

# Paul and Silas Rejoice in Prison

(Acts 16:16-40)

## Pre-Session Warm Up

How do you react to hard or difficult times? Do you get angry? Do you lash out and say unkind things? Do you take out your frustration by being miserable or disobedient? Do you pout and feel sorry for yourself? [Teacher, let the children discuss.] Some people complain and even question whether or not God knows what He is doing! It doesn't help to think about your problems; it only makes them seem bigger.

As a Christian, you don't have to react in the flesh. Instead, all you need to do is think of something about God that will help you rejoice! He will give you gladness 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

During the past few weeks, we have been learning about life for the early Christians. In our last lesson we learned that the Holy Spirit told Paul where he should go next to share the Good News.

Last week we left Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke in Philippi where he had met a woman named Lydia down by the riverside.

One day as they walked to the place by the river to meet for prayer, a slave girl started to follow them. This girl had an evil spirit of Satan in her that enabled her to tell the 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 evil spirits. Fortune telling was a common practice in Philippi and she made her master rich by telling people their fortunes. Her masters used her fortune telling to make money. Many people paid her masters 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 proclaimed the way of salvation.

**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.

Acts 16:18 [Teacher, read with a mocking tone of voice...]

*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 see that this girl was a messenger of Satan and he knew it was time to put a stop to what the slave girl was saying. He didn't want his teaching about Jesus to be confused with fortune telling.

[Note: Teacher, if Paul accepted the demon's words, he would appear to be linking the truth about Jesus with demon-related activities. Truth and evil do not mix.]

The Holy Spirit empowered Paul to command the evil spirit to leave her in Jesus' name. And suddenly her master's business was ruined. The slave girl was set free from the evil spirit's control, but this made her master angry.

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."*

With their business ruined, the girl's owners took Paul and Silas to the town officials and accused them of teaching against the law. Then the crowd 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.*

With their backs bleeding and their feet clamped painfully into heavy wooden frames, they were surrounded by darkness.

How easy it would have been for them to grumble and complain! But they didn't. God's Word says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice." (Philippians 4:4)

To rejoice in the Lord is to be joyful or happy 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!)

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

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 in 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 the Good News about what Jesus did for us.

We all deserve to be punished for the naughty things we do. If we believe 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 to save them from sin. That's the Good News we need to tell everyone today, too.

Acts 16:32-33

*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.*

The jailer washed their wounds. And 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. Often you don't know God's purpose in allowing you to go through difficult situations. God had 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 thinking about your problem and think about of these two "R's":

- **R**emember something good God has done for you (He saved you; He supplies your needs; He's helped you through other problems); some truth from the Bible (Jeremiah 29:11; Hebrews 13:5), or something about God (He is all-powerful; He is in control of everything; He wants what is best for you).
- **R**ejoice in the Lord: thank Him for what you remember about Him or sing a praise song to Him.

You will face many problems in this life, but you can learn to rejoice in the Lord at all time.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I pray that we will all learn to trust and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the proper perspective on the things that happen to us in this life. We pray that our attitudes will be like Paul and Silas'. Help us to remember that if we choose to have peace and joy in the midst of our trials, someone may come to know who You are. 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. Why was the slave girl that followed Paul and Silas able to tell fortunes? (She had an evil spirit of Satan in her; she was possessed.)
2. What did the slave girl do for her masters? (She made them a lot of money by telling people's futures!)
3. 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.)
4. What did Paul do to the evil spirit in the slave girl? (Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of the girl.)
5. By Who's power did the evil spirit come out of the slave girl? (The power of the Holy Spirit.)
6. What happened to Paul and Silas when the slave girl's master realized his business was ruined? (They were beaten and whipped and sent into prison.)
7. 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!)
8. What would you do if you got sent to prison for no good reason?
9. What sudden surprise happened to Paul and Silas? (There was a great earthquake, the jail doors opened, and their handcuffs dropped off.)
10. 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.)

11. 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?*")
12. What did Paul tell the jailer to do to be saved? (Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.)
13. 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.)
14. Why did God allow Paul and Silas to go through such a horrible trial? (So the jailer and his family would be saved.)
15. When you're in the midst of a trial, what can you do to get your mind off all your troubles? (**R**emember something good God has done for you and **R**ejoice in the Lord by thanking Him.)

