

SERIES

We are in a series called COPS, which takes a look at four narratives from the Bible where individuals in those stories wind up in the slammer.

- As we investigate and pull open these stories, we will find that they will have a great impact upon our own lives.
- Today, we will be jumping in the New Testament and the Book of Acts to take a look at the story of Paul and Silas being thrown in prison.
- As we investigate this story today we will find that Paul and Silas displayed the **Power of Perspective and the Power of Worship** in our lives
- **Rap Sheet**

- **Disturbance of the Peace**
- **Unlawful Use of Meta-Human Ability**
- **Conspiracy to commit corporate fraud against Fortune Telling, LLC**
- **Performing Psychological Practice without an official state license**

SETUP – GROUP OF GUYS GOING TO CHURCH (PAUL, SILAS, LUKE, AND TIMOTHY... MAYBE OTHERS)

Acts 16:16-18 NIV

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”

This lady follows around Paul’s crew shouting positive things about their work.

- Now, why would a demon want to shout positive things about God’s servants?

- Let's go back to last week when we talked about sin.

- Sin or evil doesn't come out and say, "Hey look guys, I'm here and I'm dangerous. Stay away from me!"
- He disguises itself as good and safe, and even as a friend.

- The enemy is deceptive. If he can convince you that he's aligned with good, then when new Christians come to speak with this lady about the things of God, she can show them spiritual things and they will buy into it believing it's good, when in actuality the enemy has led them into the worship of demons in witchcraft.

Acts 16:18 NIV

18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

It's possible that Paul and Silas didn't immediately think she was a problem because they allowed her to continue for a couple of days before addressing the problem.

Acts 16:19-23 NIV

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (It's important to note that Paul and Silas were not the only one's in that group. We know for sure Timothy and Luke were there and maybe others.) 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."
22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES AREN'T ALWAYS AN INDICATION THAT YOU'RE DOING THE WRONG THING

You ever feel like you're doing the right thing and you're still stuck?

- Maybe you feel like you try so hard to do the right thing, and life still feels like an uphill battle.
- You're not alone.
- Paul and Silas are being treated like brutal criminals for doing what in their mind was the right thing.

- Sure the magistrates didn't like it because it was income.
- The equivalent here is like Paul and Silas going in and burning a porn shop to the ground.
- These people didn't care that this young lady had her life and sanity back. They didn't care that she was free'd from her bondage.

- They just cared that their income source was taken away.

Your circumstances are not always an indication of you doing the right or wrong thing.

- **SOMETIMES LIFE JUST SUCKS.**
- Sometimes it's just a harder road that you have to travel.
- Don't beat yourself up.

Acts 16:24 NIV

24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

(SHOW PIC)

Now this is an artistic depiction of this scene.

- Flogging injuries

- **(PIC) FLOG WHIP**

- **(GO BACK TO PRISON PIC)** Risk of infection

- Nasty environment with rats, vermin, feces, urine, vomit, etc.

They dang near killed the guys by flogging them with whips. In fact, often people would die from flogging or the affects of it.

- They placed these guys in the inner cells like they were the worst of criminals.

- All for doing the right thing. Doing what Jesus commanded them to do.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Imagine with me, you and a friend being in this situation. Pastor Eric, you seem like someone that I might end up in prison with. I pick you.

- Imagine how that conversation goes.

- Well... what do we do now?!
- All we wanted to do was go a prayer meeting and we decided to take care of business with the magic lady.
- Maybe we should have just let her keep going on like she was.

- How are we supposed to serve God from in here?
- How are we supposed to plant churches and do missionary work from inside here?
- How are we supposed to point people to Jesus from inside this rat nest?

- Where are you God?
- This isn't what serving you was supposed to look like?
- Where have you gone?

- **Why have you abandoned me?**

Those guys just beat the crap out of us for doing what you wanted us to.

- **And now our feet are viced up and I think a rat just pee'd on my leg.**
- **I'm sitting next to my friend in this dark and nasty place and I love him, but I think his deodorant is wearing off.**

Where is my church with the fancy windows and big office that you promised me?

- **Where is the large missions budget, and the smell of new stuff from the new youth center?**
- **Where is the money in my bank account to pull this off?**
- **Where are the people that I need to accomplish this?**
- **When is this thing supposed to get easy?**

How in the world will you ever be able to use me now?

- **Not even YOU God can figure this one out.**
- **When are you going to show up and do something for once in my life?!**

POWER OF PERSPECTIVE (EYE GLASSES STORY)

Through the entire summer, I was struggling with pretty massive headaches. (STORY)

- **It was amazing how just a slight change in my focus or my perspective set me on a trajectory of victory and not defeat.**
- **That's the Power of Perspective**
- **Just a small slight adjustment in the way we look at things, and all of the sudden we have positioned ourselves on a trajectory of victory instead of defeat.**

PAUL AND SILAS MUST CHOOSE THEIR PERSPECTIVE

Paul and Silas have a choice in this moment.

- Look at their situation as a prison, or as an opportunity.
- Look at their situation as the end of all possibilities, or the beginning of every possibility.
- Look down at their feet and see chains, or look around and see people that need Christ.

