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THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

– JUNE 18. – ACTS 16:16-40. –

AN EXPERIENCE WITH EVIL SPIRITS – SAD CONDITION OF A SLAVE GIRL – HER ENRAGED OWNERS REVENGE THEMSELVES ON ST. PAUL AND SILAS – IGNORING THE FACTS IN THE CASE, THEY RAISED FALSE CHARGES – THE MISSIONARIES BEATEN AND IMPRISONED – SINGING PRAISES TO GOD UNDER ADVERSE CONDITIONS – A WELL-TIMED EARTHQUAKE – JAILER CONVERTED – THE MAGISTRATES, AFTER LEARNING THE TRUTH REGARDING THE PRISONERS, MADE AMENDS.

**"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."
– Verse 31.**

WHILE the missionaries were day by day passing from Lydia's home to the place of worship, outside of the city gate, they were met repeatedly by a young woman known in Philippi as a Pythoness, or Sibyl – a fortune-teller. She was a slave girl possessed by an evil spirit – one of the fallen angels – the spirit working through her, divining, or giving intelligence of lost articles, telling fortunes, foretelling future events, etc. She was evidently well known to all the people; and the exercise of her profession brought large income to a joint-stock company that owned her – apparently a syndicate of influential men.

For several days, as the missionaries went to and from [R5908 : page 166] the home of Lydia, attending to the Lord's work, this slave girl followed them, shouting, "These be the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation!" Of course, the girl did not know St. Paul and his companions; but the evil spirits did. To what extent they had forecast the results we may not know definitely, but quite possibly what occurred was what they

had premeditated; namely, that the Apostle would cast out the evil spirit, and that this would bring upon the missionaries and their converts a violent attack from the owners of the girl and their friends, and all whom they could arouse to a frenzy of excitement, of wrath and of rioting.

It is also possible that the evil spirit may simply have told the truth without considering the possibility that the Apostle might command it to come out of the woman – perhaps supposing that he would be rather pleased with a testimony from any quarter. But we read that St. Paul was grieved as day after day this testimony was given – not that he was grieved that a testimony was made regarding the Truth, but that it should come from such a source; for he knew that the evil spirit would have no respect for the Truth. Any of the fallen angels who would have respect for God and for the principles of righteousness would not seek to obsess humanity when they knew that such obsession would be to their injury and contrary to the Divine will.

Some teachers will probably suggest that this woman had hysteria, or that she was somewhat demented. But either thought is out of accord with the facts in the case as Scripturally set forth, and is quite contrary to the words of the Apostle. St. Paul said not a word to the young woman, assuming that she was not accountable. He addressed the evil spirit as such, and in the name of Jesus commanded it to come out of the woman – just as our Lord and the Apostles under His instruction had frequently cast out these evil spirits. – Mark 5:1-17; Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:17, etc.

THE REVENGE OF THE SYNDICATE

Just as the owners of the swine were angry with our Lord because of the loss of their swine when the legions of demons cast out of the man had entered into the animals, so it was with the owners of the slave girl. We can imagine what consternation was aroused amongst them when they found not only that their source of gain for

the future was gone, but that the large sum of money invested in this girl was lost; for such spirit-possessed slaves had a high market value. They became desperately angry. Nothing will so greatly move men as love or selfishness; and under present conditions selfishness moves the vast majority with intense power. The syndicate had no hope of getting the evil spirit back into the slave; and so they must have revenge upon those who had brought financial loss to them.

There is much of this spirit abroad in the world today. As long as the Truth and the Lord's servants quietly go their way, the world will generally be too busy with its own affairs to molest them. But as soon as any perceive that truth and righteousness are inimical to their interests and prospects, their opposition becomes intense. But we do not consider it to be the chief business of the Lord's people to stir up the animosity of the world and thus to bring persecution upon themselves. As a rule it is best that we leave the world to watch its own affairs, while we preach the Gospel, not using it as a sledgehammer to break men's hearts, but as the Message of joy, peace, love and blessing to those whose hearts, under Divine providence, have already been broken, and who have ears to hear the Message of the Grace of God.

