



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-26-2015 @ 0900

**“When Things Don’t Go as Planned,
Shall we Complain, or Praise?”**

Acts 16:24-28

WE EXALT THEE

For Thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth! Thou art exalted far above all gods! (2X’s)
We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee, O Lord! (2X’s)

Acts 16:24-28

“...the jailer threw them into the inner cell, and fastened their feet between heavy blocks of wood. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake, which shook the prison to its foundations. At once all the doors opened, and the chains fell off all the prisoners. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he thought that the prisoners had escaped; so he pulled out his sword, and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted at the top of his voice, ‘Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!’”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever had a wonderful event “take a sudden turn” to the “absolutely horrible” in spite of all you could do? How did you handle its “disgrace”, “pain”, and frustration?
- Have you ever known moments “nothing went according to plan”, regardless of how carefully you prepared, or how diligently you worked? Did you handle these “detours” with grace & joy?
- Do you know other “believers” who managed to do just that—keep praying, praising, and trusting God...while showing marvelous concern for the others around them?

As a general rule, we are great “planners of our lives”. Not only are we good at planning the events and things for which we hope; we also tend to “build in all sorts of expectations” for how these “high hopes” should turn out, how their progress should go, and what their final result(s) should be. Then when “life happens”, and we are “snake-bit” by the “law of unintended consequences”, we tend to experience serious “moods change”. This is when “sunshine disciples” and “unseasoned believers” get mad, grumble, begin to look for excuses for failure, or look around for something or someone else to blame. Dr. Luke, however, details how a “true believer”, “sold-out disciple”, “all-in advocate”, or “cheerful child of God” handles these situations. Paul and Silas have been mistreated and abused in a gross miscarriage of justice, and most would agree they have earned “the right to complain”. How do they handle it though? Luke recounts: “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.” Really? What are they thinking? Are they actually convinced the Lord orders all their steps? Do they genuinely believe there are no “accidents”, and that God really orchestrates every moment of every day? If so, that would mean that even when events that don’t go our way, God is working all things to reveal Divine Design, which is to bring more and more people to the full knowledge of Salvation. Rather than “forgetting” Paul and Silas, God was using their condition to win fellow prisoners, and even their jailer, to the Truth! God, grant us the Grace of Praise in the Face of Turmoil! Open our minds to appreciate the marvelous ways of Your Providence, and teach us to trust You more fully when our “situation” seems “darkest” and “most hopeless”. Fill our hearts with Your Love, and engage our spirits in Your Praise until You choose to reveal the perfection of Your Power! Until then, keep us faithful as believers and disciples who go “all-in” for the Good News You decreed!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-27-2015 @ 0900

"What's The Value of a Soul?"

Acts 16:29-34

WE EXALT THEE

For Thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth! Thou art exalted far above all gods! (2X's)
We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee, O Lord! (2X's)

Acts 16:29-34

"The jailer called for a light, rushed in, and fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. Then he led them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your family.' Then they preached the Word of the Lord to him, and to all the others in the house. At that very hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds, and he and all his family were baptized at once. Then he took Paul and Silas up into his house, and gave them some food to eat. He and his family were filled with joy, because they now believed in God."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever "judged" a person, or "evaluated" a statement, merely on the basis of your "first impression"? Generally speaking, how accurate were those "assessments"?
- In the light of "additional data", which you could not have known previously, how did you go on to reevaluate those people or statements? Did that process "humble you" often?
- When dealing with the "Promises of God", how eagerly do you "explore your options" and "try God out" to "accept Salvation" and then "live in Grace"? Do these "Gifts" fill you with joy?

Selfishness often drives secular judgments, opinions, and beliefs, which manifest in decisions, and then as actions. Someone announces a meeting, but we may "forget" to go, or have some other matter to attend. Someone holds a party, inviting us to come, but we'd rather stay home, or go to a game, or shop at the mall, because we don't "approve of the other guests". In a life-threatening emergency, we have "split-seconds" to decide how much risk to assume. If we place our expertise, reputation, even our lives on the line, the "needy" had better be "worth it", right? The "selfish" ones will tend to lean in a "safe" direction, while the "service-oriented" leap to assist the stricken, whatever the cost to themselves. Where will we fall on this spectrum? That depends in large part on how well we know we are loved by One who has gone "all-out" for us. If the God we know is truly *real* to us, with Promises of Salvation and Eternal Life, nothing in this world will keep us from offering these same blessing to others, even those who have withstood and abused us. We know with utter clarity we are all in need of Divine Grace, and our time here is limited. Now look at today's title and consider, "What's The Value of a Soul?" God, apparently, sets great value on every single one! He sent His Only-Begotten Son to offer Salvation to any who would believe. His Son, Jesus Christ, believed that Mission of Redemption was worth His own life. Paul and Silas believed it was worth their own pain, disgrace, and even jail time, to reach into places they would never have been otherwise. That's what makes the Gospel "dangerous"! No pain will silence it! No disgrace will discourage it! God, grant us the Grace of Gospel Endurance! Empower us to reach out fearlessly to the "lost souls" around us! Help us see them with the eyes of those "early Christians", who could be hurt, ignored, betrayed, lied about, and even killed, but counted all that "worthwhile" to win a single soul to Christ! How about us? Will you teach us to place the lost souls of this world ahead of our own interest...whatever the cost? God, make us Your "Living Gospel", even if it makes us dangerous to the darkness of this world!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-28-2015 @ 0900

