Persecution to Praise

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0:00] Let's go.

Their hope of gain was gone. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. When they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city.
They advocate customs that are not lawful for Romans to accept or practice. The crowd joined in attacking them and magistrates tore their garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.
And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.
About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened.
[1:20] When the jailer woke and saw that the prisoners' doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.

And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.
And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them, and he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.
But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, Let those men go. And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, The magistrates have sent to let you go, therefore come out now and go in peace.
But Paul said to them, They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison. And do they now throw us out secretly?
[2:28] No, let them come themselves and take us out. The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them, and they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed. A theme that we see all throughout Scripture is God's ability to bring good results out of bad circumstances.
His ability to do that reveals his sovereignty and his sovereign rule over all things. For example, I know in your previous study with Lee, he went over the life of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.
But eventually, he rose to a prominent position in Pharaoh's palace, and then was given a high position in the kingdom, in which he was then able to provide for his family during a terrible famine.
In Genesis 45, 5 through 8, The Bible says, And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, Joseph talking to his brothers. For God sent me before you to preserve life.
[3:45] For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

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And then in verse 8, So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.
And then in chapter 50, verse 20, As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about, that many people should be kept alive as they are today.
So we see from that example how a bad situation was used by God to accomplish a greater good.
And then ultimately, the most heinous crime ever committed was the murder of God's own Son, Jesus Christ.
Yet out of that evil act, God brought salvation. And in the sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached these words in Acts chapter 2, verses 22 through 24.
[4:45] Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and knowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosening the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. In Acts chapter 4, 5, 7, 8, and 12, those chapters record the persecution of the early church.
Yet in all of those instances of persecution, they did not destroy the church or its witness. But in fact, those persecutions were used by the Lord to cause the Christians to go out.
And the gospel was then spreading all throughout the world. When Stephen was martyred, remember, and the great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem? Well, it didn't kill the church.
It caused the church to go in the gospel to spread. This chapter provides yet another illustration of God's turning bad circumstances into spiritual victory.
[5:59] Falsely accused, savagely beaten, and unjustly prisoned, Paul and Silas saw God use those unjust circumstances to bring salvation and justification to a man and his entire household.

And so the main idea from this study is this. God often uses bad circumstances to accomplish a greater good. God often uses bad circumstances to accomplish a greater good.
So again, Paul and his missionary team had arrived in Philippi, and they were there. They found a group of Jewish women, if you remember from last week, who were worshiping.
They shared the gospel with them, and as a result of that, they were saved. Chief among those women was a lady named Lydia, who invited Paul and his team into her house, where there, Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke, they shared the gospel with her family, with the result that everyone in her family was saved.
The church in Philippi was being established, but Satan quickly sought to seek its destruction. And so a demon-possessed girl was encouraged by him, urged by him, used by him to try to infiltrate the church in Philippi, you remember?
[7:22] And eventually Paul got frustrated with her, and he turned around, and he cast the demon who was out of her. Well, she had that demon, and that was a profit for her owners, because they were making a lot of money off of her fortune-telling abilities.

And that action made her owners very angry with Paul. And so that action of Paul's led to difficult circumstances for him, but the persecution that they would face would eventually end up with praise for the one true God.
So this text, these verses take place really in four scenes. In scene number one, we have persecution to prison. Persecution to prison.
In verse 19 again, But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. So, again, tragically, the demon-possessed girl's owners did not rejoice by the fact that she had been delivered of a demon. And they were enraged instead. Her fortune-telling abilities, again, had brought them a great financial gain, but now that was gone. And instead of being in awe of the power of God to deliver their slave girl from demonic, possession, they instead attacked Paul and Silas, whom the Holy Spirit had used to deliver her.
[8:56] And their reaction to Paul and Silas is reminiscent of the Gerasenes in Mark chapter 5. If you remember, instead of rejoicing over Jesus' deliverance of the demon-possessed maniac in that passage, instead of praising God there for what Jesus had done, they were angry that Jesus had cast the demons into the herd of pigs, and they had lost those prophets.

