



**Acts 16:16-40 – Praise Your Problems Away**  
**GCSP – 03/31/2007**

There is an old Irish blessing some of you may be familiar with. It begins like this:

May the road rise up to meet you  
May the wind be always at your back  
May the sun shine warm upon your face  
May the rains fall soft upon your fields

If only life were like this all the time, but typically, the road is full of potholes and causes severe damage to your car, the wind blasts in your face and knocks you backwards, the sun beats down on you and causes skin cancer, and the rain is accompanied by a storm that destroys your fields.

Maybe that's the Murphy's Law way of looking at things, but the fact is this life we live is not always pretty – even when we are living our lives in accordance with God's Word. And when the life's circumstances have you down, it is not always easy to pray, to praise God, or to even properly handle God's provision.

Open your Bibles to **Acts 16:16-40**. In tonight's study we are going to see how Paul & Silas were:

- opposed by demonic forces (**v. 16-18**)
- beaten physically by human persecutors (**v. 19-24**)
- sustained by prayer and praise (**v. 25**)
- encouraged by God's provision (**v. 26-34**)
- vindicated by God's justice (**v. 35-40**)

**Acts 16:16-40**

Let's pray.

**Opposed by Demonic Forces – (v. 16-18)**

The text does not give us any indication of the time frame, but enough time has passed to establish a church between **verse 15**, which we covered last week, and **verse 16**. We know this because the church at Philippi does get started on this visit and the events of the rest of this chapter happened in quick fashion, ending with Paul & Silas leaving for Thessalonica.

**v. 16**

In the course of the ministry, it happened one day as they were heading to the meeting of the church, a demon possessed slave girl confronts Paul and the group of leaders, which at least consists of Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Paul recognizes this demon possession but apparently does nothing about it for several days.

We are not going to spend much time with this issue tonight, for there are other points I wish to focus on, but when we get to **chapter 19** we will most likely take another break from our verse-by-verse study of the Book of Acts and spend ample time on demon possession, casting out demons, and spiritual warfare in general. For tonight, just understand that demon possession is very real, only unbelievers can be possessed, and only the power of God can have any affect on demons.

I will go as far to say, many, if not most, of the people who fill the mental institutions of this world are possessed by demons as opposed to having mental deficiencies. And if that is the case, all the doctors and drugs in the world will not solve their problems.

Paul recognizes this as a demon possession – we simply do not recognize it as such today. Typically demons prefer to work their craft in the background – they seem to prefer not to be exposed. But we do have a few occasions in Scripture where they can't help themselves and make a scene in front of God's servants.

#### **v. 17**

Through this slave girl, the demon speaks: **"These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation"** (NASB).

This demon speaks the truth. Did you know demons understand theology and the Bible better than most, if not all, Christians? Their theology is perfect. They have been in the presence of God. They understand the truth of Scripture and they even understand their ultimate end. So since this demon does speak the truth, why does it agitate Paul? – Because having a demon helping your cause actually discredits your cause, which is exactly what he was trying to accomplish.

#### **v. 18**

Paul will have no association with a demon and commands the demon to come out of this girl **"in the name of Jesus Christ"** and he does.

Let me make a quick application before we move on. In the same way, using the devices and ways of the world, does not help the cause of the church, it discredits the church. You can't hold a casino night in the church. You can't show film clips from immoral movies to illustrate a sermon. You can't sing secular songs in the church service to show how in tune you are with the world. And you can't replace preaching and teaching the Word of God with a casual discussion about sex, psychology, social issues, tolerance of homosexuality, or any other humanistic topic. These tactics do not help the church they are destroying the church! It is a ploy of Satan. Paul recognized it – the church today appears to be blind to it.

#### **Beaten Physically by Human Persecutors – (v. 19-24)**

Paul easily recognized demon possession. This was not a perception that only he or other Christians had – it was common knowledge amongst most people of the time. And again, we will study this more in-depth when we get to **chapter 19**, but you would think people would respond favorably to seeing someone delivered from this horrible condition, but this was not always the case.

#### **v. 19-21**

The men who owned this slave girl were outraged. They were using this girl to make a profit through fortunetelling. With the demonic ability gone, so was their money.

How bold are you when you live a life of sin? These men just saw the power of God through Paul. A demon was no match for this power. A demon is simply a fallen angel. In **2 Samuel 24**, one angel killed 70,000 Israelites. In **Exodus 12**, one angel killed countless thousands of the firstborn Egyptians. In **2 Kings 19**, one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians. This fallen angel was no match for the power of God through the Apostle Paul, and yet these men grab Paul and Silas and drag them into the center of town.

Beloved, we are insanely bold when we sin one time, let alone live a life characterized by sin, for any and every sin is defying the God of the universe! And the God of the universe can vanquish

every demon and every angel with a word from His mouth or even a thought from His mind. Yes, we are insanely bold when we choose to sin.

Notice the charges leveled against them: **"throwing our city into confusion"** and **"proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or observe."** There is no mention of the slave girl and nothing said about the gospel.

Why only Paul and Silas? Why not Timothy and Luke also? **Verse 20** – Paul and Silas were Jews. Timothy was only half Jewish and Luke is a Gentile. Prejudice is not just a modern day problem.

