

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTERIES

E MAIL ADDRESS
PKBedwell@hotmail.com

Web Site Address
Bedwellglobalministeries

EXPOSITORY SERMON

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SONGS IN THE NIGHT

Scripture Reading – Acts 16:16-31.

Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles written by Luke traces the beginnings of the early church. It is a history of how the church began to develop and penetrate the paganism of that time. It not only records the significant events which took place, it also accentuated the movement of God the Holy Spirit upon His church, and the vibrant dynamic spirit and passion which gripped the minds and the hearts of God's people. It is quite clear that the reason for this is found in the simple yet powerful principle defined in Acts 15 and the 28th verse. It was the guiding principle on which all decisions were made and all actions were implemented, **"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."** This is where they started. There is no mystery here. There is nothing really complicated about it. The Holy Spirit was pre-eminent in the life of those early disciples. It never ceases to

amaze me why so many in the contemporary church do not appear to have latched on to this fundamental principle. They may give it a casual nod of agreement to its importance. Some even verbally approve of it because it sounds like the right stand to take. But they are so busy about many things that it is pushed into the background and neglected. This is tragic. So often they are like Martha when one day Jesus visited her house. She was busy in the kitchen while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to what He had to say. Martha complained about that, but Jesus said **Mary had chosen the better part**. From the human point of view Martha's way of doing things was the better part. The human mind tends to be impressed and occupied with human plan, human ingenuity and human busyness. All of which has a measure of value. From the Divine point of view, however, what Mary did was of first importance. Jesus made this clear when he said that Mary who sat at His feet listening to what He had to say - she had chosen the best way. It was not that what Martha did was so wrong, but it had the touch of the human upon it. She was caught up in her busyness. She thought that her busyness she had more value than listening to Jesus. Spending time with Jesus was not part of that busyness. She placed emphasis on the wrong priority. Mary however sat at the Feet of Jesus, listened and learned from Him. She took time away from the busyness of home responsibilities to be in touch with Jesus and Jesus said that it was the better way. (See Luke 10:38-42)

Now it is clear the early church was in vital contact with God. The

Apostles were in vital touch with Holy Spirit and they recognized His sovereignty in their mission to win the world to Christ. Their philosophy was always **“it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us.”** They were in touch with the Divine and they carried out His instructions. They took seriously what Jesus commanded them to do. To wait for the promise of the Father, and they would be filled and empowered by the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. They believed Him when He said “without me you can do nothing.” And they acted upon it. Here is the open secret for the success of the early disciples as they strove to bring the gospel of Christ to a lost world. The power and fervor with which they preached the gospel- impacted the world because God was upon His people in power and glory. This impact on the world was such, that Luke tells us, they **turned the world upside down**. I find that amazing. It was not because God chose specialized people to do His work. Let us never forget that the church was composed of common people and ordinary people like you and I. They made themselves available to God and extra-ordinary things took place through these ordinary people. While they were differences in personalities, social standing, family background and environment, they had one thing in common. They were all filled with the Spirit of God, and the disciples who were gripped with fear before Calvary, after Pentecost went into the world to proclaim the Gospel with boldness. When they were persecuted they rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Men and women of the Spirit are joyfully resilient. The question that haunts us is “can we possess the same resilient spirit - the same spiritual power - the same spiritual victory?” I believe we can, if we fulfill the conditions that the early church fulfilled. Indeed in many areas it is happening in the church in our day. One of the fruits of the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit is a resilient victorious spirit.

In the story we read of Paul and Silas in prison what struck me was the joy with which they praised the Lord. They had been charged with sedition. They were placed in stocks and beaten with rods. It was physical brutality of the worst kind. But they sang in the darkest hour of the night, for they sang at midnight. Their voices lifted in praise. Their backs were lacerated, bruised, bleeding and unwashed. Down in that dungeon they praised God. These were not circumstances conducive to singing. We would understand it a little better if they endured all of this with a quiet resignation or in stoical silence. We can understand that. Witnessing to the power of God was what they were about in the world. Their singing was their witness in the dungeon. These men were possessed of a Spirit who enabled them to sing in spite of the pain and dark circumstances.