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And instead of inquiring of Jesus, you know, who are you? Who is this man that he has power to cast out demons? Instead, what did they do? He said, get out of here. Get out of here. We don't want you here anymore.
Later in Acts, the craftsmen of Ephesus who made shrines of the goddess Artemis were likewise enraged whenever they saw the gospel spreading and Christians throwing away their idols and no longer buying from them and was putting them out of business.
Such reactions illustrate a spiritual reality that the love of money blinds people to the truth. And that's what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 6.9. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.
So the fact that Paul was dragged before the rulers of the city is an interesting turn of events, if we think about it, because who was Paul before he met Christ? Somebody who went to towns and found Christians and dragged them out to go to be imprisoned.
[10:30] Well, now he was the Christian who was being persecuted, who was being dragged before the leaders of this town. And so they brought them to the marketplace. And the marketplace back then was like the public square.

It's where people bought and sold. It's where people hung out. And it was also the place where oftentimes trials would take place. That's where the leaders were. And so if you caught someone doing something, you drag them into the marketplace before those magistrates.
And there before everyone, they would judge that case, try that case. And in verse 20, it says, So the owner of the slave girls stated their case by making sure that first, the magistrates understood that these men are Jewish men.
About that time, the emperor Claudius issued an order expelling Jews from Rome. And so anti-Semitism was as alive back then as it is today. And so they began their case by making sure that, Hey, you shouldn't side with these guys because they're Jews.
And verse 21, they continued on by saying, They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice. Now, there was a law that forbade Roman citizens from practicing any foreign religion that had not been sanctioned by the state.
[11:54] But it was a law that was mostly ignored. It was hardly ever enforced. But we know that the real reason why Paul and Silas were brought to the magistrates wasn't because of this law, but out of revenge.

The owners wanted revenge for what Paul and Silas had done in casting out the demon from their slave girl. And they wanted them to get payback. They wanted payback. So in verse 22, it says, So again, the crowd caught up in this anti-Semitic frenzy.
The magistrates failed to investigate the case. Things got out of control. And instead of conducting a proper hearing and giving Paul and Silas a chance to defend themselves, they illegally ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods.
The beating would have been administered by men called lictors. A lictor served as the police of the magistrates, and each one carried a bundle of rods that was tied together.
Have you ever seen the rods that they carry before? Have any of you ever seen a picture of that? So you got a bunch of, I mean, it's a bunch of rods about this thick, bound together to make one giant rod with a little handle at the end.
[13:15] And so you can imagine getting hit by one of those things would not have felt good. And we know that Paul and Silas didn't endure just a hit from one of those, but it was many hits.

Those rods were also a symbol for Roman justice. So those rods, kind of like for us, we have, what's the symbol of justice for us? The blind lady with the scales?
Well, this was their symbol for justice, was these rods that were bound together that would definitely hurt to get hit with. In 2 Corinthians 11.25, Paul mentioned there that he had endured such a beating like this, not just here, but at least two other times.
Can you imagine? Verse 23, And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them safely.
So to the illegal beating, the magistrates then ordered an unjust imprisonment. They ordered Paul and Silas to be placed under maximum security.
[14:23] In verse 24, it says, Paul and Silas, So from there we move on to scene two, which is persecution to power.

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So from persecution to prison to persecution now, persecution to power. In the beginning of verse 25, About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.
No doubt, after enduring such a beating, it would have been hard, I think, for Paul and Silas to have slept, because they were covered in bruises, and who knows what broken appendages they may or may not have had.
And obviously it was uncomfortable to sleep in a prison and to have your feet locked up. But it says there that they rejoiced anyways.
Why did they rejoice? Because our praising God does not depend upon our present circumstances. We should rejoice in the Lord always.
[16:12] Again, I will say rejoice, as Philippians chapter 4 says, Christians rejoice not so much in circumstances, but the truth that God causes all things to work together for the good, as Romans 8, 28 says, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for the good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

