


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
July 27 - August 2, 2008

Acts 16:16-40

Prison Break

1 Come out of her!

Read. Acts 16:16-18 NLT

One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a demon-possessed slave girl. She was a fortune-teller who earned a lot of money for her masters. 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 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.

Read. Luke 10:18-20 TNIV

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Think.

- Describe the girl that Paul encountered in the marketplace. What did she yell out as she followed Paul? Why was this a problem for Paul? Why did he wait "many days" before doing something about this? What did he finally do? What was the immediate response?
- Can we still encounter the demonic like this today? Have you ever personally had an encounter with the demonic? What happened?
- Do you tend to think that people make too much of the demonic (a "demon around every corner") or not enough? Why? How would you define a balanced view of the demonic and spiritual warfare?
- What do you learn from Paul's handling of this demon-possessed slave girl?
- What additional light does Jesus' assurance to his disciples shed on the whole subject of spiritual warfare?

Pray.

Lord, empower me to be sober and vigilant when it comes to the dark powers of this world, but not to allow them to define me nor to confine me in a straight jacket of fear.

Live.

Find a way to bless someone who really annoys you this week.

Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom,
imprisoned in iron chains of misery.
"LORD, help!" they cried in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom;
he snapped their chains.
Psalm 107:10, 13-14 NLT

"Gentlemen, will you please tell me how I can get out of this mess?"

The jailor sat in the rubble of his own prison in the dark. The earth had literally shaken the foundations of the prison – and in so doing had shaken the jailor himself to the very core.

His keep was a shambles, his prisoners no doubt fled, his career toppling, his own life forfeit.

The jailor had become the jailed.

Only one way out now: an honorable, self-inflicted death. With sword turned upward jabbing into his own vitals, he prepared to fall on it, bringing, hopefully, a swift end to the mess surrounding him.

On the verge of crying out in his own death rattle, he is interrupted by another cry. "Do no harm to yourself, we are all here!" How had the voice known where he was in the dark, he thought, all alone?

Dropping the sword he grasped the light. Other roused guards still shaking off the dust stumble towards the voice with torches, their light revealing two men standing free but lingering for the jailor's freedom.

It was quite the prison break. Peter had experienced the ground shaking in concert with prayer, and a dramatic prison break of his own. Paul had both elements wrapped up into one event. But whereas Peter's guards were felled with the executioner's blade, Paul sees his jailer step into new life. It doesn't matter how deep the jailer's question ran – whether he was looking for escape from his immediate dilemma or to deeper issues of the soul. Paul's answer – trust in Jesus – ultimately fits both levels, and every level in between; for the good news of Jesus is God's ultimate rescue operation – the ultimate prison break for captive and captor alike.

2) Into the inner dungeon

Read. Acts 16:19-24 NLT

Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice." A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

Read. 2 Timothy 3:11-12 NLT

You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured. You know all about how I was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra—but the Lord rescued me from all of it. Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Think.

- What accusation was made about Paul and Silas? What was the real issue? What was done to Paul and Silas?
- Paul will make use of his Roman citizenship later — why do you think he doesn't issue a protest here?
- Have you ever taken a beating for being a Jesus follower — physically, emotionally or otherwise? What happened? How did you respond?

Pray.

Lord, help me not to freak when I'm treated like one because I'm following you. Help me not to egg on opposition, but also not to run from it when it comes.

Live.

Bless and minister to someone who's been beaten by life.

4) What must I do to be saved?

Read. Acts 16:29-34 NLT

The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he 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, along with everyone in your household." And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. 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. 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.

Think.

- Where, emotionally and spiritually, do you think the jailer was when Paul cried out to him? What question does he ask? What was Paul's answer? Why is Paul careful to include the jailer's entire household in his assurance of salvation?
- How deeply did you sense your need for salvation when you first called out to the Lord for help? How fully have you personally embraced Paul's answer?
- What change took place in the jailer that night? How was this change evidenced? What impact did all this have on his household?
- How would you like to see yourself and your own family or group impacted by Jesus in a fresh way?

Pray.

Holy Spirit, make a fresh move in my heart and life — let me not fear the dust and rubble of shaken foundations through which your change comes.

Live. Humble yourself and ask for help when you need it this week.

3) Shaken to its foundations

Read. Acts 16:25-28 NLT

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. 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! 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. But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"

Read. Psalm 107:13-16 NLT

"LORD, help!" they cried in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom;
he snapped their chains.
Let them praise the LORD for his great love
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.
For he broke down their prison gates of bronze;
he cut apart their bars of iron.

Think.

- What enabled Paul and Silas to be singing hymns and praying in the dark? What kept them from being sullen, bitter and depressed?
- What tends to be your response to personal injustice? How can you move closer to Paul's heart response in that prison cell?
- Why is the jailer prepared to kill himself? How does Paul save him?
- Where in this world would you like to see some "prison gates" broken down and some "bars of iron" cut apart?

Pray.

Lord, rescue me from self-destruction or efforts at mere self-preservation. Help me to hear and move to the cry of the distressed

Live. Find a way this week to bless someone in prison.

5) Let those men go!

Read. Acts 16:35-40 NLT

The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!" So the jailer told Paul, "The city officials have said you and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace." But Paul replied, "They have publicly beaten us without a trial and put us in prison—and we are Roman citizens. So now they want us to leave secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves to release us!"

When the police reported this, the city officials were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. So they came to the jail and apologized to them. Then they brought them out and begged them to leave the city. When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

Think.

- Why the change in heart with the city officials? Why does Paul now make a big issue over his Roman citizenship? Why is he so hard on the officials — and how does that harmonize with "turning the other cheek"?
- Do you have a hard time pointing out that an apology is needed when a wrong has been done? Do you tend to be overly assertive? Overly passive? Why? How can we find and maintain a healthy balance in "speaking the truth in love"?

Pray.

Lord, help me to own up to my errors and transgressions — and show me how to hold others accountable for theirs. Show me when to speak up and when to shut up; when to bear injustice in silence and when to raise my voice in protest. Lead me in this grace!

Live. As called for, apologize for a wrong you've done — and lovingly confront over a wrong done to you.