"Who Is Jesus to You?"

Acts 17:1-4

WE EXALT THEE

For Thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth! Thou art exalted far above all gods! (2X's)
We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee, O Lord! (2X's)

Acts 17:1-4

"Paul and Silas traveled on through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue. According to his usual habit, Paul went to the synagogue. There, during three Sabbaths, he held discussions with the people, quoting and explaining the Scriptures, and proving from them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from death. "This Jesus whom I announce to you," Paul said, "is the Messiah." Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas; so did many of the leading women and a large group of Greeks who worshiped God."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever been thoroughly thrilled and excited to introduce "someone special" you knew personally to others around you? Did they "catch the fire" of your enthusiasm?
- On the other hand, were you ever among those who "caught the fire", sharing the joy of the speaker, and hoping you, too, would personally meet such a wonderful individual?
- What do you believe it takes to "know God" well enough to be so "fired up" about the Lord you would eagerly share His Gospel with *anyone* who would listen?

In every census taken of Americans who refer to themselves as "Christian", or at least certain of "God" in some fashion, the percentage of "believers" is always large...around 80-84%. But any objective observer of the "moral state" or "ethical sense" of America today must wonder, "How in the world can our behavior be at such odds with our belief?" Family units crumble with scarcely a second thought. Legal arrangements, business deals, and political alliances shift overnight. Traditional codes and mores are portrayed as "obsolete", "old-fashioned", and "out of touch". So where is the "bedrock of belief" necessary to sustain the liberties that sustained the saints and citizens who built the nation entrusted to us? "Claiming Christianity" and "knowing Jesus Christ" are two very different states of "belief". Paul makes it very clear to the people he addresses in this passage he believes Jesus is the Messiah. (As far as you are concerned, who is Jesus, and what difference does He make in your world? Do you truly *know* Jesus as your Redeemer, your Healer, your "solid Rock of Refuge" in the midst of a storm, your "Hope for Tomorrow", and your "Reason for Being" today?.) It's so easy to "talk the talk" of doctrine, but it's much more dangerous to "walk the walk" of discipleship. Will we embrace the discipline of prayer? Are we ready to commit to "study of the Word", and be accountable to a believing fellowship? Will we set an actual "bedrock solid" belief on living knowledge of Jesus Christ? Will we "serve in His Name", reaching out to "needy" wherever we may find them, so they, too, come to know and love Him as "God of All" and true and only "Source of Salvation"? God, grant us the Grace of Committed Character and Worthy Witness! We pray to know You truly, to love You deeply, and to share You fervently with every fiber of our being, regardless of what the world may decide. Keep us free of compromise, and wholly dedicated to the Gospel of the Son You sent to redeem us. As He went "all-out" for us, make us every willing to go "all-in" for Him!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-29-2015 @ 0900

"Be Ready to Speak"

Acts 17:16-34

WE EXALT THEE

For Thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth! Thou art exalted far above all gods! (2X's)
We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee, O Lord! (2X's)

Acts 17:16-34

"While Paul was waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy, he was greatly upset when he noticed how full of idols the city was. So he held discussions...also in the public square every day with the people who happened to come by. ...So they took Paul, brought him before the city council, the Areopagus, and said, 'We would like to know what this new teaching is that you are talking about.' ...When they heard Paul speak about a raising from death, some of them made fun of him, but others said, 'We want to hear you speak about this again.' And so Paul left the meeting. Some men joined him and believed, among whom was Dionysius, a member of the council; there was also a woman named Damaris, and some other people."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember ever being "put on the spot" suddenly to give an account of yourself and your beliefs? How did it make you feel? Were you able to give a good account of yourself?
- Have you ever "looked around your surroundings" and found yourself deeply saddened by the "godlessness"/"secular spirit" of your office, school, campus, city, state, or nation?
- What was it like for you to discover "kindred spirits" in unlikely times and places, people who were genuinely "hungry for the Gospel" and "open to the Grace of God"?