And here's the thing, too, as we see here, is when Christians suffer, the world takes notice of their suffering. The prisoners knew what Paul and Silas had endured, and they no doubt would have been amazed to hear them praying and singing and rejoicing despite how unjustly they had been treated.
Because the key to having joy in every circumstance of life is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, which they were. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. How Christians react to suffering then often reveals their concept of who God truly is.
So, example, in the health and wealth gospel, according to them, I don't think they'd ever preach this passage because here's Paul and Silas suffering, yet rejoicing in the suffering.
But they had the correct perception of who God truly is. They knew His Word. They knew that despite these bad circumstances, God is in control, and God is sovereign, and God was with them, and God was going to use this in some way to accomplish a greater good.
[17:40] I got a lengthy quote here from A.W. Tozer, but I think it's a good one. He says, What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.

We are able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, what comes into your mind when you think about God. We might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.
A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology, but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple.
Where it is inadequate or out of plumb, the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.
So what we believe about God matters. And when we're in a difficult situation, what we truly believe about God will be revealed. Paul and Silas did not base their theology on their circumstances.
[18:54] Instead, they evaluated those circumstances in light of what they knew to be true about God. Their songs expressed confidence and trust that God would use this situation for good and for His glory.

And they did not have to wait long for that very thing to happen. In verse 26, And here we see how God is sovereign over both the natural and the supernatural realms.
He used the natural means of an earthquake and the supernatural means of an angel to let these prisoners loose. The earthquake rocked the jailer's house, which was probably connected to the jail or close to the jail.
And so immediately, what does he do? Verse 27, When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.
The jailer knew that a Roman soldier who allowed prisoners to escape, no matter what the cause was, had to pay for it with their own life.
[20:26] And so rather than facing that kind of humiliation and that kind of a painful execution, he decided that he would take matters into his own hands. But in verse 28, Paul stopped him, crying out with a loud voice, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.

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Now we don't know, well it doesn't, we're not given the reason exactly why the prisoners didn't leave. Because you'd think if you were a prisoner and your cuffs came off, and the door was open, the first thing you do is, I'm going to bust out of here, I'm running away.
But probably what happened is that they were just so amazed by this miracle, that I think they were just frozen in awe of what they were witnessing.
And it may have been, and I think it was the case, that they were, as Scripture is saying, they were listening to Paul and Silas, praying and singing, and that was having an effect on them.
And so I think when they saw Paul and Silas remaining, they decided to do the same. In just a short amount of time, these two men had been able to have such a great powerful witness on whatever other prisoners were in that jail.
[21:36] In verse 29, And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas. So here the tables are turned. The jailer now is the one on his knees before these prisoners.

No doubt he was afraid of their message, and he regarded the earthquake as confirmation that what Paul and Silas were preaching was true.
And in this case with Paul, it took an awesome manifestation of God's power to bring this jailer to his knees, and he was open now to respond to their preaching of the gospel.
And so next that brings us to scene three, persecution to conversion. Persecution to conversion. Every other fill-in is a P, but I, you know, there's no P that I could find for conversion.
So instead of trying to force something, I bet some of you probably can figure something out. Yeah. To, I could just put a P in front of conversion, and the P would be silent.
[22:39] So you can do that in your fill-in. Once the jailer made sure that the other prisoners were secure, in verse 30 it says, and he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

So his question expressed a longing in his heart. He wanted to be made right with God, and he believed that Paul and Silas had the answer that could make him right with God.
And so his question was simple, and it was direct. And look, Paul's response was simple and direct as well, wasn't it? Verse 31, Paul and Silas, they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.
And so confident were they? They said, You and your household as well. To believe in the Lord means to believe he is who he claims to be. In John 20, he lists the purpose for why he wrote the gospel.
Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he said, But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. It means to believe in who Jesus is.
[23:47] It means to believe in what Jesus did. 1 Corinthians 15, 3-4, For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received. That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

That he was buried. That he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. Romans 10, 9-10. It says, Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
For with the heart one receives and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. So the message of salvation is preached. Simply, but directly to the jailer.
And in verse 32, it says, They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his household. The jailer's family members would have been obviously members of his household, probably his servants, as well as any other relatives or guests who were staying with him at that time.
They all heard the gospel, and they all believed. Verse 33 says, And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, he and his family.
[24:55] And though the hour was late, surely you would think that earthquake would have woken some other people up in town. And so here we see evidence of the jailer's true conversion, because he wants to be baptized, which is one of the first steps of obedience in the Christian life.