We might ask “How can this be? This should not be! My first question would be, “what do these men have that inspires them to rejoice in spite of their agonizing circumstances?” They were not caught up in their pain they were caught up in their God. This tells me that we do not necessarily need beautiful sanctuaries or carefully monitored temperatures

and entertaining music to inspire praise and worship. We do not need a perfect environment and comfortable life style in order serve and worship God. These things maybe enjoyable and acceptable, but they are not indispensable to the spirit of worship. When worship is from the heart, it does not matter where we worship, or in what circumstances we face, because true worship involves focusing our whole being on God. Genuine worship is an attitude or posture of the heart and should not be controlled by the outward conditions. This singing in the prison house came from within and it was a dynamic witness to those about them. What they preached they lived. The difficulties did not dampen their singing. . Their problems did not paralyze their praise. There is no doubt that something miraculous took place in the prison that night. They sang songs in the in the darkest hour of the night.

The question I ask is “why was it possible to reveal this wonderful spirit?” “What gave birth to exuberant joy? A study of this incident in the life of the early church has the answer to this question. The followers of Jesus had found the secret of singing in all circumstances. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is the open secret of their resilience. Men and women of the Spirit have a song in their hearts no matter what the circumstances maybe. It is the Holy Spirit who gives a song in the night.

Paul and Silas were concentrating on witnessing and the preaching of the Gospel as they were led by the Holy Spirit. This commitment to their witness for Christ was defined and definite. The question still remains as

to why were they able to sing songs in the night.

To sum it all up It was because of their complete

1. DEPENDENCE ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD. Acts 16:16-18,25, The

scripture tells us in verse 16 that they were on their way to the,

a.Place of Prayer. And again in verse 25, they were praying in the

dungeon. They possessed the constant spirit of of persistent prayer

which was an integral part of the life and ministry of the early Christians.

Prayer is a testimony to dependence on God. It is a clear recognition of

total reliance on Him. These men always found a place of prayer, for they knew prayer is dependence on the presence and power of God. They also

knew that the place of prayer linked them to the power of God. In all of

their service to God they found the place of prayer. And it is also clear that

the place of prayer is,

b. The Place of Power. Acts 16:18 The presence of the Holy Spirit is

essentially the power of the church or the Christian. Jesus said that they

would receive power after the Holy Spirit came upon them. This is the

answer to the weakness of man. The channel of this power is prayer.

Power is appropriated when prayer links the impotence of man with the

omnipotence(Almighty power) of God.

In this incident, Paul and Silas faced a demon which possessed a

slave girl. It was only the power of God which could defeat this evil spirit.

They found that power in the place of prayer. R. A. Torrey wrote “that

prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouse of God’s infinite grace

and power. All that God is and all that God has is at our disposal.” If there is prayerlessness in the life in our lives, it is an indication that we think that we do not need God’s presence and power in our lives or in the life of the Church. We may not do this intentionally. But it is a dangerous unintentional attitude to have. All ranged about us are “rulers, authorities, the powers of the dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:12. These are the malignantly evil forces with which we are confronted. There is no program or ministry no matter how good or well planned they maybe that can defeat or overcome these powers - NONE AT ALL. Nor can the child of God conquer them in his own strength. Paul tells us that we do not live by the standards of the world. For though we live in the world we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 2 Corinthians 10:2-4. Divine power lies in a dynamic and vibrant prayer life. If we are too busy to pray we are too busy to have power and too busy to be effective. To do God’s work without prayer is dangerous and ineffective. I am becoming more and more convinced of this. I agree with Dr. W.E McCumber who rightly warned us that “the mission of Jesus is unsafe in the hands of a prayer less church. The devil fears nothing less than he fears a people who play at religion but do not pray.” There is a real sense that in our personal lives and in the church when we do not pray we are playing at religion. On the contemporary scene we seem to be more