Once we get used to a routine in life, it's easy to "live on autopilot". (Can you remember ever driving a very familiar route, only to realize suddenly that you have no memory of going through all of the traffic lights between where you are and where you've been? Did a little bit of fear or concern surge through you at that point? Did it concern you at all that you could go so far, and through so much potential "danger" without paying any conscious attention to people/vehicles around you, or even really thinking about it?) The deeper problem arises when we begin living most of our "inner lives" in this manner. We "go through life" day after day, giving little to no thought as to the "deeper meaning" of what we are doing, when or why or with whom...because "we are on autopilot." Then comes a sudden challenge to the faith we claim, and we are "put on the spot" to declare our belief, and back it up with "reasonable propositions". Do we stand firm at such a "moment of truth", or "back-peddle" in fear? Can we explain with clarity many of the Christian customs, assertions, or platitudes we often employ? Luke relates how Paul is suddenly "thrust into the spotlight". He is being given the chance to speak to the City Council of Athens to "make his case for Christ"; these are the "upper crust" of the city, not average day-to-day people in the street. Note also—his original hearers don't *ask* Paul; they *take* Paul before the council! (How many of *us* would be ready for such a challenge? Are *we* ready to "speak for the Lord" if given the chance? Are we prepared to address the city council, the school board, district superintendent, the boss, the mayor, or anyone for whom "God would open the door", in the name of Jesus Christ, and state clearly why we believe He is God, and why *they* may need Him, too?) God, grant us the Grace of Ready Witness! In any opportunities You arrange for us, empower us to "make the most of the moment". Enable us to share our faith in You so clearly and passionately that people of "hungry heart" and "open mind" will hear Your Invitation in our testimony. Make Your Gospel such an integral part of the lives we live that we are ever ready to offer others a "place in the Reign of Love" Your Son initiated, and continues to sustain for *all* who will believe Him!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-30-2015 @ 0900

"God Makes a Way!"

Acts 18:1-4

WE EXALT THEE

For Thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth! Thou art exalted far above all gods! (2X's)
We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee! We exalt Thee, O Lord! (2X's)

Acts 18:1-4

"After this, Paul left Athens and went on to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, for Emperor Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and stayed and worked with them, because he earned his living by making tents, just as they did. He held discussions in the synagogue every Sabbath, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever "found yourself in a bind", wondering "what now?" or "how do I make ends meet here?", when God "mysteriously" opened a door and provided all you needed?
- Can you remember a "moment of loneliness", in which you felt truly isolated from all around you, and a "chance meeting" took place, through which you made a lasting friendship?
- How did you use the "new opportunity" to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, and offer the Grace of God to even more people around you?

"Stepping out in faith" is one of the "hallmarks of sainthood", but any who have done so freely admit such "walks of trust" are easier said than done. (On a "secular" level, we may ask: "Where do we go?" "Where do we stay?" "How do we make a living?" "Who will be there with us?" On the "spiritual" plane, we may wonder, "Is this really God's Will?" "Where is God right now?" "Is *this* the answer to my prayer?") These are the kinds of questions all of us ask when we find ourselves facing the unknown. It is easy to *talk* about "faith" and *testify* to God's "faithfulness" and "provision" from the safety and security of our living rooms or church pews, (especially if all of our needs are met at the moment). Luke now asserts God's faithfulness even when we are "all alone" and "far from our normal stomping grounds"! Paul is "on mission", far from his "home base" at Antioch, but he follows God's lead, and notice how God provides for everything. In the "strange" setting of the city of Corinth, Paul finds a couple, who "just happen" to share the same faith and trade, (tent-making,) and become good friends of his! By faithfully following the Holy Spirit's lead, Paul suddenly finds friends, a job, and an income by which he can support himself while spreading the Gospel in a foreign land. God "covers all the bases" for those who dare to trust in Divine Providence while obeying Divine Will. No matter where we are, or where we may be going, we are "God's children". As long as we are following Him humbly, He will "make provision" as we go along. Paul needed a job, and God provided a job. Paul needed some friends, and God provided some friends. Soooo....What may we may need this year as we follow God's lead? Are we feeling fearful or faithful as we look to tomorrow? God is already there! Are we uncertain of our prospects, or confident in our Provider? Luke affirms that God already "has us covered" if we unite in fervent prayer, embrace sacrifice as needed, and serve generously where we are able to "follow His lead". God, grant us the Grace of Ardent Trust! Keep our prayer open to the guidance of Your Spirit. Help us embrace the sacrifices of time and effort required to offer freely the Gospel we have freely received. Empower us to serve in Your Name all the needy we encounter wherever You may send us. Enable us to ponder Your Divine Design *before* we prepare pastoral plans of our own. Rather than ask the world to come join us, make us more willing to "walk beside" the worldly, inviting them by our lifestyle to embrace the Gospel of Your Son, as You make the Way!