#### **v. 22-24**

What has Paul and Silas done wrong? The phrase, "No good deed goes unpunished" comes to mind, doesn't it? They are both stripped and beaten with rods, thrown into the innermost prison where the worst criminals were kept, and had their legs stretched apart and their feet locked in stocks.

The Roman soldiers were adept at beating offenders severely enough to make them suffer immensely, yet at the same time keep them alive. Having your legs stretched and placed in stocks would be cause for severe cramping of the muscles and no remedy for relief. This was not a minor form of punishment. Paul and Silas were suffering greatly for following God's call on their life.

**1 Peter 2:20-21**, says, **"Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows, God is pleased with you. This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps"** (NLT). The NASB says you, **"find favor with God"** when you endure unjust suffering in your life.

Do you understand the implications of this? First of all, every one of us will experience times of suffering, times of persecution, and times of trouble and trial. This is not in question and is not something we can opt out of. Secondly, we can be blessed and find favor with God through these times if we patiently and faithfully endure it, or we can complain, grumble, moan, and pitch a fit and not be blessed by God.

Either way, you are going to go through times of suffering. God gives each of us the choice of the results when it is over with – and it will be over with at some point.

#### **Sustained by Prayer and Praise – (v. 25)**

When your bodies are wracked with pain from bruises, lacerations, and severe cramps; when you laying in the filth and raw sewage that typified the innermost prisons of that day, sleep is not an option. Your options are to moan and complain, or to pray and praise. Paul and Silas give us an unbelievable example by choosing the latter. They choose to praise their problems away.

There is not even any indication they were praying to be released. And biblically speaking, this should not necessarily be our first prayer either when trials come. **James 1:2-5**, says, **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him"** (NIV).

There is tremendous purpose in trials. If God were to grant our prayer to immediately pull us out when we pray, we would miss this. We would be denied the maturity and benefits God has in store for those who patiently and faithfully endure through trials.

Beloved, I am not saying that we always sit back and do nothing when trials come our way – that would be presumption. God has no obligation to free us from our self-inflicted problems – even though He chooses to do so most of the time. But I am saying that we are to always be thankful for our trials, and we are to turn to God in prayer, and we are to praise God no matter what circumstances we are in, because He is accomplishing His perfect will and work through us at all times.

Do you want the blessing of God on your life? Then faithfully and patiently endure the trails you face with prayer and praise. From a human perspective, what in the world did Paul and Silas have to praise God about? But Paul and Silas took a step back from their human circumstances and focused on the God who answers prayer, and heals bruised and broken and bleeding bodies, and delivers those who are unjustly held captive, and blesses though we are unworthy.

Beloved, we do not deserve any of the comforts of life we enjoy. Yet we complain about the simplest of things, in essence walking up to Jesus while He hangs on the cross to moan about a hangnail.

How ridiculous are we, and how ridiculous do we look to others when we behave in this manner?

But how did others look upon Paul and Silas? The tense of the Greek wording in this verse indicates the praising went on for quite a while and the other prisoners continued to listen. Instead of listening to curses and complaints, they hear praise and adoration. Paul and Silas took the opportunity of suffering – and let me repeat that phrase, the opportunity of suffering – to be a blessing and comfort to others.

Can you use the next trial in your life as an opportunity for blessing in your life and the lives of others? It's your choice. The trial will come, but the choice of blessing or no blessing will be yours according to how you respond to it.

#### Encouraged by God's Provision – (v. 26-34)

The blessing is about to unfold for Paul and Silas.

#### **v. 26**

God sends a precise earthquake. This earthquake is so precise, the buildings do not collapse, but all the doors open and all the chains and stocks open. Explain that one.

Let me give another quick application before we move on: Stop trying to humanly figure your way out of your trials! God doesn't need your ideas! It's not like God is in heaven waiting for your help to find a solution – "Oh wow, I didn't think of that!" We are such imbeciles when we try to come up with the perfect solution for our problems. God already had the solution before the trial began! Let Him provide it in His time.

#### **v. 27-30**

Did you ever take the time to stop being so self-absorbed in your trial to consider God wants to use your situation to bring someone else to salvation?

What did Jesus Christ do to bring salvation to others? – He patiently endured suffering. Can you comprehend that you are never more like Christ than when you patiently endure suffering? And

can you imagine the incomprehensible blessing of seeing a soul accept His salvation because of your testimony through your suffering?

We should be on our knees and pleading, "Oh God, allow us to suffer and in the process see a soul come to Thee!" Praise God for His wonderful purposes and plans! Don't ever complain about the ordeal you face.

**v. 31**

The simple plan of salvation – believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Beloved, if you know enough about salvation to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, then you know enough to share the gospel message with others.

**v. 32-34**

The blessing continues with great rejoicing over an entire household coming into God's glorious salvation.

Do you think Paul and Silas are weighing things in the balances? "You know, I'm not sure if the amount of suffering we went through was worth seeing an entire household of people come to the Lord."

**Vindicated by God's Justice – (v. 35-40)**

God will take care of the injustices you face. You simply have to allow Him to do it in His time.

That old Irish blessing I started at the beginning of this sermon, ends like this:

And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Beloved, God does have you in the palm of His hand. I know it's hard to recognize when you are in the midst of a trial, but if you will learn to immediately respond to these trials with thanksgiving and praise, God will in essence be freed to pour out blessings on your life beyond what you could ever ask or think.

Let's pray.