

## Acts Series #14 - "Songs In The Night" - Acts 16:16-34

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *How Do You Respond To Trouble?*

1. Some years ago there was a scientific research organization that wanted to study wolves
2. So they offered a \$5,000 bounty for each wolf captured alive
3. Sam & Jed, two unemployed farm workers, turned into fortune hunters
4. They went into the wilderness, scouring the mountains and forests looking for their prey
5. After several days, and empty handed, they fell asleep one night, exhausted
6. Just after midnight, Sam awoke to find that they were surrounded by about 50 wolves with flaming red eyes and barred teeth
7. He nudged his friend and said, "Jed, wake up! We're rich!"
8. How do you handle trouble?
9. What kind of general attitude do you have when you find yourself beset with difficulty?
  - a. do you wig out and start to complain?
  - b. or do you mellow out and look for the good in it all?

#### B. *My Experience This Week*

1. A terrible thing happened this week
2. We discovered that we had double booked the sanctuary and annex on Sat., May 25<sup>th</sup>
  - a. there was a wedding scheduled
  - b. and a special graduation ceremony for one of the young men in the fellowship
    - 1) he is an Explorer Scout
    - 2) and this was his Honor Ceremony
  - c. both will have large groups attending and have receptions following them
  - d. and both were booked for the same time!
  - e. we still aren't sure how it happened - but it did
  - f. and because of all the arrangements both groups had made, we couldn't change the times
  - g. so our backs were up against the wall and at first it seemed like there was no way out
3. When I first realized what was up, I was so troubled that I woke up in the middle of the night, frantic over what to do
  - a. tossed and turned,
  - b. heart racing
  - c. broke out in a sweat
  - d. when I did get back to sleep, slept fitfully and had terrible dreams of a

bride standing on one side dressed in her gown, beating me with her bouquet, and on the other side and scout beating me with his sash

### **C. Dealing With Trouble**

1. Trouble is common to all people
2. No matter who you are . . .
  - a. whether you live a prosperous and privileged life
  - b. or poor and underprivileged
  - c. trouble will beset you
3. So, how do you handle trouble?
4. We're going to see how Christians should deal with trouble in our study today

## **II. TEXT**

### **A. Vs. 16-19**

**{16} Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.**

**{17} This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."**

**{18} And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.**

**{19} But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.**

1. Paul & Silas have come to the city of Philippi in Macedonia
2. They are in thoroughly Gentile territory now
3. In fact, there are so few Jews in the city, there is no synagogue
4. The handful of Jews who are there, met each Sabbath by the riverside for prayer
5. So Paul & Silas joined them and taught out of the scriptures about Jesus as Messiah
6. And soon a small group of disciples were gathering to grow in the faith
7. But as Paul & Silas walked around the city, a young slave girl followed them around
8. She was possessed by a demon that spoke through her and told fortunes to people who paid her masters for her services
9. Her masters had made a tidy little profit off her and enjoyed their income
10. But the spirit possessing the girl kept declaring to anyone who would listen that Paul & Silas were messengers of God and that they had come to show the people the way to life
11. We might think that Paul & Silas would appreciate this free advertising,
  - a. specially since it came from a source the people recognized as being pretty trustworthy
  - b. and indeed, for a few days, they let her go on

- c. but after awhile, the continual shouting of the girl became too much
- d. Paul neither needed, nor wanted, the testimony of a demon
- 12. So, through the authority given him in the name of Christ, he cast the demon out of the girl
- 13. Now, her masters weren't real happy with this turn of events
- 14. For when the demon left, it left her without the ability to tell fortunes
- 15. Their source of income dried up
  - a. they'd have to look elsewhere for funds
  - b. they'd have to forget about that new Armani suit and Gucci shoes they saw at the mall
  - c. they'd have to miss a couple of Mercedes payments and would have to put that vacation to Pompeii on hold
- 16. Because they got hit in the pocketbook, they decided to strike back
- 17. So they grabbed Paul & Silas and dragged them before the city authorities

### **B. Vs. 20-21**

**{20} And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;**

**{21} "and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."**

- 1. These were completely false charges!
- 2. There was not one shred of truth in them
- 3. They first accuse the apostles of troubling the city
- 4. The word "trouble" means "to disturb"
  - a. they accused Paul & Silas of disturbing the peace
  - b. yeah - a couple of prayer meetings at the riverside
  - b. and silencing a demon possessed girl are pretty dangerous threats to civic harmony aren't they?
- 5. If anyone was disturbing the peace it was these slave owners
  - a. they were the ones who were inciting the people to violence
  - b. they are the ones who were dragging men through the streets and leveling charges of rebellion
  - c. it was their mob that gathered, not Paul's & Silas'
- 6. And besides, what were the apostles teaching that was contrary to Roman law?
- 7. Nothing!
- 8. These men were false witnesses and utter hypocrites!
- 9. But as almost always happens, the severity of the charge was enough to stain the reputation of Paul & his companion
- 10. Without even a hearing, the crowd and the authorities convict them

### **C. Vs. 22-24**

**{22} Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.**

**{23} And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.**

**{24} Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.**

1. How incredibly unfair
2. If anything, Paul & Silas had come to Philippi with a message that would transform the lives of every person in the city, if they would but receive it
3. And that message would make each one of them into someone new
  - a. they would become better citizens
  - b. better workers, better masters
  - c. better families
  - d. better in every area and dimension of life
4. But they never even gave the apostles a chance to defend or explain themselves
5. They just took the charges at face value, beat them, and threw them in jail
  