Very generally the Apostles pursued as smooth a course as principle would permit; and in this instance St. Paul very evidently acted under special guidance of the Lord. The Apostle's general instruction to the Church is, "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18.) The thought is, Do not go out of your way to stir up trouble; but if the Lord in His providence permits trouble to arise, be courageous and full of faith in Him who has permitted it, that He will overrule it for good and to our ultimate benefit.

Evidently the owners of the Pythoness had influence; for they succeeded quickly in arousing a mob determined to have revenge upon St. Paul and Silas. The two missionaries were carried before the

rulers at the market place. There the syndicate ignored the truth of the matter and raised spurious charges, claiming that the prisoners were teaching a religion contrary to the laws of Rome, and thus likely to raise sedition. This was contrary to the truth; for the Lord's servants went, according to law, outside of the city gates for their worship.

However, under the circumstances, the false charge was sufficient to bring down upon the Lord's representatives the severest penalties which their judges could inflict. The magistrates, who held office especially for the preventing of rioting and for preserving order, were greatly excited and rent their garments as an indication of their distress and dissatisfaction that such a disturbance should be brought to their city. The thought was that the men against whom the populace would thus rise up must be guilty of something and thus deserving of punishment. They knew not that the evil spirits had to do with the arousing of the riot. As St. Paul elsewhere expressed it, "We contend not with flesh and blood [merely], but with wicked spirits in influential positions."

THE MISSIONARIES IMPRISONED

To satisfy the mob and to restore peace quickly, the magistrates ordered the missionaries to be beaten, presumably with rods, and then committed them to prison. Alas, what a reward for missionary effort! What a recompense for sacrificing their lives for the Lord and the Truth – that these noble men should be evil-spoken of, evil-thought of and evilly treated!

Let us remember that the God who changes not is our **[R5908 : page 167]** God, and that He has supervision of the interests of the Church today as then. Let us remember that He requires of us today, as of those missionaries of old, that we be willing to represent Him, willing to endure hardness and thus to make full proof of our ministry – of our service for Christ and His Message. Would it require faith on the part of the missionaries to accept such experiences as

providential and not to think of these as evidences of the Lord's disfavor or neglect? So must we learn similar lessons of faith in the School of Christ, and be glad to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and the Apostles. We must learn to rejoice in tribulations as in prosperity.

The prison was constructed with outer cells, more or less accessible to the light and to air, and with an inner or central dungeon for the most vicious criminals. It was into this inner prison that St. Paul and Silas were thrust, and their feet made fast in the stocks. It was under these unfavorable circumstances, with their backs raw and bleeding from the scourging, that these faithful brethren were so filled with the spirit of rejoicing that they gave vent to their feelings in hymns of thankfulness for the privilege of suffering in connection with the Lord's work and of enduring tribulations for righteousness' sake.

We can readily see that nothing less than a strong, living faith in God enabled these two missionaries to feel that their adversities endured for the sake of the Gospel meant to them the Divine approval, if rightly received. They realized that their trying experiences were but "light afflictions" which, under Divine providence, would work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Only this enabled these mistreated men to triumph in their hour of distress and to praise God for the privilege of suffering as members of the Body of Christ, filling up a share of the sufferings of Christ in order that by and by they might also share His glory as members of His Body – members of the great antitypical Moses, the Mediator of the New Covenant. – Col. 1:24; Acts 3:22.

These things were written for our instruction, that we, beholding the faithfulness of others, might be encouraged. Our covenant is the same as theirs, and theirs was the same as our Lord's; for the sufferings of Christ are one, however varied in character, and the glories to follow will be one, although the sharers will differ as star differeth from star in glory. The greater the sufferings endured

faithfully, uncomplainingly, rejoicingly, the greater will be the reward in the Kingdom of our Father and of our Lord and Savior.

