

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

## **R<sub>2</sub>L – Resolved to Live: Making the Most of the Opportunities**

*Acts 16:25-40*

*25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. 27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” 29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 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 together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. 34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household. 35 Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, “Release those men.” 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” 37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.” 38 The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, 39 and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. 40 They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.*

Upon doing a web search for things that do not go together I came across the thoughts of one person who identified the following: *“Woolite and bleach, pickles and jelly, a hardhat and an evening gown are a few things that don’t go together. Each of these combos would yield disastrous or comical results. Although it’s possible to find unexpected treasures when pairing things that shouldn’t go together, often the results are less than satisfactory.”* Did you catch that last statement, “often the results are less than satisfactory?” But there are times for Christians when what seems to not go together actually brings about results that are incredible and to the glory of God.

While it may seem strange to most, have you ever heard a believer who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer giving thanks to God? Have you ever heard a believer praise God that he lost his job. Such things seem to make little sense, unless you know that God is good and sovereign. How about this one? Have you ever heard believers praising God for the cross of Christ, the cross, that instrument of death? And then we have one in our text; two things that seemingly do not belong together; singing and worshipping in a jail cell. None of this makes much sense to the on-looking world; but when God’s people do such things, it captures attention.

Our God loves to use difficult and unique events and the reactions of His people to show the lost their need of Jesus as Savior? How do I know this? It is right before us here in Acts 16. God presents His people with all sorts of strange and unique opportunities that allow us to fulfill His purposes in reaching people for Jesus. For example, next week we will be leaving the

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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security and comfort of an establish building to become a mobile church, meeting at a school. How backwards does that sound; yet God can use such things to reach the lost.

God sends us opportunities all the time but we often miss them because we are more concerned about fulfilling our own desires than that of God. It would be nice if God would put a neon sign on top of the situation flashing the words, “This is an opportunity!” That is not the way it works. Daily we are to exercise faith, seeking Him and His purposes in every situation of life.

It is a mindset. We need to remember that if we do not see the situations in our lives as opportunities to accomplish God’s purposes, we will not be busy about God’s work. We all agree, at least in theory, that this life is not about us, that it is about Jesus; but how does that look in our practice? Is your goal to have a fat bank account; to retire at 65; to be comfortable. Isn’t the biblical goal of life to live every moment to the glory of God, whether He gives us 80 years, 8 more years or even just 8 more minutes? Our purpose in life as Christians is to glorify God by knowing Christ and making Him known to others. Once that issue is settled, the rest of our lives may be seen as an unending line of opportunities sent to us by God. And what are these opportunities to be used for? Let’s see the answer to that in our text this morning.

Remember what happened. Paul and Silas, the servants of the Most High God are incarcerated for having set a demon-possessed slave girl free from her oppression. Of course her masters did not appreciate what Paul and Silas had done because it took away their money making machine as the girl no longer told the future. Paul and Silas were dragged into court, misrepresented, beaten with rods, and locked in stocks as though they were the worst of criminals. They did not deserve any of this, being wrongfully held; and yet it was through all of this that God supplied Paul and Silas a divine opportunity, as we will see. In our text, I would like you to see three calls that God put upon Paul and Silas to have them be and to have them do what He wanted accomplished. We need to realize that God continues to issue these calls to believers today, using them to open doors of opportunities, that we might be witnesses for Christ.

## **I. God calls you to wait on Him (25-28).**

Life is full of waiting, is it not? It seems we are always waiting on or for something. It also happens to be something that God calls His people to; to wait on Him. Often the Lord will give just enough light on our path to get us going in the direction He wants us; but that light does not extend too far down the road. The Lord does not want us trusting in ourselves, but continually on Him.

Now the word “waiting” does not imply doing nothing but sitting and twiddling our thumbs. Like a waiter who “waits” on a table at the restaurant, the word “waiting” speaks of serving. To wait on the Lord speaks of doing what we know God directed us to do until He gives us further direction. This is what we find Paul and Silas doing, serving as God had commanded, even in the midst of the most unique and unexpected circumstances. And remember this; those unexpected circumstances are ALWAYS a tool that God is using to capture the attention of the lost as they watch how you handle yourself. As people watch us in those circumstances; we ought to be engaged in what I will call unexpected responses.

Here are Paul and Silas, beaten, bloodied and bound in the stocks of an inner prison. How would the jailer had expected Paul and Silas to respond? How did they respond? Notice with me three unexpected circumstances through which Paul and Silas, as they waited on what the Lord, gave unexpected responses.

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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## **A. Unexpected circumstance #1: They were worshipping God in prison (16:25).**

*But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;*

We are told here that it was midnight and rather than sleeping, which is what most of us like to be doing at such a time, Paul and Silas were doing what? They were praying (the implication is out loud), and they were singing hymns of praise to God. They were not singing “*Nobody knows the troubles I’ve seen; nobody knows my sorrow...*” No, they were proclaiming things like, “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; for He has done great things...”

