

Sermon for January 17, 2021, “The power of prayer and praise”

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:19-34 ¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³²They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Introduction: The power of prayer and praise

As we live our Christian life, we experience the wonderful grace that hymns to God give us. There are many stories in the Bible that offer the experience of amazing Power and Grace through singing hymns to God. In the book of Samuel, there is a story about how David heals King Saul from his agony from of an evil spirit by playing an instrument and singing (1 Samuel 16:14-23).

Also, as seen in today's text, we can see that Paul and Silas, imprisoned in Philippi prison, experience amazing miracles through prayer and praise to God.

As such, we can experience change and amazing power through prayer and praise to God. I hope we will meet in the bible those who have experienced such a miracle through today's message. Also, we hope that we will experience God's amazing grace and power through prayer and praise.

Body: Paul and Silas' prayers and praise

According to today's text, Paul and Silas preach in Philippi during their second Missionary Journeys. One day as they were going down to the place of prayer on the Sabbath, they met a demon-possessed slave girl, and healed her. As a result, the masters of the slave girl who made money through the divination of the slave girl were economically hurt. Paul and Silas were imprisoned for this, despite there being no apparent crime. This is because Paul and Silas, foreigners, were accused of teaching customs that the Romans could neither receive nor practice.

Paul and Silas faced an unfair situation in prison, but they were not resentful. Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God around midnight when they were in prison. And then, an amazing thing happened: After a massive earthquake, all doors of the prison immediately flew open and the chains of every prisoner fell off. The jailer thought that Paul and Silas had run away and tried to commit suicide, but Paul and Silas appeared and stopped the jailer from committing suicide. After that, the jailer hears the Gospel by Paul and becomes a Christian. This is the story of today's text.

Like Paul and Silas, we, children of God, can experience amazing change and power through “prayer” and “praise.” So what is the meaning of the prayers and praise of Paul and Silas?

1. Prayers and hymns offered in the worst situation

Let’s look at today’s text Acts 16:23-25, “After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them

in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”

As you can see from this passage, being imprisoned means that the possibility of all activities is blocked. However, Paul and Silas prayed to God and sang hymns, even when all circumstances were unfavorable. Such faith of Paul and Silas is not small thing.

In fact, we often see people who only blame circumstances that are unfavorable to them. However, believers should not blame the environment, but overcome the environment with faith. Furthermore, we must turn the unfavorable environment into faith. This is what a true believer looks like.

Here is a short story: The day after a severe an all-night thunder and lightning storm, a little boy asks his father a question. **“What was God doing when the storm and lightning hit last night?”**, **“Why didn’t God stop the storm and lightning?”** The child’s father answers, **“God was making a new morning in the storm and lightning.”**

We look at storms and lightning, complain and are afraid, but remember that God is the one who makes a new morning out of them. What is the second meaning of the prayers and praise of Paul and Silas?

2. Prayer and praise that worked miracles

Today's text, Acts 16:26 says, “Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.”

In general, when we sing, we often need to feel good or comfort. So it is not easy to sing hymns in the midst of physical hardships and psychological difficulties. Nevertheless, Paul and Silas sang hymns to God. Here is the great faith of Paul and Silas. **If so, what was the faith of Paul and Silas?**

First, they believed in the presence of God in prison. Paul and Silas believed in God's presence everywhere, regardless of time and place. This is the heart of Paul and Silas' faith. So there is no need to be anxious and worried because God is with us. If we believe that God is with us, we can sing even in prison.

Second, Paul and Silas believed that even if all works did not follow by their will and plan, God had a better will and plan for them. In fact, the personal desire of Paul and Silas would have been more welcome to people than to suffer during their second Missionary Journeys. However, there are much more persecutions and hardships than people welcome. Even so, they are not disappointed, because they firmly believe that God will have a better plan for them. So they pray and sing hymns.

In today's text, we can see a side of God's amazing plan that we do not understand. Today's text, Acts 16:30-34, tells the amazing event of how a prison guard who was guarding Paul and Silas in prison accepted Christ and accepted the Gospel.

Paradoxically, the Philippian Church would not have been born if Paul and Silas had not been imprisoned. While Paul and Silas were imprisoned, they had the opportunity to preach to the jailer. Then Paul preached to the guard's family and the whole family believed in Jesus. In this way, the church was born by planting the seeds of the gospel in Philippi. God had a better plan than Paul and Silas. Because Paul and Silas trust God's will and plan, they were able to sing hymns and pray while in prison.

Finally, what is the meaning of the prayers and praise of Paul and Silas?

3. Prayer and praise that saved souls

Today's text, Acts 16:27-29 says, “The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!' The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.”

This verse shows that Paul and Silas saved the life of a prison guard who tried to commit suicide. So, in the end, Paul and Silas save the jailer and the souls of his family.

Today's text, Acts 16:30-34 continues to say, **“He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.”(vv.30-32)**

“At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.”(vv.33-34)

As these verses show, Paul and Silas were God's gifts to the jailer. The jailer was invited to salvation through Paul, and as a result, the jailer's whole family believed in God and was greatly pleased about it. Here we see people's praise for God. That is, people rejoice greatly in believing in God.

Christians have amazing abilities that the world cannot give. It is the name of Jesus Christ. By believing in the name of Jesus Christ, we have hope and lead lives that influence others. There is nothing more precious than saving a soul in this world. Paul's prayer and hymn to God have had amazing results in saving one soul.

Conclusion: Christians who live by the power of prayer and praise

Now let's summarize today's sermon. Christians must be able to be sure that God is with us when we face hardships and suffering. And we have to be sure that God is always the one who gives us the best.

As Paul and Silas show us, where there is prayer and praise, the power of God appears and change begins. So when prayer and praise begin in our homes, our homes begin to change. When there is prayer and praise in the church, the church begins to revitalize. And Christian prayers and praise to God have the power to transform society into a more beautiful community. I pray that our lives will be like this.