

# Paul and Silas Rejoice in Prison

(Acts 16:16-34)

## Introduction

How do you react when someone is mean to you? Do you get angry? Do you want to get back at them? It's our natural reaction to lash back, isn't it. If someone calls you a bad name, you want to call him a bad name back. If someone hits you it's a natural thing to want to hit them back, isn't it.

What if you're persecuted for being a believer in Jesus?

As a Christian, you don't have to react in the flesh. You have the Holy Spirit who can help you to take control of your thoughts and give you peace and joy inside even when things on the outside aren't good.

Today our lesson is about a time that seemed hopeless to Paul and Silas, but they never stopped praising the Lord!

## Opening Prayer

Father, when we're going through hard times, help us to take control of our thoughts. Help us to remember that You are all-powerful and in control of everything. Help us to learn this morning that You are ready and willing to give us peace and joy in the midst of our trials, if only we would truly learn to trust that You have our best interests in mind and that You will not allow us to go through anything that's too difficult to handle. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Memory Verse

*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)*

## Lesson

In our last lesson we learned that the Holy Spirit led Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Macedonia where they had met Luke, the man who wrote the book of Acts that we are studying.

Then, the Holy Spirit led them to Philippi where they met a woman by the name of Lydia, who invited them to stay with her.

One day as they went down by the river to meet for prayer, they met a slave girl who had an evil spirit that enabled her to tell people's future.

Acts 16:16

*One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who **had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future**. She **earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes**.*

This girl's fortune-telling ability came from Satan. Many people paid her owners a lot of money to have her tell them their future.

Acts 16:17

*She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."*

This slave girl ran after Paul and called out that Paul and Silas were servants of God who have come to tell you how to have eternal life in heaven.

**Ask:** Was there anything wrong with what this girl was saying? (No!)

She was speaking the truth, but probably in a mocking tone of voice.

[Teacher, re-read verse 17 with a mocking tone of voice...]

Acts 16:18

*This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And instantly it left her.*

The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to know that this girl was a messenger of Satan and he knew he had to put a stop to what the slave girl was saying. He didn't want the truth about Jesus to be confused with fortune telling. If Paul accepted the demon's words, he would have linked the truth about Jesus with demonic activity. Truth and evil do not mix so Paul had to put a stop to it.

The Holy Spirit empowered Paul to command the evil spirit to leave her in Jesus' name. The slave girl was set free from the evil spirit's

control, but this made her owners angry. Suddenly their business was ruined.

Acts 16:19-21

*Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. (20) "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. (21) "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice."*

The girl's owners' hope of wealth was shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the town officials and accused them of teaching against the law. The crowd went wild and attacked Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:22-24

*A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. (23) They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. (24) So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.*

They stripped their clothes off and whipped them until their backs were bleeding. Then they were thrown into the inner dungeon and their feet were clamped painfully to the wall. There they were in total darkness.

Can you imagine the spiders and snakes and bats and all the other things that go bump in the night? How easy it would have been for them to grumble and complain! But they didn't.

God's Word tells us to, "*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.*" (Philippians 4:4) (By the way, this verse comes from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi that he wrote many years later.)

To rejoice in the Lord is to be joyful as you think about Him, even if you are going through hard times, like Paul and Silas were. They were locked up in prison. But they didn't complain or grumble. They were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and rejoiced in the Lord!

Paul and Silas were being treated like dangerous prisoners; but they had not done anything wrong. Who does that remind you of? (Jesus!)

**Ask:** If you were Paul and Silas, what do you think you would do as you were chained to the cold dark dungeon walls and your feet clamped painfully to the wall?

They could have cried and said they wanted to go home. They could have been angry and shouted about how unfair their treatment was. They could have yelled at God for allowing them to experience such harsh treatment.

**Ask:** When bad things happen to you how do you act?

As believers we have the power to respond like Jesus did when they crucified Him. We have the power of the Holy Spirit living right inside of us and we can call upon Him to help us respond with faith and courage.

Acts 16:25

*Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.*

They thought they were about to be put to death, yet they continued to praise the Lord. They didn't know a miracle was about to happen!

Acts 16:26-27

*Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! (27) The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself.*

Jailers in those days were put to death if their prisoners escaped. So, when he thought that Paul and Silas had escaped, the jailer tried to kill himself. But Paul stopped him.

Acts 16:28

*But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"*

When the jailer saw that the prisoners hadn't run away, he realized immediately that God had done a miracle. It was God who caused the earth to shake; it was God who opened the prison gates; it was God who loosed the prisoner's chains.