A WELL-TIMED EARTHQUAKE

Whilst the missionaries were singing, an earthquake shock was experienced which jarred the walls, loosed the staples of the chains wherewith they were bound, and released the bars whereby their prison doors were held in place. The jailer, finding the doors open, supposed that the prisoners had escaped. Knowing that he would be held responsible, he drew his sword and was about to commit suicide, when St. Paul called to him and said, "Do thyself no harm. We are all here."

By this time the jailer was fully convinced that the missionaries committed to his care were remarkable men – not ordinary criminals. Possibly, indeed, he had some knowledge of demonism and obsession, and had heard that by word of mouth one of these men had spoiled a supposedly Divine oracle, by exercising some superior power. At all events he was now ready to care for these prisoners and to hear the Message of the Love of God.

Presumably he first made the prison secure, the while thinking over these matters, and then brought the missionaries into his own living quarters in the prison. He attended to their comfort, and meantime heard from them something respecting their mission-respecting Jesus the Messiah and His death as the world's Redeemer. The jailer was convicted of sin. He realized in a general way at least that all mankind are sinners, aliens, separated from God by wicked works. He longed for a realization of forgiveness of his own sins and for a reconciliation with his Creator; and he perceived that these missionaries could help him. Hence he inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" What must I do to come into relationship with God, that I, like you, might be able to realize His loving care in all of my affairs; that I, like you, might be able to glory in tribulation and to

realize that under Divine providence all things will work together for my good now and hereafter?

The answer came promptly: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Taking this statement as a text, the missionaries explained to the jailer and his household some of the philosophy of the Divine Plan of Atonement – the death of Jesus, the Just for the unjust; the blessing that in due time is to reach Adam and his race through the resurrection processes and the privilege now of hearing and accepting the Divine call to joint-heirship with Jesus as His "members" in the sufferings of the present and in the glory to follow.

THE JAILER CONVERTED

The Truth-seed sank into good soil. Those present believed and gratefully accepted the privilege of discipleship – to suffer for Christ's sake. Forthwith they were baptized, thus symbolizing their death to the world, to sin and to self, and their desire to walk in newness of life as members of The Christ. How the missionaries must have realized that they were as providentially directed to the jail by the injustice of the magistrate as they had been previously guided to the riverside prayer meeting! Thus their faith was strengthened. They were willing to endure hardness with patience and joy for the sake of the great privilege of carrying the Good Tidings to others.

According to some standards it was now high time for these missionaries to strike for an increase of salary and a parsonage, and especially to strike against any further persecution, and to tell the Lord that they had had enough along the lines of self-sacrifice. But the effect was just the opposite. They were the more encouraged to go on, to endure still further sufferings.

As followers of Jesus, we must see to it that our experiences tally with those of the Master and His Apostles. We must neither look

for any other kind of experiences nor be satisfied unless we find opportunities of suffering for the Truth's sake. We may be assured that, although times are somewhat changed, our Lord was quite right when He declared through His Apostle, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12.) It may be in his own home and family or in the Church or from the world; for if he is faithful in letting his light shine he will not escape.

If, therefore, any one of the Lord's people is escaping persecution, he should feel fearful of his condition and should make careful examination as to whether he is faithful to all the privileges and opportunities that he can find. This does not mean, however, that we should seek persecution in the sense of doing foolish things or of doing proper things in a foolish manner. But it does mean that we should not shrink from the responsibility of proper conduct because of fear of consequences. Fear is one of the most subtle foes of the people of God. It should be offset by trust, by faith in God. **[R5908 : page 168]**

COMPANIONS IN SUFFERING

The record declares that St. Paul alone rebuked the evil spirit. Thus he alone was responsible for the tumult which led to the imprisonment of himself and Silas. We can readily perceive how Silas might improperly have taken a course in opposition. He might have publicly reprimanded St. Paul, and at least partially have joined with the multitude and thus have escaped arrest, beating and imprisonment. We are glad that it was not so with Silas, that he was a worthy companion to the noble St. Paul. He recognized that the Lord's blessing was upon the Apostle, and that St. Paul was being especially used of the Lord, and that therefore whatever experiences came to them the Lord was both able and willing to overrule for their good.

