

THE HYMNS THAT BROKE CHAINS

Paul and Silas were victims of a severe persecution for having healed a girl who was possessed by a spirit of divination, who brought much gain to her own by foretelling (Acts 16:16b). So it happened that this girl for many days caused great discomfort to Paul, until annoyed and worn out, he turned and said to the spirit within her, I change you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her! And it came out that very moment (Acts 16:18). That caused her owners to take Paul and Silas to the authorities to be beaten with rods. They struck them with many blows and threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. He, having received charge, put them into the inner prison (the dungeon) and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:20-24). They were secured by the stocks, but their spirit was free to sing praises to God. Not burdened by their situation, at mid-night, they let praises to God, loud enough for the other prisoners to hear. That must have been a divine sound as if it had come from heaven, in the moment when all was calm and perhaps asleep. Heaven came down to Paul and Silas and they spread the sound for all the prisoners to hear. That, my friend, was powerful! We haven't experienced such power in our time. Paul and Silas prayed, sang hymns of praise to God while in shackles. Imagine the state in which they were, to find the courage in faith which sustained them through their ordeal. Paul taught through the letter to the Philippians these principles: Rejoice in the Lord always, do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God (Phil. 4:4,6). This was a principal Paul observed and taught his churches. While shackled in jail, he lived what he taught through his experience. He didn't complain but used the opportunity to spread the Gospel even when in chains. The hymns they sung were a way to show the prisoners that there was a God of love; nothing muzzled his mouth; the joy of the Lord planted in his heart spoke to all the other prisoners that the joy that comes from God provides strength even in the midst of bad circumstances.

The extent that Paul and Silas experienced the power of God was that the doors of the jail could not compete with God's power, and they were opened, loosening everyone's shackles and freedom rung in that jail, where all could have escaped, but none did, for the sake of Paul and Silas and for God's purpose to be accomplished in the lives of the jailer and his family. As a matter of fact, Paul had a vision when a man from Macedonia stood pleading with him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us! (Acts 16:9). For God's purposes to happen, Paul and Silas had to suffer as prisoners. We just don't know how God works neither do we understand His ways. The way He thinks is much higher than our way, His thoughts higher than our thoughts. We stay perplexed at somethings that must happen for the will of God to be accomplished. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. Paul and Silas were under the care of God, even when circumstance did not show it to be real. The result of Paul and Silas being jailed and mistreated, was the salvation of the jailer and his family. Fearful of what just had happened, the jailer tried to commit suicide, but Paul and Silas saved his life by saying that no one had fled. The jailer came with a question, Men, what is it necessary for me to do that I may be saved? They answered, Believe in the Lord

YAHSHUA Messiah and you will be saved; you and your household as well (Acts 16:25-31). Here is a tremendous result of obedience and an internal reward. Paul and Silas overlooked all they were going through for the price in heaven waiting for them.

Although, when the road is rough and difficult to travel, when the stillness of the night we are in, takes us places we do not want to go through with fear and anxiety, there will be the presence of the Holy Spirit, Who will never leave, nor forsake us. His voice assures us that we are not alone. A song can be born at that time of uncertainty and at the same time of faith in the One Who loves us. A song that travels far into the ears of one who is in desperate need to hear it. So, we must open our mouth and sing loudly and clearly for all around us to hear about the faithfulness of our God.

Think of the Patriarch Job. Suffering for reasons only God knew, never lost his love for God; beautiful writings came from his trials, in an expression of his faith in God. Oh, that the words I now speak were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! That with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer and Vindicator lives; and at the last He will stand upon the earth; and after my skin even this body, has been destroyed, then from my flesh or without it, I shall see God, Whom I, even I, shall see for myself and on my side! And my eyes shall behold Him, and not as a stranger! My heart pines away and is consumed within me. (Job19:23-27). This is indeed the most beautiful song sung in Job's night, when he expressed hope and faith and belief in His God in his sufferings. He did not abandon God as his wife suggested. No, the Patriarch Job didn't love God because of his riches. He was as God described him to Satan: Have you considered MY servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and abstains from and shuns evil? (Job1:8). When God gave Satan permission to hurt Job, that was the spiritual condition Job lived in. So, his trials started from the top of his head to his toe, there was no sound health; He lost all his riches and his children, too. The only person that survived was his wife, who angrily advised him to curse God and die. Surrounded by his friends, so he thought, it completed his emotional pains. But Job kept his song and at the end it broke his chains, when he prayed for his friends. God blessed him more than the first time.

King David, a prophet, a musician, suffered much in the hands of his enemies. In his case, he caused his problems, but despite it, God gave him songs in his nights of trials and blessed him. He said in Psalm 40: I waited patiently and expectantly for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock, steadying my steps and establishing my goings. And He has put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God, many shall see and fear and put their trust and confident reliance in the Lord...Many O Lord my God, are the wonderful works which You have done and Your thoughts toward us; no one can compare with You! If I should declare and speak of them, they are too many to be numbered (Ps. 40:1-3,5). The love that King David had for God is seen in his psalms. A broken and contrite heart before God, he became "a man after God's heart." His psalms declare praises, worship, gratitude, brokenness of heart, and humbleness. Reading the book of Psalms connects with our everyday temptations and trials. The heart of David expresses what we would express to God in our sorrows and hopelessness. It so encourages us to read them, knowing that

somebody suffered the same pain we suffer today. A new song will be given us when we, like Paul and Silas submit to our circumstances, letting God do His part. The Bible says that God inhabits the praises of His saints; I imagine that angels join us in many situations when we are not aware of them. The unseen angels have taken part in many worships in the past. It must have been a glorious experience never to leave our hearing.

Perhaps you are going through a tough valley or a desert, with all kinds of temptations to fall into. Or you are going through a time trial that has lasted longer than you expected, according to your calendar. Maybe you lost hope and faith in the healing of your body or lost your strength to fight for it. Maybe it is none of these suggestions. But one thing I know, He didn't die for nothing. His body was not broken in vain; it happens for the healing of our body. He is our Creator, our Healer and Savior and Lord. Do you think that is there anything too difficult for Him to do? Learning how to surrender to Him all troubles and diseases and be free from anxiety and fear, is a path in His direction for contentment and peace. He will give you a song amid your hardest time, as He did Paul and Silas. Then the doors of your trials will all be opened, the chains will be broken from you; you will be free to praise Him, to worship Him with the song He gave you. Life will be new; the old gone. No looking back. The memories will at times take you to the past but remember: Do not remember the former things; neither consider the things of old; Behold, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs forth; do you not perceive and know it, and will you not give heed to it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isai 43: 18-19). There will be a song you will sing that will open your jail cell, and free you to liberty in Him. Sing, sing, sing, my friend! God inhabits the praise of His saints. Be one of them!