

Message - 05-29-22
Ps 97; Rev 22:16:12-14, 16-17, 20-21;
Ac 16:16-34; Jn 17:20-26

Think back to Paul, Silas and Luke arriving in the City of Philippi. It was a wonderful Sabbath when Paul baptized Lydia and her entire household. Paul continued to walk from Lydia's house down to the riverbank to meet the folks who showed up for prayer and worship. He could always supply the Word of God – and teach and disciple the believers. Paul was in his element when he was serving the Lord.

One day, as the ministry team made their way to the place of prayer, a young woman with a “spirit of divination” shouted out what she understood supernaturally about these Jesus followers. Then, as the days passed, the girl continued to follow them and proclaim that they were servants of the Most High God whenever they walked by.

Paul did not appreciate the free advertising. He was annoyed by the pesky spirit that had hold of her. So, one day he turned and spoke not to the possessed woman, but to the spirit that was in her: “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her;” (v 18) said Paul. The Scripture says the spirit left her immediately. Note the power of the Holy Spirit – and the power of the name of Jesus. Another sign. What happened is good news to anyone who wishes to please God. The young woman was set free from an evil spirit. But we learn that these unscrupulous business people have recourse to Roman law. They charge Paul and Silas with disturbing the peace and being Jewish. Talk about unfair! The magistrate orders the missionaries to be stripped, beaten and thrown in jail.

Looks terrible for the good guys. They are even put in the stocks. In case you have trouble feeling the pain of what Paul and Silas endured. The Voice of the Martyrs ministry reports:

“On May 23, 2019, India reelected Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a staunch supporter of Hindutva — a pervasive Hindu nationalist ideology that calls for India to be a completely Hindu nation. Modi has said Christians and other non-Hindus have no place in India.

During Modi's first term, our brothers and sisters in India endured increased beatings, imprisonment and the destruction of their church buildings by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) — a Hindu nationalist organization, of which Modi was a member before he entered politics. During the next five years of Modi's second term, Christians expect to suffer even more persecution.” (nfo@vomusa.org)

Local pastors in India must endure so-called lawful charges that they are criminals in our day. We must dwell on these events. Please pray for those who are called to take the Gospel to the people. Your prayers make a difference. Our fellow believers will be shielded and defended by the power of the Holy Spirit when we pray.

As Paul Harvey used to say, “Now, the rest of the story.” Paul and Silas are praying there in the inner room of the prison, unable to move. They sing a few praise songs and pray some more. Suddenly, there is a huge rumbling and loud cracking sound as the earth shakes and breaks the foundation of the prison. The doors of the jail cells are sprung open. All chains are broken. Everyone is suddenly free. Wondrous and terrifying! Another sign from God. The poor jailer figures all his prisoners will run away, and he will be executed for dereliction of duty. He draws his sword and is about to impale himself. Paul calls out to him, “Don't harm yourself; we're all here!” (v 28)

The jailer is awe-struck. He sends for lights and descends into the innermost part of the jail. He kneels before Paul and Silas asking, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (v 30) I have some questions here. Does the jailer want to be saved from the Roman authorities? Does he want to be saved from the terror of the massive quake that so miraculously freed the prisoners? We read and welcome the miracle that took place in the Philippian jail. What do you need to be saved from? From the government? From natural and man-made terrors? From yourself? Just asking. Jesus is able to save you and me from the things we fear – outside and inside ourselves.

(Continued on next page.)

The jailer lives very close to the jail, I believe. The Scripture says he takes the Christians outside and there they share the Gospel with him. They explain that he is saved by believing in Jesus Christ. He takes them into his home and performs first aid on their wounds caused by being beaten. Then, Paul and Silas baptize the jailer and his entire household. There is rejoicing then and there in the wee hours of the morning. They share a meal – and just as Lydia’s house became a Christian gathering place in Philippi – so this house becomes a Christian home also.

The Father and Jesus Christ send angels, as we see so often in these scenes of heaven revealed by John of Patmos. The angel beckons to everyone who is willing to come – Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to woo and beckon hearts and souls to come to Him. We, the Bride – the church are sent to say, “Come! Come to Jesus!”

The jailer understands that there is a call going out. What must we do to be saved? Acknowledge that God is sovereign. He does as he pleases with the very foundation of the prisons that hold us. He shakes and breaks the foundation of all that degrades and shames you and me. Watch and pray! Be on the look-out for the acts of power that show the Spirit – the blessed Holy Spirit is near – still moving – still changing hearts!

The Gospel of John has brought us to the great High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. He is still preparing His disciples for His execution, death and burial. Jesus prays for His followers to become one – as He and His Heavenly Father are one. By the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, believers are united – joined together in awe and amazement. Two new congregations have begun in Philippi – in the home of Lydia and now in the home of the jailer. Amen.