

Don't flee from discomfort, but be daring in your witness

The Bentley Mulsanne. I think if you're going to buy one of these luxury automobiles, you have to go with the extended wheelbase option. You see, it's not for driving, but for being driven. With extra legroom, a backseat theatre system, a refrigerated bottle cooler with crystal champagne flutes, massaging seats with heat and cool, of course crafted with premium grade leather, and lambswool rugs. Maybe your pocketbook doesn't allow you these sorts of comforts, but we gravitate toward comfort nonetheless. Heating in the winter and air conditioning in the summer to keep our temperature band as narrow as possible, recliners in the living room with a television controlled by a remote so we don't even have to get up. Not only physical comforts, but we gravitate toward other comforts as well. We avoid those situations or conversations that might be difficult and uncomfortable, and sometimes only give a smile and stay silent instead of speaking up and causing a stir. We silently go along with the masses, seeing standing out or speaking up as too uncomfortable. But we're called to more than this, aren't we? We're called to live for more than comfort, but to live for Christ and to bear witness for him.

Scripture Passage: Acts 16:16-40

In our passage this morning we see Paul and Silas being daring in their witness. **Don't flee from discomfort, but be daring in your witness.**

Don't Fear Standing Out (vv.16-18)

1. **vv.16-17** "*As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination...*" - Last week we learned of the fruit Paul and Silas saw in their ministry in Philippi, that Lydia and her household were converted to faith in Christ. Now, Paul and Silas are continuing in their ministry in Philippi, going regularly to the place of prayer near the river. But now, every time they went, they were met along the way by a slave girl who was crying out, "*These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.*"

1. At first this seems like a good message she's proclaiming. But in reality this was only causing confusion. First of all, the Most High God doesn't necessarily need to be a reference to the God of Israel. This is a more generic phrase, even used for Zeus at times. Second, the second half of the sentence lacks the definite article, the, and could be read "a way of salvation." Third, having this slave girl, who was known as one who worked in divination, be one of your promoters, is confusing at best.

2. **v.18** "*Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit...*" - I do think this was a righteous annoyance. Paul wasn't greatly annoyed at someone chewing with their mouth open or leaving the cap off the toothpaste. His annoyance was with the confusion brought on by the message this slave girl was promoting.

1. Paul was patient long enough, and finally needs to respond. It says he turned and spoke to the spirit. His trouble wasn't with the girl, but with the spirit that controlled her. He commands this spirit out in the name of Jesus Christ, and immediately it leaves.

2. Paul wasn't out on crusade to find and cast out evil spirits, but as he was engaging in ministry he was confronted by this spirit, and the confrontation needed to take place. The confusion caused by the message of this spirit would only harm the gospel message in Philippi. The Christian message is unique, and the way of salvation is exclusive, only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Anything that might obscure or distort or confuse that message needed to be addressed.

1. Christianity stands as unique, but the world would try to fit it into its acceptable mold; make it nothing more than another menu option in the cafeteria of spirituality. **As believers, we have been given the great privilege and the awesome responsibility of preserving and proclaiming the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. When the world tries to water down the gospel, who is there to provide clarity, and present the gospel in undiluted form? It's our work!**

Transition: Paul was unwilling to have the confusion persist, and he was willing to stand out and speak up for the clarity of the gospel message. This, as we might expect in our own experience, got him into some trouble with the non-believers around him. That brings us to our next point this morning, that we don't fear what man might do.

Don't Fear What Man Might Do (vv.19-24)

1. **v.19** "*But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas...*" - Paul and Silas were dragged into the marketplace to be stood before the city magistrates. Don't think of this like being brought into the farmer's market. The marketplace, the *agora*, was the hub of the city. It's where commerce would take place, but also was the social and political center as well.

2. **vv.20-21** *“These men are disturbing our city...”* - Notice the accusation leveled against Paul and Silas. We know that the real reason these men brought them before the magistrates was because their income source was gone, but the charge they bring is very different. These men are working an angle and falsely accusing Paul and Silas. They are disturbing the city, but in the best sense possible. The men didn't have any problem with Paul and Silas as long as their religion stayed private at the riverside and didn't interfere with business and commerce, as long as it didn't influence public life. But that's no real Christianity, is it?
 1. **1 John 3:13** *“Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”* **John 15:18-19** *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”* Jesus has prepared us for this type of hatred and persecution, and equipped us to continue to love and serve even when we're hated and mistreated. **Psalm 118:6-9** *“The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.”*
3. **v.22** *“The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.”* - This quickly turns into violence against Paul and Silas. The magistrates call for the *lictor*, which is like law enforcement. These men would go through the city carrying a bundle of rods that were used in occasions like this, to carry out beatings ordered by the magistrates. These are like wooden dowels, laid across the back of Paul and Silas repeatedly. Paul would suffer 3 such beatings (**2 Cor. 11:25**).
4. **vv.23-24** *“And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison...”* - Still no trial has taken place, Paul and Silas have been beaten, and now are thrown into the deep recesses of the prison and put in stocks. These stocks were sometimes those which would hold the arms, neck, and feet. More common were the stocks that held only the feet, but kept the legs spread far apart and were designed to make the person incredibly uncomfortable. Add to that the beating just endured, and you have the recipe for a great deal of discomfort.