Do not forget their condition as they were singing praise. Undoubtedly bodies were still raw and bleeding from the beating the day before. We are told they are in the inner prison and as they worshipped God, there were other prisoners doing what, listening to them. They had a captive audience. But this was not a clean, air-conditioned, well-lighted sanctuary. This was a stinking, filthy prison, the smell of which I would imagine to be nauseating. Paul and Silas were not sitting in cushioned chairs or even on hard pews. Their arms and legs were in stocks, most likely stretched wide apart, causing painful cramping. But what are they doing? Something that Paul would call the Philippian believers to do and he could call them to do it by his own example; “Rejoice in the Lord always. And I will say it again, rejoice!” (4:4). Beloved, are we commanded to praise the Lord? Are we commanded to lift up our voices and proclaim the goodness and greatness of the Lord? Yes. But we tend to forget this truth, that the call to pray and to praise God do not depend on circumstances. As I have said many times, obedience to God is not dependent upon our circumstances. How did Paul and Silas have such a joy as to praise God in this circumstance? Beloved, if we know Christ, then we have the Spirit of Christ within us and do you remember what the Spirit of God produces in believers who are walking with and waiting on the Lord? What is the “fruit” that the Spirit produces? Love, joy (Paul and Silas’ motivation to praise God), peace, patience, etc...

Charles Spurgeon once said, “*Any fool can sing in the day. 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.*” Here is the point, as God’s people do what only God’s people can do; that is truly rejoice in the midst of the worst of circumstances; then even unsaved people will take note. Notice again that our text says that “the prisoners were listening to them.” The word “listening” does not mean that they simply heard the noise they were making, but implies that they were intently paying attention.

Do you see the marked difference in the life of those who are truly walking with God? Such persons tend not to be put out when mistreated by the world, but say with their Lord, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34). In fact, their intent is to turn the attention on to God rather than upon themselves. That is the unexpected! It is the opposite of what the world sees and does. Sing a hymn in the church on a Sunday morning; that is good and expected. Even non-Christians can do and indeed do that; but sing praise songs to Jesus in a prison cell; in a dark moment of life; in the presence of others; that will get people’s attention. Pray and give thanks to God before a meal; of course; but pray out loud before a room of criminals, as we see Paul did, and now the audience is curious.

But there was nothing rehearse about their worship. It was spontaneous and real. And do you know why they were able to do this? Because it was already their practice; they had already

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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learned to praise God in any and all circumstances. Is this true of you? Let me ask you, do you sing praise to the Lord during any other time in the week than when you come to church? Do you pray and read the Scriptures, feeding your mind with material that you can use anytime to praise the Lord? Many of you have times of daily prayer and Bible reading, but do you also have daily times of singing praise to God; so that when your circumstances get hard, your natural response is praise? That was the first unexpected response. Here is the second...

## **B. Unexpected Circumstance #2: There was an great earthquake (16:26).**

*...and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.*

This is nothing ordinary about this earthquake. Luke records that it so shook the foundations of the prison house that it caused the doors to open, yet there were no injuries. It was also unusual as it caused the locks and chains of the stockade to fall off. Everyone's chains were loosed and thus the prisoners were “free.” What would you expect the prisoners to do? This leads us to the third unexpected circumstance...

## **C. Unexpected Circumstance #3: The prisoners chose not to escape (27-28).**

*27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!”*

How great and unusual was this earthquake? Evidently the jailer slept through it, waking just in time to see that the prison doors were opened. According to Roman law and custom, if a prisoner escaped while under guard, that jailer would receive the punishment of the prisoners. So when the jailer saw the opened doors, his thought was that the prisoners were gone; that they had escaped. Not willing to live with shame of losing them, he drew his sword, ready to take his own life.

Did you ever wonder how it was that the jailer did not see the prisoners, but somehow Paul knew to cry “out with a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!’”? What kind of response is that? If Paul had been intent on revenge for the way he and Silas had been treated, he might have let the jailer fall on his sword. What I would have you notice is Paul Biblical worldview. He did not see people as enemies but rather as victims of the enemy; that enemy being sin! Paul's heart was to see people converted to Christ, not condemned by their sin. And so Paul takes the initiative.

How many of you have ever been hurt by someone; by what he did or said to you or about you? Have you ever been misrepresented by someone else? What is your general reaction? Upset? Mad? Bothered? Wanting to defend yourself? Have you ever thought that perhaps God is putting you into a position to reach that person with the truth of God? You have a choice; to either respond in the flesh; or you can choose to treat that person the way God has treated you; with grace and mercy.