willing to spend time planning for church ministries and activities than we are to spend time in prayer. It is unmistakably clear that while prayer may not have lost its place in the church it has lost its place of priority. The result is that there may be a great deal of activity in the church but without prayer we accomplish little. It is not that these activities are invalid. Strategies and forward planning may have their place. I want to make clear that this not a discussion to discount or eliminate the need for strategies. It is not a challenge to discard ministries in the church, but rather a challenge to re-evaluate our priorities in order to ensure that Biblical priorities are established. The early Christians were redemptively effective because they recognized what was the essential and indispensable priority in church witness, church expansion and the evangelization of all people of all nations. The pre-eminence and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit was of first importance in the hearts and mind of those early Christians. What is clearly evident in our day that prayer seems to have lost its place of priority in the church and in the lives of many Christians. Paul and Silas in the midst of their missionary journey took time to go the place of prayer. The place of prayer is the place of spiritual power.

One day in Lucerne, Switzerland, a man went up to the summit of Mt. Pilatus in a cable car operated by hydraulic power. As he ascended, he marveled the miracles of modern engineering. More than halfway up, his attention was caught by a waterfall. The water poured down the

mountainside. If the railway symbolized modern science, then that waterfall was the symbol of primitive nature. What a contrast! He thought. Then it suddenly occurred to him that the waterfall was not a contrast but a complement. It was the source of that hydraulic power. It was the force of that water that was driving him up. So it is with prayer. The power that takes us up to God is the same power that comes from God. The Apostles were able to sing in the darkest hour of the night because of their dependence on God.

Furthermore note their commitment to their mission was evident by their

2. DEVOTION TO THE PURPOSES OF GOD. Acts 16:17.

This devotion is revealed because they had committed themselves to

a. The Rule of a God's Sovereignty in their Lives. Acts 16:17. They knew to whom they were surrendered. The demon in the slave girl recognized this to be true. "These men are **"servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."** Acts 16:17. The key phrase here is that they **were "servants of the Most High God."** This was the testimony of the demon about them. That is significant. In these words the demon revealed the complete devotion of Paul and Silas to the service of God and the proclamation of the Gospel. The contrast between the slave girl and Paul and Silas is striking. She was a servant of the demon. Possessed and bound by it and it controlled her whole being. But Paul and Silas were servants of the "Most High God." However, the significance of servant hood in the Kingdom of God is that it is always by choice and not by

coercion. Paul indicates this to be true, in his letter to the Church at Rome, he says, “thanks be to God though you used to be slaves to sin, you **wholeheartedly obeyed** the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and become slaves to righteousness. “ Paul in a decisive moment on the road to Damascus had become a captive of Christ. A servant of the “Most High God.” That decision put a song in his heart. We know this to be true, because in Romans 7 Paul describes the rule, the power and suppressive authority of sin in his life. That bondage brought him into the state of wretchedness. He cried out “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from the body of death. Paul describes his condition of his spiritual pain, misery and anguish as a servant of sin. Pleading for deliverance from the Lord Jesus Christ, he finds freedom in Him and Paul sings a new song, **“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the Law of the Spirit of Life set me free from the law of sin and death.” Romans 8:1-2.** In that moment he became a servant of the “Most High God.” It was a freedom which he had not known as a devout Jew who kept the whole law unbroken. And I suggest that this is a mark of their commitment to their witness for Christ.

b. The Durability of God’s Salvation in their lives. Acts 16:22-25.

These men had been attacked by the crowd. They were arrested stripped and beaten. They were thrown into prison and their feet were fastened in the stocks. In spite of all of this they did not flinch or retreat or

denounce Christ.

The question comes to mind does Christianity really work under this kind of pressure and pain. Is it practical? Is it durable under stress? If this story has anything to say to us, it is that the Christian faith is durable under intense pressure. Beaten and in prison their witness for Christ did not waver. The scripture tells us that they were praying and singing hymns at midnight.