Acts 16:29-30

*The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. (30) Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

The jailer had heard Paul and Silas rejoicing in the Lord; now he wanted to know God in the same way, too. The Holy Spirit caused this jailer to realize he needed to be saved. So, Paul told him what he had to do.

Acts 16:31

*They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household."*

Paul and Silas didn't give the jailer a list of rules to follow in order to get saved! Paul simply told the jailer to believe in Jesus and you will be saved.

**Ask:** What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus?

It means that we trust that what Jesus did on the cross, satisfied God's wrath against our sin. He hates our sin! He said all sin must be punished.

We all deserve to be punished for the naughty things we do. If we trust that Jesus willingly died and gave His life's blood to pay for our sins, someday we will have eternal life with God in heaven.

Paul and Silas told the jailer that he and anyone else in his family who wanted to, could believe on Jesus and receive eternal life, too.

That's the Good News we need to tell everyone today, too.

Acts 16:32-34

*And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. (33) Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. (34) He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.*

The jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were baptized. Then the jailer brought them food to eat and he and his entire household worshipped the Lord because they were all saved from their sins!

God turned Paul and Silas' pain to joy and victory as the jailer and his family believed in the Lord.

You may not understand why God allows you to go through hard times. Sometimes it's for someone else's benefit. God let Paul and Silas go through that hard time so the jailer and his family would be saved.

So, next time you face a problem, stop felling sorry for yourself! Think about these two "R's":

- **Remember** that God is good and only wants what's best. He has a plan and a purpose in allowing you to go through trials.
- **Rejoice** in the Lord. Thank Him for all He's done for you and sing a praise song to Him.

When you face problems in this life, it doesn't help to think about how tough a time you are having, it only makes your problems seem bigger. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the bigger picture; it will cause you to rejoice in the Lord every time.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Father, when we go through hard times, help us to remember You are a good God who only wants what is best. Turn our trials into joy knowing You may be using our suffering so that someone else might come to know Your goodness, too. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### CRAFT CORNER

Cut a yellow circle for each child. On the front draw a smiley face and write out Philippians 4:4. On the back write these steps:

1. Remember something good God has done for you.
2. Rejoice in the Lord by thanking Him.

Encourage children to put the circle in a prominent place where they will see it each day as a reminder.

### GAME CENTER

Play *Pictionary* or *Charades* using lesson themes from the past few weeks. Alternate between teams. Give one minute to guess the topic. If Team A guesses correctly they get 1,000 points. If team A doesn't guess it, but Team B does, then Team B gets 500 points.

Print the following lesson theme ideas onto playing cards:

- Ananias and Sapphira Lie
- Early Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit
- God Delivers Peter from Prison
- Paul and Silas Rejoice in Prison
- Peter and John Heal the Lame Man

- Saul Becomes a Believer

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

### **Review questions:**

1. Where did Paul meet the slave girl? (Down by the riverside outside the city of Philippi.)
2. What did the slave girl do for her owners? (She made them wealthy by telling people's futures!)
3. Why was the slave girl able to tell people's future? (She had an evil spirit of Satan in her; she was possessed.)
4. Why did Paul and Silas get so annoyed with the slave girl if she was actually telling the truth about them? (She was probably calling out in a mocking tone of voice, making fun of Paul and Silas. Paul didn't want the truth of God to be confused with fortune telling.)
5. What did Paul do to the evil spirit in the slave girl? (Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of the girl.)
6. By Who's power did the evil spirit come out of the slave girl? (The power of the Holy Spirit.)
7. What happened to Paul and Silas when the slave girl's owners realized their business was ruined? (They were beaten and whipped and sent into prison.)
8. What did Paul and Silas do while they were in prison with their backs bleeding and their feet clamped painfully to the wall? (They rejoiced in the Lord!)
9. What would you do if you got sent to prison for no good reason?

10. What sudden surprise happened to Paul and Silas? (There was a great earthquake, the jail doors opened, and their handcuffs dropped off.)
11. Why did the jailer almost kill himself? (He thought that Paul and Silas escaped and he knew the punishment for letting a prisoner escape was certain death.)
12. When the jailer realized that God had done a mighty miracle what did he ask Paul and Silas? ("*What must I do to be saved?*")
13. What did Paul tell the jailer to do to be saved? (Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.)
14. What does it mean *to believe* on Jesus? (To trust that when He was crucified on the cross, He took the full punishment for your sins and satisfied God's wrath against your sin.)
15. Why did God allow Paul and Silas to go through such a horrible trial? (So the jailer and his family would be saved.)
16. When you're in the midst of a trial, what can you do to get your mind off all your troubles? (**R**emember God is good and **R**ejoice in the Lord by thanking Him.)

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