How is that possible? Believe me; we do not do it on our own. It is not natural to respond to ill-treatment with kindness. It is supernatural to choose to respond to a person with love; with the intent to help. Did I make that up? Is that really what our Lord wants us to do? Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 6:27-28, **“27 “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”**

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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One of the reasons given for the rapid spread of Christianity during the first few hundred years of its existence is that the Christians, when mocked and mistreated responded to their persecutors in love. Rather than retreat or retaliate, they would reach out with Godly kindness. That is unexpected and disarming and gave the Christians opportunities to share the gospel of Christ.

The reason why responding like this is difficult is because we desire instant gratification. We want things to be resolved right now. Some of you heard about my little run in with the city of Rogers; something that required me to speak to the city attorney. My circumstances had the potential of taking weeks, along with much effort to get resolved; but it was something that was cleared up in less than 24 hours. That was great; but it does not always work like that; sometimes the Lord has us wait; calling us to look to Him, day by day and even moment by moment; believing that He will bring about His own good answer in His time. Will you resolve to wait on the Lord? Wait, meaning to serve Him with what you do know He wants you to do until He reveals to you another direction. But there is more...

## II. God calls you to witness for Him (29-34).

There is a simple biblical truth revealed in these next verses and it is this; God opens up opportunities to talk to people about Jesus in the midst of every trial. The problem is not the lack of God-appointed opportunities; no, the problem is we get so wrapped up in ourselves that we miss the opportunities. A biblical worldview has us looking for opportunities to be a witness for Christ; an ordinary worldview has us looking at how to make our own lives the most comfortable and stress free. A biblical worldview is intent on sharing the gospel; an ordinary worldview is content with most anything else. And if we are to share the gospel of Christ, we must know it. Paul shares the gospel here and I would have you see with me four things he includes in his gospel presentation. This is how we can share the gospel as well.

### A. To be saved requires repentance (29-30).

*29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*

Shocked by hearing Paul’s voice, the jailer rushed in; understandably fearful. He had heard Paul and Silas earlier in the night, preaching the gospel, singing songs of praise. The earthquake was of such a nature that seemingly caused the jailer to see this as a God-thing. Somehow in the night the jailer had heard the gospel and now, so overwhelmed by the message and what had just happened, he asked the question, “What must I do to be saved?” That question reveals a couple of things about repentance.

First, repentance, the idea of turning from one’s sin in order to turn from God begins when you come to see yourself as a sinner; lost and separated from God because of your own sin. It is to see God as absolutely holy, pure and perfect and to see your own sin as a stain upon the perfection of God who created you. It is to realize you cannot be in His presence in your current condition; a condition you want to turn from.

This brings us to the second part of repentance, sensing a true desire to change. When the jailer said, “What must I do to be saved?” he was saying in effect, “I cannot go on living the way I have, something has to happen; something must be changed. That is repentance; the desire to turn from sin in order to turn to the living God. In addition to repentance...

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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## **B. To be saved requires faith (16:31).**

*They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”*

Salvation; deliverance; conversion from a life that leads to death to a life that leads to true life requires faith. But what is faith? According to Hebrews 11:1, **“faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”** Faith must be in the right object; it must be a hope in the right person. Paul shares two things that must be a part of our faith...

First, you must believe in Jesus. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? It means that you take as true all the Bible says about who Jesus is God come to us in the flesh; and in what He; dying on the cross for our sins. As Romans 5:8 says, **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

But there is a second aspect about this. Not only are we to believe in Jesus, but we believe that He is Lord! To believe that Jesus is Lord is to know that He is to be your master; the controlling influence in your life. The one who is saved has a desire to see Jesus come to have first place in every area of his or her life. This is true for anyone who believes or has faith in the Lord Jesus. It is for the jailer as well as for anyone in his household. Whomever believes will be saved. This brings us to a third requirement for salvation; there is repentance, faith and next...

## **C. To be saved requires receiving the Word of God (32).**

*And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.*

The Bible is clear that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Emotional stories and dreams about heaven or hell cannot bring salvation. I know that many people have been moved by such things, but genuine faith comes only as the Word of God is used to present Christ.

How can you know if you are saved? How can you know if you have been born-again? One evidence is that you long to hear the Word. And you long to have your family and friends to hear it, like the jailer and his family did. The danger will never be that we speak the Word of God too much; the danger is that we will speak of it too little. Salvation requires repentance, faith, receiving the Word and finally, as noted in our text...

## **D. Being saved results in a changed life (16:33-34).**

*33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. 34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.*

Notice that our text indicates a changed life for the jailer. This one who had previously cared less about Paul and Silas now took them home to cleanse their wounds. In these two verses we find four signs that are true of people who are genuinely saved.