One of the first things a Christian should do is, they want to be baptized, because they want to make that public confession that they belong to Christ, and that they have been forgiven by Christ, and they are going to live their life for Christ.
And so he does that. We see another mark of his conversion by the fact that he cleans and treats Paul and Silas' wounds, and he also feeds them.

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And so that shows hospitality, which is again another fruit of one who has truly been saved. And it's amazing, because what a transformation.
Just a short time before Paul and Silas shared the gospel with him, this man was in total despair, ready to take his sword and plunge it into himself and commit suicide.
[26:03] And now, look at him. He's rejoicing in this new life that he has in Jesus Christ. In verse 34 it says, And he brought them into his house, and he set food before them, and he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

And you know, for those of us who go to prison ministry, and for those of us who have spent a career in law enforcement, which is one of us that I know of, one thing that I've witnessed in going to jails is that jail is not a very happy place.
The prisoners are not happy, and the people who work in jail are not happy, because they have to put up with the prisoners all day long. And I think every Friday we go to prison ministry, we usually see a new group of guards, because I think a lot of them just can't stand it.
And every time we drive in, there's a sign over to the left that says, We're hiring guards, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Because it's just not a very happy environment to be in.
When I was in Leavenworth, we had the federal penitentiary, we had the military prison, and in Lansing, the next city over, we had the state prison. And so a lot of our church members were prison guards, and they did not like their jobs, because this is a tough job.
[27:21] It's miserable. And so you can imagine that this man had put up with a lot, and seen a lot in his life, and probably made him pretty calloused, and pretty tough, and pretty hard-hearted.

But here we see that the gospel, and God, has the ability to transform anyone from spiritual death to spiritual life, no matter how hearted or how calloused they are.
The gospel is used by him, and it's the power of God to save people and transform their lives. And then finally, scene four, persecution to praise.
Persecution to praise. Praise. Praise. Persecution to praise. Paul, being the faithful shepherd that he was, made efforts to protect the new church that had been formed in Philippi.
And so in verse 35 it says, But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, Let those men go. The magistrates were under the impression that they had taught these Jewish men a lesson.
[28:29] Now they would keep their mouths shut, and they would kick him out of town, and, you know, do him a favor, right? But Paul had other ideas than that.

Verse 36 it says, And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore now come and go in peace. But Paul would not be disposed of so flippantly. He did not seek revenge, but he did not want the treatment that he and Silas received to become a precedent of mistreatment for the other Christians that had been made in Philippi.
And so in verse 37 it says, But Paul said to them, They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens and have thrown us into prison, and they do now throw us out secretly?
No, let them come themselves and take us out. To inflict corporal punishment upon a Roman citizen was a grave violation of Roman law, made all the more serious since it was done here without a trial.
[29:36] The consequences for both the magistrates and the city were potentially very serious because Paul was a Roman citizen, as was Silas.

And so these magistrates, for having done this, for having beaten Roman citizens and having done so without a trial and having thrown them in prison, were in a lot of trouble.
Potentially they were in a whole lot of trouble. At least they would have been removed from their place of leadership and possibly Philippi, which was considered a Roman colony, could have that title removed and all the benefits that came along with it.
So they were really in hot water. So Paul would not allow them here to compound their series of injustices by secreting them out of town. If the magistrates wanted them to leave, well, they would have to show respect to Paul and Silas as they did it.
Verse 38 says, The police reported these words to the magistrates and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. The magistrates were now forced to face the reality of what they had done.