You see, your perspective can either be your prison or your opportunity.

- How you choose to look at it will determine the potential outcome.
- It's all about what you focus on.

- Being blessed is not a state of living, it's a state of mind. It's your perspective.
- Being grateful is not a measurement of how much happiness you possess, it's a state of mind. It's your perspective.
- There is great power in your perspective.
- Your perspective can quickly change someone else's perspective.

FOCUS: CIRCUMSTANCE -- So many people choose to sit and self-pity in the middle of their prison.

- They choose to allow it to deplete all of the joy and contentment out of their life.
- We sit there paralyzed focused on our circumstances and problems while opportunity surrounds us.
- They're focused on being locked in this room when if they'd look around and realize they are surrounded by murders, rapists, drug dealers, and thieves that have father and mother wounds and have never heard the Gospel in an area of the world that had never heard about the Gospel.

FOCUS: WHO'S NOT HERE -- So many choose to focus on the fact that other people don't have to sit in prison with them.

- In Paul and Silas case... Luke and Timothy were there when the demon was cast out. Why don't they have to sit in here.
- They get off easy.
- Their life is easy, and they have everything handed to them.
- Why did we take the flogging and they didn't?
- So many choose to sit in the middle of their prison and compare themselves to those that have different circumstances.

- And that alone paralyzes them exactly where they are.

FOCUS: ON NOW NOT FUTURE -- So many choose to give up inside the walls of the prison, not realizing they are moments away from their miracle.

PAUL AND SILAS CHOOSE

So Paul and Silas have a choice... get mad, depressed, and blame God... or worship Him.

Acts 16:25 NIV

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

Close your eyes and imagine with me... (IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL) **[BLACK SCREEN]**

THE POWER OF WORSHIP

Um, there is nothing like a powerful hymn or worship to God.

- Hearing it in a normal church setting is one thing.
- But hearing it in the middle of a dark prison with open bleeding lacerations in your back with no hope for ever escaping is another.
- It's more pure, and it's more powerful.
- In a room full of murders, rapists, drug users, thieves, they begin to sing about the goodness of God.

We should worship God in all situations, but when we worship God in our darkest moments it unleashes something special in our life.

- When we worship God beat up physically, emotionally and spiritually...

- It unleashes the power of God on ourselves and those around us.

PAUL AND SILAS DIDN'T HAVE THE PERSPECTIVE THAT GOD HAD LEFT THEM, THEY KNEW THAT THERE WAS A GREATER PURPOSE BEING WORKED OUT IN THEIR SUFFERING.

- **THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IN THE MOMENT WHAT THAT PURPOSE WAS, SO WHAT ELSE DID THEY HAVE TO DO BUT JUST WORSHIP.**

Acts 16:26-34 NIV

26 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 bonds were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

THIS IS THE POWER OF WORSHIP

Paul and Silas perspective was set on God.

- This is the Power of Worship, that we let God do what he does, while we do what we do.
- The Power of Perspective and the Power of Worship are so closely linked together because...

- You must change your perspective to find a heart of worship, and you must worship to get your mind on God to change your perspective. (REPEAT)

Now catch this...

- In Paul and Sila's case, their circumstance changed when they worshipped.
- That's not always going to happen.
- Sometimes, the prison doors stay shut and no earthquake happens.

- The real question is... will you continue in your worship even when the circumstance doesn't change.
- Because even though Paul and Silas were released from prison, they were far from done.

2 Corinthians 11:23-27 NLT

I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. ²⁴ Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. ²⁶ I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.^[a] ²⁷ I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

The Power of Worship is no matter whether an earthquake happens or not, we put our focus not on our circumstance or problem, but on Jesus who is bigger than our circumstance. So he can make us more like Him, and use us to accomplish what he wants to accomplish through us.

CLOSING

The reason why this is so tough for us is we come in here chained to our prison.

- **Worship strums up and we can't muster to get in the mood or even open our mouths to sing along.**

- **What if someone standing next to me hears my singing voice and falls over dead?**

- **We will definitely need a miracle then.**

- **We are tired.**

- **Work has us beat up.**
- **Kids have us beat up.**
- **Schedule has us beat up.**
- **Sickness has us beat up.**
- **Life has a way of beating us up.**

- **The last thing I wanna do is open my mouth and sing these words. (Especially that one song that says "Sloppy wet kiss.")**

- **However... singing those very songs will begin to open up your heart and change your perspective.**
- **Closing your eyes and focusing on Jesus... maybe for some of you for the first time since last Sunday night... is the very thing you need to reconnect with the source of your life.**

TRANSITION TO WORSHIP

Some of you in this room are going through situations where being behind literal bars like Paul and Silas may actually seem better than what you are facing.

- **Maybe others would say that things are okay right now.**

- **And regardless of whether an earthquake happens or not, you will still leave here with some form of pain.**

- **Whether or not God responds the way you think he should...**

- **We have an opportunity, a moment to come together and worship Him.**

- **Matthew 18:20 NIV**
- **For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."**

And maybe, just maybe, as we worship, together as a faith community we will experience the Power of Worship in our lives.

- **Don't miss this opportunity.**
- **Put your perspective on things above.**