First, there is remorse over sin (33a). The first thing the jailer did was wash their wounds, wounds that he had a part in inflicting. It was this jailer who locked them up, possibly beating them before that. But here he is seeking to set things right. He may not be able to remove the scars, but he can soothe the wounds. Beloved, one sign of a changed heart is one that is sickened by the way it used to live, think and act.

A second sign of a genuinely saved person is the desire to be baptized; to publically identify with Christ and His people. We see this at the end of verse 33, **“immediately he was**

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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**baptized.”** The jailer wants to publically renounce his former life and wants everyone to know his intention to live for Jesus. Is this your desire?

The third sign of a genuinely saved person is the manifestation of true, godly joy. Notice how verse 34 ends, **“rejoiced greatly...”** What was the source of His joy? The source was the Lord Jesus Christ. What was the reason for his joy? Because he and a number from his household had believed that Jesus was Savior and Lord. When salvation comes to a person, his or her perspectives change on a number of things. Rather than finding happiness in things or with money, true joy is found in the simple truth of knowing Jesus and growing in that knowledge. True joy is found in seeing God working in the lives of those we live with, those we work with, and in those we worship with. True joy is found in seeing our children grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ unto salvation.

God accomplished all of this in just one sleepless night for Paul, Silas, the jailer and his household. So we have seen that we are called to wait upon the Lord; to witness for the Lord and finally...

### III. God calls us to watch Him open up more opportunities (16:35-40)

When we walk with the Lord; when we wait on Him and witness for Him, then the inevitable result is more opportunities to make Jesus known! Let us walk through the final three scenes of our text to see who this works.

#### A. The officials deflected their responsibility (35-36).

*35 Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, “Release those men.” 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.”*

Upon review, the city leaders came to see they really had no grounds to punish Paul and Silas further. No doubt there hope was that they had intimidated Paul and Silas enough to tuck tail and run. The city officials were hoping that all of this would just go away. They realized an injustice had been done to Paul and Silas, but wanted to just ignore it. Paul on the other hand, chose to use the situation as yet another opportunity to make Christ known. We are to use our position or status in life to make Christ known and so...

#### B. Paul declared their wrongdoing (16:37-39).

*37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.” 38 The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, 39 and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.*

Paul knew that by declaring the truth of what happened, it would open up doors of opportunity; if not right at that moment, at least later. Paul might want to come back to Philippi (and he did) so he had to set the stage for his return. In other words, Paul saw this (and indeed every) situation as an opportunity to make Christ known.

Paul did not do this for revenge or for personal reasons, but for the purpose of making Christ known. Paul had said nothing before this time because all the officials were doing was affecting Paul’s personal rights. But upon leaving the city, Paul knew he had to do something to

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## Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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make later opportunities. If Paul and the other had just disappeared from town, then rumors and false information could spread about who they were and more importantly, whom they represented. Paul declared the wrongdoing of the people publically for the sake of the gospel. Paul was protecting the young church in Philippi from future problems, giving the believers a sure foundation from which to make Jesus known in the city.

Having smoothed things out for the church, next...

### **C. Paul determined to complete his work (16:40).**

*They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia [it would seem they came in the midst of a church service], and when they saw the brethren [it would seem that many people had been saved by this time], they encouraged them [one of the reasons why the church meets] and departed [moved on to see more opportunities].*

The events in Philippi may have discouraged many others from Christian service, but Paul and his team were determined as ever to take the gospel further. Nothing would thwart the purpose of God in spreading the gospel. I love what John MacArthur said of this episode, “Once again Satan’s plans were frustrated and overruled by God’s sovereign control of events. The persecution Satan unleashed to destroy the Philippian church merely added another household to it and gained it protection from the city’s rulers.”

I would well imagine that many other things took place here in Philippi, but as we noted before, Luke is giving us a selective history, conserving space. But notice the progression of the story, from an influential businesswoman named Lydia, to a lower class slave girl, to a middle class Gentile jailer. Why these three people? It has been noted that Jewish men prayed a morning prayer that went something like this, “*Blessed art thou, oh Lord Thy God, for not making me a slave, a Gentile, or a woman.*” Before everyone gets offended by this (we can explain it a bit more during our second hour), just note that these are the exact three categories that God chose to save first in Philippi. The point? The message of Christ can reach and will reach anyone; and thus we must be resolved to make the most of every opportunity.

What does this mean for us? It means we need to be identifying witnessing opportunities in our lives. Every day you have opportunities to talk to people about Jesus; if you are waiting on God; if you are witnessing for Jesus and if you are watching for more opportunities.

Second, will you make the most of those opportunities? Let us beg God to grant us the ability to make the most of every opportunity for Jesus Christ!

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*Soli Deo Gloria*

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