Now we might understand that that under such dire circumstances they would pray. That would be the normal thing to do. But to sing that is a different story. It is a testimony to the conquering spirit which is born in the heart that knows the presence and power of God. Well you might say that is the Apostle Paul and Silas. We will never be able to reach that stature. There are those who down through the history of the Christian church have maintained their Christian witness and their Christian song in excruciating pain and intense pressure. Madam Guyon that great saint of the past did not choose her circumstances or her environment. She did not choose her prison. But she did choose not to let her prison imprison her heart. She sang in her prison. Francis Ridley Havergal renowned hymn writer was besieged by her frail body which was not her choice. Ridden by pain she sang in her prison for she testified simply yet strikingly. **“Everybody is so sorry for me, except myself.”** She was singing in her prison. Blindness fell on John Milton the writer and poet, and in that darkness He gave us that magnificent piece of literature called, **“Paradise**

Regained.” He sang in the darkness of his prison. June Liddell wife of the Nazarene evangelist P. L. Liddell one Sunday asked permission to pray for those who had come to minister to her. She had been given six months to live. Her prayer was simple yet profound. It would not be understood by the world. **She prayed, “Lord thank you for allowing me to have this disease so that I may witness for you.”** She sang in her prison. The salvation of grace that God gives to us is durable. Paul and Silas sang hymns at the midnight hour.

Finally their commitment to the purposes of God is seen in their,

3. THE DECLARATION OF PLAN THE OF GOD. Acts 16:17,25.

The slave girl followed Paul and Silas shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved. She kept this up for many days.”

Paul and Silas were fulfilling the plan of God for the salvation souls of men and women. It is the central mission of God’s servants to reach lost souls so that they might discover the way to salvation. She must tell the “way to be saved.” God has in Christ provided the way to salvation. He sent His one and only Son to suffer bleed and die on the Cross of Calvary and then rise again for our justification. The plan of salvation is now clear. The obstacles have been removed. And God has given His followers both the responsibility and the challenge to tell men and women the way to be saved. It is our privilege to declare his great redemptive plan for a lost and dying world. Paul and Silas were true to that witness. They were

uncompromising and unafraid to present this plan to lost and dying souls. This was their uncompromising witness.

Will you note that their witness was,

a. Distinctive. Acts 16:25. The joy of their salvation was so intense that at the midnight hour, they prayed and sang hymns and worshipped.

Whoever heard of men singing with lacerated backs, bruised bodies and bound feet fixed in stocks in the darkest hours of the night in a dungeon?

This was a new song whose chords rang out with the blending of their faith and the power of the presence of the living Christ in the person of His Holy Spirit. The prison may shut men out from the world, but not from God. The genuine witness will not be snuffed out by the darkness, it will not die in the midst of pressure and it will not be bound by chains. It rises above the those forces which would seek to defeat the Christian. John in his Revelation tells us that there were those in heaven who had been martyred **who overcame** by the word of their testimony. Their witness was powerful and distinctive. Their witness was also,

b. Dynamic. Acts 16:25. Paul and Silas sang hymns and the **other prisoners were listening to them**. They had preached the way of salvation and proved the genuineness of their message by singing in the midst of their pain and bondage. **And the other prisoners were listening to them.**

They caught the attention of those other prisoners. It is clear from this story that this witness dynamically impacted those who heard it. What we need to realize is that as Christians the world is watching and listening to

our witness. They are observing everything we say and do. What are they seeing and what are they hearing? What kind of impact is our witness making on those with whom we come into contact. Do we sing songs of praise and victory in the darkest hours of life's journey?

Conclusion

Paul and Silas were men of the Spirit and Luke tells when the Spirit is in control - when He is genuinely sovereign in the heart, there is reason to sing even in the darkest night and in the most agonizing hours of life. It is in the reality and genuineness of the Spirit filled life that we will impact a beaten battered world. They sang at midnight no wonder they were instrumental in turning the world upside down. Such is the power of "Songs in the Night." Are you singing songs in the night?

