
He is going to die.  
That earthquake might as well have caused his own roof to collapse in on him  
Because he will not have long left to live.  
So rather than prolong the agony he produces his sword, and is about to kill himself  
when he hears a voice.

“Do not harm yourself! We are all here.”

This is a miracle, almost as unlikely as the earthquake

The prisoners have stayed,

And his life isn't as doomed as he thought.

But he is still shaken, so orders the lights to be lit,

He falls at the feet of Paul and Silas, he brings them outside and he asks the question that every human being asked when the enormity of events suddenly exposes their own frailty...

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved”

And Paul speak famous, famous words, which are at the heart of the whole gospel

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...

You and your whole household.”

Paul doesn't tell the jailer to make sacrifices,

He doesn't tell him to list all his past crimes - and as a jailer he would have had a few

No he simply has to believe

Or better to use a better translation...

To Trust.

Then Paul teaches him more about the story of Jesus...

The one who is God come down to us

The one who taught us to love

The one who died for us

The one who rose again

And somehow when he is listening, the jailer knows that this is for him, and in a beautiful beautiful moment,

He, this rough and bruising jailer, takes the body of two of his prisoners, and does something he has probably never ever done for any prisoner before,

He washes their wounds,

Not once,

But twice,

For Paul and for Silas.

And then the roles are reverse,

And Paul and Silas take water, maybe even from the same jug

And they pour water over the jailer

And they wash him, as a sign that he has died and raised again in Jesus,

As a sign that his own sins have been washed away.

And then he takes Paul and Silas into his own house, which must have been next door,

And he gives them food - this is amazing,

And his entire household see this jailer, this brute of a man transformed,

Something remarkable has happened inside him,

He has become a believer in God... he is the same man, he is completely and utterly changed.

*What do we say about this story...*

The first thing to say is that these things still do happen.

In parts of the world where the Church is persecuted like it was in Acts,

Some incredible Acts-like stories are still being told.

In May 1997, a Chinese Believer called Brother Yun, or sometimes nicknamed by his captors “the Heavenly Man”, was at the lowest point of his life.

He was being held in the notorious and high security Zengzhou prison

Both his legs had been broken in a terrible beating he had received 6 weeks earlier,

He felt that he was going to spend years and years in prison

And even worse, it felt to him, like God had abandoned him.

However, reading the book of Acts - and particularly a verse in Acts chapter 26, “Now get up and stand on your feet”, a verse which was addressed to the Apostle Paul when he had just met Jesus on the Damascus road

And also several verses from the book of Jeremiah, about God bringing us deliverance from our enemies, Brother Yun began to believe that Good might still have a purpose for him.

One night, after reading verses from Jeremiah, Brother Yun also had a vision of sitting beside his wife, and his wife was tending his wounds, and asking him to “open the iron door”.

After this he had a powerful sense of God saying to him “This is the hour of your salvation”.

Brother Yun knew that this was the moment he had to escape.

From an earthly perspective, Brother Yun had no chance of escape, he had four floors and four huge security doors, two guards on each, to get through, and even if he got through them, he had the huge entrance gates from the heavily guarded prison to get through.

However he decided to make a go of it,

He felt he had no choice - God was telling him.

So he banged on his cell wall twice - this was a signal to his friend and fellow Christian Brother Xu that he needed some help.

Brother Xu also seemed to know what was happening and told him he needed to escape,

Brother Yun, had some toilet roll with scripture verse written on them, and he wrapped it around his waist.

Then Brother Xu distracted the guards by wanting to go to the bathroom to brush his teeth.

For some strange reason, as they were distracted, Brother Yun, though barely able to walk because of his broken legs, managed to get through the first security door.

He went down the stairs, as he got to the second door,

Another prisoner, Brother Musheng was coming the other way, the guards were distracted and let Yun through.

Then the third door, it was open, and the Yun felt God telling him to go,

For some reason the guard didn't notice him as he walked past.

Then he got to the iron gates on the bottom floor, these lead out onto a court yard, and these too were open...

Then Brother Yun walked across the courtyard, it was full of guards walking past, but none of them seem bothered by this prisoner walking amongst them; and then most unbelievably of all, the last gate, the big entrance gates to the prison were also open, and Brother Yun simply walked out onto the street, and the moment he stood on the pavement, a taxi appeared and asked him where he wanted to go.

Brother Yun gave the address of some believers, and he was taken to their house and given refuge, and that is how, in the manner of the book of Acts, Brother Yun of the

Church in China, became the first man ever to escape from Zengzhou maximum security prison.

But the question still remains?

What does this story mean to us in Weem?

I think this story does speak to all of us who feel ourselves to be in some kind of a prison....

In that story, in one sense, Paul and Silas were in Prison,

But somehow later in the story, the jailer becomes the man who is trapped,

And feels he has no escape but to take his own sword onto himself.

And so it is with us,

And with people we know.

Who are trapped in some kind of prison,

A job which feels like a dead end

A relationship which feels like it is slowly draining them of life

A habit which has become a prison

A secret which feels unbearable and so they live a life which is not true to who they are.

And the plain teaching of this story is this,

Jesus is the one who saves us.

It does mean that he saves us from our sin, from our estrangement from God

When we trust in him.



But his is not a salvation which only counts when we die.

It is about a salvation which begins to work now.

The simple truth is this...

Jesus does things.

In our complicated world,

And in our complicated lives.

Jesus does things.

Jesus saves us.

And he asks us trust in him.

Somehow the truth of the gospel is that there is no prison

From which we cannot one day escape.

And I wonder what that prison is for you,

And I wonder what that prison is for someone you love.

Might you simply pray to him now... "Lord save me"

And then walk in the way he leads you... and see what happens.

He is the Lord who sets the prisoner free

And this is the a gift, it is without condition, this is the gospel.

He is the Lord who sets the prisoner free.

AMEN