Thus Silas was privileged to share in the beating, in the songs and in the conversion of the jailer. Surely it brings a great blessing to

have faith in the Lord, and to be obedient to Divine providences rather than to be too worldly-wise, too cautious and self-seeking. In Hebrews 10:32,33, the Apostle mentions some who "endured a great fight of afflictions," and some who were merely their companions in the shame without experiencing the same losses. He points out that God appreciates faithfulness in either of these respects and will duly give a reward. Let us be faithful to the Lord – followers of His leading and sharers of His blessings.

THE PLIGHT OF THE MAGISTRATES

The next morning the rulers, having learned something of the circumstances of the preceding night, ordered the release of the missionaries. Evidently they realized that they had no just cause against St. Paul and Silas. The beating and the imprisonment of the two were merely to satisfy the public clamor – just as when Pilate similarly commanded that our Lord be beaten, not as a satisfaction of justice, but to appease the anger of the multitude. But St. Paul had not been a lawyer for nothing. The night before, he had probably attempted to tell the rulers that he and Silas were Roman citizens and had the right to demand a fair trial before receiving any kind of punishment. But the clamor of the mob was probably so great that their protests were unheard.

When the order for their release reached the prison, the missionaries sent word to the rulers that they were Roman citizens; and that Roman law had been violated in three particulars in their case; (1) They had been beaten; (2) This had been done publicly; (3) This was reprehensible in that they had not been legally condemned.

ST. PAUL'S SOUNDNESS OF MIND

These charges against the rulers might have gone hard against them. Hence it is not to be wondered at that they came to the prison, as the Apostle requested, and brought the missionaries forth publicly,

thus giving evidence to the people that they conceded that an injustice had been done on the previous night. This would avoid leaving a reproach upon the faith at Philippi. The public could not say to the disciples, "Your teachers were tried and expelled from this city, and forbidden to return."

On the other hand, notice the spirit of compromise. St. Paul and Silas did not insist on going forth to preach in public, and demand that they be given legal protection in the exercise of their liberties. On the contrary, they concluded that they had accomplished all in their power, and that God's providence was now directing them elsewhere. They acted upon the Master's counsel, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another."

Thus a peaceful compromise was effected, by which the magistrates were relieved from further difficulty and the missionaries were honorably led forth as men who had done nothing amiss, but who had concluded that in the interests of peace they would quit the city, although their rights as Roman citizens would have permitted them to remain. Some of the Lord's people make the mistake of not sufficiently insisting on their rights; and others err in the opposite way of insisting too much for their earthly rights. Here in St. Paul's case we find illustrated the proper course – "the spirit of a sound mind." He insisted upon such of his rights as were reasonable and necessary for the Lord's Cause; but he freely relinquished other rights in the interest of peace, in harmony with his covenant of sacrifice and with the Scriptures.

Before separating the missionaries returned to the home of Lydia, where they met the brethren and comforted them. What they said for the comfort of the brethren is not difficult to imagine. They surely recounted the joy which they had experienced in suffering for Christ's sake and told how the Lord had overruled their trials, difficulties, sufferings and imprisonment for good, that thereby the jailer and his family were added to the number of brethren.

Whoever has read the New Testament properly has surely noticed the spirit of brotherhood therein recorded as prevalent amongst those accepted of the Lord as members of the Household of Faith. And whoever intelligently comes into contact with those who are now rejoicing in the Present Truth must surely note the same spirit of brotherhood in a remarkable degree.

