

May 20, 2007 Acts 16:16-34

Three high school graduates in an overseas prison. One from Hampton, one from Randolph and one from Cannon. They have been in prison for 20 yrs. Since the first day they have been digging trying to tunnel their way out. One day they found this old lamp. It turned out to have a genie. The Genie said I will grant you three wishes but since all three of you found me you will get one wish each. The man from Hampton said I know what I will wish for I wish I was back in Hampton. The man from Randolph said I know what I will wish for, I wish I was back in Randolph. The man from Cannon thought and thought. I can't figure out what to wish for he said, I wish those two other were here to help me.

Today we have a fun story of another prison with people miraculously being saved by God. It starts out kind of comically. Paul, Silas were walking to a place of prayer maybe a synagogue when this slave girl starts following them. She apparently has this spirit of divination. She's a fortune teller, a soothsayer she talks to spirits. She follows them around crying out: *"These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation."*

She does this for days. Paul gets really annoyed with her. I know that bothers me too, pause, when soothsayers follow me around, pause, yelling stuff like that. Paul gets annoyed with her and casts the spirit out of her.

Remember this woman was a slave. Her owners used to make money off of her because she had this spirit of divination. She probably helped them pick the Power ball numbers. So they were not too happy with Paul and Silas. He just cost them a lot of money.

The owners were so mad that they brought them complaining to the magistrates.

The magistrates have Paul and Silas beaten with these metal rods, flogged and thrown into prison. It says in our reading today from the book of Acts: Paul and Silas are thrown into prison and locked in stocks. Paul and Silas turn to God in prayer and sing hymns. We don't know what kind of hymns they sing. One pastor I know, I won't mention his name but he's the pastor of Cross of Christ and Cannon River, he thinks they are singing happy praise songs because they have faith that Jesus will get them out of this. That might be true but I think they are praying to get out of jail. They are probably singing psalms like: (Psalms 13:1) How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Or (Psalms 121:1-2) I lift up my eyes to the hills-- from where will my help come? 2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Like most of us in this kind of situation they were probably praying for a miracle, praying to be saved. "Help me

lord out of this situation.” We might pray help me Lord my friend is sick, We might pray, Help me lord, I haven't studied all year and now I have a final exam. I need a miracle.

Well they were praying, “give us a miracle”. And you know what? There was a miracle. A miracle that led to salvation. That night about midnight something strange happens. There is an earthquake, the doors are opened and the chains come off everyone. The jail guard wakes up sees that the Doors have been opened and thinks his prisoners are gone and he is in big trouble.

What do you think would happen to a guard if he lost a prisoner. Do you think his bosses would write up a bad evaluation report for his files? Would they give him a second chance or fire him? No I think and apparently the jailer thought they would probably threw him in jail or killed him. So the guard takes out his sword and is going to save them the trouble and kill himself.

Now, we hear about the very strange thing that happened. The strange thing that happened was that Peter and Silas are still in the jail, they didn't leave. They start yelling for the jailer not to hurt himself because they are still there. I think this is really strange. Don't you think it is strange that they were praying for release and when they have an opportunity they don't leave they stay there?

This miracle, was for salvation, this miracle was for the release of the captives but it was not for Paul and Silas. At least not completely. Primarily this miracle was for the jailer.

No doubt they were blessed by this miracle but this miracle didn't end with them. In fact it didn't even get them out of jail as you will find out when you go home and read this whole chapter.

Which was the bigger miracle, the earthquake or the fact that they didn't escape? One miracle leads to another miracle. It led to the jailer and his whole family coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

This is an interesting story because it appears that the miracle is for getting Paul and Silas out of jail. When I remembered this story I remembered as the earthquake freeing Paul and Silas from prison but as we see, it really isn't. The apparent blessing of Paul and Silas turns out to be a blessing for the jailer.

God is pretty tricky. I wonder where else God has done something like this. He appears to be helping one person, blessing one person and it turns out he is using them to bless someone else or maybe both of them.

I wonder if God has done something like that to us, blessed us in order to bless someone else. Think about talents. God gives someone the ability to sing or play an instrument or fix cars or computers or make a lot of

money. It appears that God is just blessing them.

Thank you for the beautiful gift of singing God, I'll just go put it in my room. We are blessed, we have been blessed but maybe it isn't really about us. Maybe it's for someone else.

This past summer we went to the Nation Youth Gathering in San Antonio. We heard this speaker Tony Campolo he is a sociology Professor at Penn University. He told us about one of his talented students. This student came to him to share his good news. He had applied to this very prestigious teaching position. He was picked out of 500 applicants. Tony said to him, "what's so great about that. 499 other people could do that job. There are hundreds of jobs in the city of Philadelphia that no one will take."

Maybe our real gift or blessing is that God is giving us the opportunity or ability or resources so that we can help someone who really needs help. Maybe we have been blessed like Abraham to be a blessing. Maybe our challenge is to look around and see for what or for who we have been blessed.

Let's not be short sighted. Let us be God-sighted. Let's look at the world as God does. Look look to see what God sees. Let's ask ourselves, What is it that God is concerned about here? Where would God be of help? Where could God be of help through me here? Maybe life isn't all about us. Maybe we need view of the world is bigger, bigger than us.

God bless you have a great week.