6. So there Paul & Silas sat, locked as it says, in the inner prison
  - a. meaning they were in the maximum security section ,
  - b. at the bowels of the Philippian prison
7. They knew nothing of prison reform or prisoner's rights in the ancient world
  - a. Roman prisons were no Club Fed
  - b. they were dark, smelly, rat & germ infested cesspools of filth and decay
  - c. kind of like the space under my son's beds
8. And it wasn't enough to just lock them in the cell, but because they feared a jail break attempt, they also clamped them into stocks
9. So there they sat,
  - a. in the dark, in the stink
  - b. hearing the sound of the rodents scurrying around them
  - c. their feet held securely to the ground
10. And all because of a ridiculous charge, a false arrest, a sham trial, and an absurd judgment
11. Put yourself in their place =
  - a. What would be your attitude?
  - b. What would you be doing while you sat there
12. To be honest - I'd have to say that I doubt very seriously that I'd be a very happy camper
  - a. I would be complaining loud and long
  - b. I'd be demanding that God show up, right now, and explain Himself
  - c. after all, they had gone to Philippi for one reason - to do God's work; to preach the gospel
  - d. it hardly seemed right
    - 1) they followed God and obeyed His direction
    - 2) and it landed them in prison
    - 3) now they were jailbait
  - e. no, for sure I'd be planning a career change as soon as I was out of there
13. But interestingly, that wasn't Paul & Silas' reaction

#### **D. Vs. 25**

**{25} But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.**

1. This is so convicting
2. I read these words and am immediately struck with the irony in this story
3. And that's the reason the Holy Spirit made sure it was recorded for us
4. Where we might expect the apostles to be upset and complaining, because it would be the human thing to do,
5. They instead are worshipping and praising God
  - a. they don't blame Him for letting them down
  - b. they don't doubt His love and care for them
  - c. no, instead they trust that in the midst of it all, God is still working out His perfect plan
6. Paul & Silas knew that God's plan for our lives doesn't always lead through gentle meadows filled with fragrant flowers but that sometimes it leads to dark prison cells
7. And they knew that no matter where it lead, they were to stay faithful to follow Him because there was some all important lesson to be learned or task to perform
8. Sure it may go against their desires – but hey, they had learned early on that their desires were too small and selfish
9. Sure God's will might go beyond their understanding - but hey, that only proved their understanding was limited and weak
10. How much better to simply trust in God, no matter where that trust took them
11. So though it is late and the surroundings are tough, they decide to turn their hearts to God
12. And they turned that dark pit of despair into a glorious chamber of heaven
13. The prison became a church,
14. And the prayers and praises of God's own filled the darkness with their own spiritual light
15. So much so that the other prisoners, also lying in the dark, slowly began to see a new light with their inner eyes

#### **E. Vs. 26-34**

**{26} 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 chains were loosed.**

**{27} And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.**

**{28} But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."**

**{29} Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.**

**{30} And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**

**{31} So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."**

**{32} Then 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 stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.**

**{34} Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.**

1. We will cover this passage in greater detail on Wednesday
2. But today, let's conclude with this thought
3. Is this the way the story would have gone if Paul & Silas had been sitting in their cell complaining about their lot?
4. I don't think so
5. First of all, it's doubtful God ever would have sent the quake
6. Secondly, even if He did, and their attitude was sour and complaining, then when the earthquake came, their minds would have only been on one thing - escape
7. And as soon as the doors opened they would have made a dash for the exit
8. And as a result, the jailer would have carried out his intent of killing himself
  - a. a wife would have been left without a husband
  - b. some children without their daddy
  - c. and the streets of the city filled with dangerous criminals preying on the weak and innocent
9. But because Paul & Silas trusted God and lived out that trust in the midst of a hard situation, the jailer was not only physically saved but spiritually saved, as well as his entire household
10. And though it doesn't say so, it's implied that the entire prison population also stayed and were impacted by the apostles
  - a. you see, if even one of the prisoners had escaped, the jailer's life would still be forfeit
  - b. notice also that Paul says that they were *all* still there
  - c. their testimony to the other prisoner's had touched their lives and they were transformed as only the Spirit of God can do

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. An Important Truth**

1. Christian, what's your attitude when you're going through a trial?
  - a. in the midst of trouble, is your outlook positive or negative?
  - b. do you grumble and complain, or do you pray and praise?
2. There is an important truth we all need to remember - and that is this: We will know trouble
  - a. there will be seasons of difficulty and oppression
  - b. there will be trials and stress
  - c. and sometimes, it will be undeserved and unfair
3. The only question is – How are we going to respond? What will our

- attitude be?
4. Let's learn to be like Paul & Silas
    - a. there *seemed*, NO good reason for their trouble
    - b. but they had come to know that God works in unseen ways
    - c. so they patiently and hopefully waited and watched
    - d. since there was nothing else to do, they worshipped
    - e. and when the moment of God's providence came, they ceased it
  5. In similar manner, God's will for your life leads through difficulty
  6. Learn to wait and watch for what He's doing because He wants to both *teach* and *use* you
  7. One of the classic baseball televisions shots comes from the 1975 World Series
    - a. Carlton Fisk hit a ball down deep into the outfield but right down the foul line
    - b. he stood there. Jumping up and down, waving his arms, tryin gto coax the ball to stay fair
    - c. it did, for a home run
    - d. it was all captured on film, but it shouldn't have been
    - e. you see, the cameraman was supposed to track on the ball, not stay focused on Fisk
    - f. but just as Fisk stepped to the plate, the camera man who was high up in the scoreboard at Fenway park saw a rat that slipped out of the woodwork and began circling him
    - g. the camera man tried to keep one eye on the game and one eye on the rat
    - h. he happened to be looking at the rat when Fisk hit the ball, so the camera stayed and caught the shot
  8. Sometimes we encounter problems like that rat.
    - a. we have no idea how they will be resolved
    - b. but because of them, we may see God work in a way we never would have without the problem