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[30:43] And in order to defuse a potentially explosive situation that they had placed themselves in, they obeyed Paul's request and also they issued an apology in verse 39. So they came and apologized to them and they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

They had no right to do this still. They had no right to expel Paul and Silas from their community. They apologized and they begged them to leave so that there wouldn't be any further uprisings in the city.
And Paul and Silas at this point agreed to leave, but they did so on their own terms. And so they go back to, in verse 40, So they went out of the prison, they visited Lydia.
And when they had seen the brothers, all the other cruises that had been made, they encouraged them and they departed. So the difficult circumstances that Paul and Silas endured in Philippi birthed a new church.
It was tough, but a new church had been founded there in the city. A light was now in a place where there was darkness. Salvation had come to many in this city.
[31:52] Through their persecution, many came to praise God as a result of knowing Christ savingly as their Lord and Savior. So the main point of application is this. Don't fret when times are bad.

Remain faithful. Don't fret when times are bad. Remain faithful. Because God knows what you're going through and you have the promises from Him in His Word that He works all things together for the good of those who love Him.
So whenever times are bad, don't fret. Be faithful because you never know what God might do. But you can trust that He cares about you and that He will do something.
So three other points here of application. Bad times present good opportunities to share the gospel. Bad times present good opportunities to share the gospel.
I know of a lot of people that I've got to visit in the hospital and they either had a life-threatening illness or something else of that matter, a very serious injury.
[32:54] And it was an opportunity for them to witness to their doctors and to their nurses. And a lot of times, you know, for our family members and our friends or people in our community, if they know that we're a Christian and they see us go through something bad, they're watching us to see, okay, you know, do they really believe what they claim to believe?

And so when we're in a bad situation, really it's like the Lord shines a spotlight on us because people are watching and it's an opportunity for us to use that situation to share the gospel, to not fret and be faithful.
Number two, God saves unlikely people in unlikely ways. So again, the jailer, you know, was an unlikely convert, at least in the eyes of many, yet God saved him and he did so in a phenomenal way, didn't he?
And so we can't ever be of the mind that, well, this person is beyond God's ability to save. We know that God is the one who saves, our responsibility is to share the gospel and we should never think of someone and say, well, you know, no way, not possible.
So God saves unlikely people in unlikely ways. And then finally, persecution results in God's praise. Persecution results in God's praise. Have you seen, there's a video of Christians in Ukraine and I think they're down in a train station down in a tunnel as people are evacuating whatever's going on.
[34:23] Stan's nodding his head and they're singing hymns. You know, in the midst of all that was going on, they are taking that opportunity to praise God, not fretting, but being faithful.

And so, may it be the case for us too that whenever we go through difficult situations in life, as difficult as they are, we know that God is with us and that God can use that situation to accomplish a greater good than we ever thought possible.
Okay, let's pray. Lord, we thank you for our time together. We thank you once again for the opportunity to be in your word. And Lord, we thank you for this passage and for what it teaches us about you, that you are a God who is sovereign.
You're a God who's in control. You are a God who works in mysterious ways. Lord, we know that bad circumstances are a part of living in a world cursed by sin.
We know that ultimately you have a place prepared for us in your kingdom, Lord, where there will never be a bad circumstance for us to have to face. But in this life, there will be.
[35:33] And you told us that would be the case. You didn't tell us otherwise. And so, Lord, I pray that when we come into a circumstance that is difficult for us, whether that's us being persecuted or

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just going through something difficult in life, that, God, we would be reminded by you through your word, the indwelling of your spirit, that you do not forsake your children.

You do not leave them to go through the valley alone. That you walk with us always, Lord, and that you always walk with us until that day when we come to be with you in your kingdom and you tell us well done, good and faithful servant.

So, Lord, may we be faithful to you no matter what's going on in our lives and may we be always reminded, Lord, that you do great things and you accomplish great things in ways that often we fail to anticipate you being able to do.

So, help us to be faithful, Lord, to you and not fretful no matter what's going on in our world or in our lives. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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