Transition: The men had gotten their way, and Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned. But their ministry didn't end. Don't fear what man might do, and don't fear

Don't Fear the Circumstances (vv.25-34)

1. **v.25** *“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them...”* - In the deepest and darkest part of the prison, their backs beaten by repeated blows with rods, their bodies aching and only exacerbated by the stocks, Paul and Silas are doing what? Do you hear that? In the silence of the prison voices break through. Is that singing?
 1. *“Any fool can sing in the day,”* said Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *“It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by ... Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men.”*
 2. *This might come naturally to you, but I know for me this takes some discipline and cultivation. I can easily slide into complaint, but God would have us train ourselves for godliness.*
2. **v.26** *“...and suddenly there was a great earthquake...”* - What do you think their prayers were? Do you think they were praying for deliverance?
 1. **Colossians 4:3-4** *“At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”*
 2. **Ephesians 6:18b-20** *“and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”*
 3. **Philippians 1:12-20** *“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”*

4. The doors are open and everyone is free. Could this be an answer to their prayers? “God, open a door that no man can open.” Now, here it is - an open door! They’re free! But might I suggest that they were free even when the doors were locked and the stocks were tight around their ankles? So free, in fact, that even being released from these physical constraints, they don’t see the need to rush out. God opened a door for them, and it’s a door for gospel ministry, and that gospel ministry was to continue right there inside the prison.
3. **vv.27-30** The jailer is terrified, assuming all the prisoners had fled. About to take his sword and kill himself he hears a voice from the dark inner prison. “*Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.*” Paul and Silas’ freedom to stay, even when the door was opened, resulted in gospel-ministry to this jailer.
 1. **What reason might you give for leaving Philippi, especially when the door is opened for you? Is going through that door gospel-motivated?**
4. **v.31** Paul and Silas present the clear gospel message. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
5. **vv.32-34** The word is preached to him and his entire household. The jailer washes the wounds of Paul and Silas, and his household is baptized. He feeds Paul and Silas, and the entire household is rejoicing in this new faith. Their freedom in Christ opened the door for them to preach the word boldly, and see this jailer and his household saved from eternal damnation and welcomed into the family of God.

Transition: Don’t fear the the circumstances.

Don’t Fear to Use What God Provides (vv.35-40)

1. **v.35** “*But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police...*” - Keep in mind that, even though they preached to the jailer and his household, baptized them, were fed and washed by them, they are still prisoners. But now the order comes that they are free to go.
2. **vv.37-39** Paul makes use of his right as a Roman citizen, and demands that the magistrates come and offer an apology. Some of us might read this and think, “Ah, satisfying. Stick it to ‘em! Vindication.” But I don’t think that’s what Paul was about. I don’t believe this was selfishly motivated.
 1. Paul and Silas would be known in Philippi as the preachers of Jesus. Now they’ve been imprisoned, and if they were to go away secretly the reputation of Christians in Philippi would be quite negatively impacted. The gospel witness of Lydia and her household, as well as now the jailer and his household, would be greatly hindered by this reputation if Paul didn’t make use of this right.
3. **v.40** Paul and Silas were gospel-motivated, and as such they stop to visit the believers before departing the city. No doubt they report the conversion of the jailer and his household and encourage Lydia and her household to fellowship with the jailer and his. This is the Philippian church.

Conclusion: The Philippian church was quite diverse, even as a small and young congregation. Because of the obedience of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, being Spirit-led to Philippi and equipped with the word of God, a church was planted and souls were saved. They were prayerful, careful, thoughtful, and deliberate in their words and actions, that the gospel would be proclaimed and souls would be saved. Church, we are called to this. To a prayerful, careful, thoughtful, and deliberate engagement in life, living to witness for Christ.

Family



December 9, 2018

Table Talk

Sing!

Hark the herald angels sing
 "Glory to the newborn King!
 Peace on earth and mercy mild
 God and sinners reconciled"
 Joyful, all ye nations rise
 Join the triumph of the skies
 With the angelic host proclaim:
 "Christ is born in Bethlehem"
 Hark! The herald angels sing
 "Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ by highest heav'n adored
 Christ the everlasting Lord!
 Late in time behold Him come
 Offspring of a Virgin's womb
 Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
 Hail the incarnate Deity
 Pleased as man with man to dwell
 Jesus, our Emmanuel
 Hark! The herald angels sing
 "Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
 Hail the Son of Righteousness!
 Light and life to all He brings
 Ris'n with healing in His wings
 Mild He lays His glory by
 Born that man no more may die
 Born to raise the sons of earth
 Born to give them second birth
 Hark! The herald angels sing
 "Glory to the newborn King!"



Advent Reading...

Isaiah 7:13-14; 11:1-5; Luke 1:26-38

Matthew 1:18-25

Micah 5:2-4; Matthew 2:1-12

Luke 2:8-14

This week's Scripture Memory -

Isaiah 9:6

In the second week of Advent, we set our focus on the angels who came to proclaim the coming of Jesus. The angels were sent as messengers from God to announce the advent of Jesus, and also to orchestrate events around his coming. It is good for us to hear the wonderful things they spoke about our Savior King.