

Series: "Church the Way It's Supposed to Be"

Sermon #14

"Jailhouse Rock"

Acts 16

Introduction: In 1957, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller wrote these words:

*Number forty-seven said to number three
You're the cutest jailbird I ever did see
I sure would be delighted with your company
Come on and do the jailhouse rock with me.*

Those words are part of the lyric to a song that was released September 24, 1957 to coincide with a movie starring Elvis Presley called "Jailhouse Rock."

The song named some very unusual characters such as [Shifty Henry](#), a well known LA musician. The [Purple Gang](#), a real mob, not a rhythm section; and, "Bugsy" who was probably [Bugsy Siegel](#), the [Jewish](#) gangster. In 2000, *Rolling Stone Magazine* listed "Jailhouse Rock" as #67 of the 500 greatest rock-n-roll songs of all time. The song was named by The Rock-n-Roll Hall of Fame as one of the pioneer songs that shaped rock-n-roll. [1]

But, ladies and gentlemen, Elvis Aaron Presley did not invent "Jailhouse Rock." God invented it, recorded it, provided the lyrics for it, and allowed it to be sung in Acts 16.

The Jerusalem conference has convened in Acts 15. Paul, Barnabas, Peter and James have been used of God to clear up the confusion created by a group of false Jewish teachers regarding the matter of circumcision for salvation.

Acts 16 is the chapter of "Jailhouse Rock." Let me explain what I mean by drawing your attention to 3 new things. First of all, we see:

Outline

1. A New Direction!

- A) Enriched by God's Men
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2. A New Distraction!

- A) His Focus was Tested
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3. A New Disposition!

- A) What Brought Them In
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 - 1) Prayer
 - 2) Praise
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 - a) Lives were Spared
 - b) Lives were Saved
 - c) Lives were Solidified

1. A New DIRECTION!

In his classic work, *"The Great Omission,"* Robertson McQuilken writes, "In a world in which 9 out of every 10 people are lost, 3 out of every 4 have never heard the way out, and 1 of every 2 cannot hear, the church sleeps on."

As the Jerusalem conference ends it was certainly not time for the disciples to take a nap. In fact, Paul hits the ground running after they had established, once and for all, the glorious doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

Paul now sets out in a new direction as he sets sail on his **2nd missionary journey**. It's interesting that Paul visited in the reverse order the cities which he had visited the first time.

A) ENRICHED by God's MEN

In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas part ways because of their disagreement about John Mark. You will remember that on their **1st missionary journey**, John Mark had gotten discouraged when confronted with opposition; and, thus, went home.

Paul is in need of a new partner. Thus, when Barnabas gave John Mark another chance, **Paul chose Silas.** However, as soon as they come to **"Derbe and Lystra,"** in Acts 16, Paul meets a young man named **"Timotheus,"** otherwise known as Timothy.

Someone said, **"God may change His workmen, but His work will go on!"**

Paul quickly learns that Timothy was **produced by a woman of God.** In verse **2**, Timothy is referred to as the **"son of a certain woman."** That woman is identified in 2 Timothy 1: 5 as Eunice. Apparently, much of Timothy's success in the ministry could be traced back to the godly heritage instilled in him by his mother.

Then, he was not only produced by a woman of God, but he was **perfected in the Word of God.** In 2 Timothy 3: 15, Paul describes how that Timothy, **"from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures."** In other words, due to his godly upbringing, Timothy was well-versed in the Scriptures.

As a result, he was **prepared for the work of God.** We read in verse **2** that he, **"well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium."**

This **good report** was a constant, consistent, and continuous witness given by Timothy, for Timothy and of Timothy. When Paul came to town and met Timothy, he found a young man who was well-prepared for the work of the ministry. Apparently, we get the idea that, because Timothy had been faithful in the little things, he was counted on to be faithful in the large things.

Jesus said in Luke 16: 10, **"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."**

I used to think that verse meant that a person who stole a pencil had the potential to steal a purse. But what Jesus was saying was thing, **"Unfaithfulness in the small things is the same as unfaithfulness in the big things."** To God unfaithfulness is unfaithfulness, whether in the big or small.

Do you want God to use you? Do you want God to **"enlarge your coast?"** Do you want God to take you to the next level in your Christian life? Do you want God to open bigger and better doors?

Then, learn to be faithful scrubbing a toilet, changing a diaper, patrolling the parking lot, or turning off the lights. If God can count on you to be dependable in the little things; He will be able to count on you to be dependable in the large things.

When Ronald Reagan was asked, "What is the secret to being a great leader?" He replied, **"Surround yourself with people smarter than you are."**

I don't know if Timothy was smarter than Paul; but he was a servant like Paul. Thus, Paul begins his new direction equipped with dependable, reliable and faithful men of God. But, also he was:

B) EQUIPPED with God's MESSAGE

Paul takes Silas, and digs a diamond out of the rough, named Timothy. They head out in a new direction and we read in verse **5** that, **"the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."**

In verse **6**, they were **"forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia."** So, Paul goes down to Troas. And it is while he is in Troas that, through a vision, he becomes equipped with a message from God.

In the vision, Paul sees a field white unto harvest, and he a man give a plea for help in verse **9**, **"Come over into Macedonia, and help us."**

This vision marks one of the most important turning points in history. It turned Paul westward into Europe, and would result in the evangelization of the Western world, which would result in the further development and proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul responds to the plea in verse **10**, **"And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."**

Paul receives a message from God; he obeys, and comes to Macedonia armed with the glorious gospel message of God. His obedience to obey the "Macedonian Call" opens the door, in verse 12, to come to **"Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia."**

His obedience to the "Macedonian Call," which opened the door to come to Philippi also opened the door, in verse 14, to meet **"a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."**

Paul's obedience to the "Macedonian Call," which opened the door to come to Philippi, as well as opened the door to meet Lydia, all resulted in the opening of the door for the beginning of what would become known as the Church of Philippi.

Many writers concur that the beginning of the Philippian church began in verse **40**. After Paul and Silas were released from prison they, **"entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed."**

The Philippian church was one of the greatest churches of Paul's ministry, as well as the New Testament. It was founded all because of Paul's obedience to follow God in a new direction.

In March of 1986, in Bel Air, Maryland, a 25-year-old man named Roger Moore was given a traffic ticket for not having his toddler secured in a car seat. The young man grumbled about the ticket and fastened his son into the appropriate restraint. The ticket was begrudgingly stuffed in the glove compartment.

Nineteen minutes later, Mr. Moore and his young son were involved in an accident. The little toddler sustained a few minor injuries but was protected by the restraints of his car seat. Unfortunately, the father was killed. Although he heeded the warning to fasten his son's seat belt, Moore never buckled his own. Someone heard the story and paraphrased James 1:23: **"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who . . . died in Bel Air, Maryland, in 1986."**

Rev. J. H. Sammis put it this way:

*When we walk with the Lord, I the light of His Word
What a glory He sheds on our way.
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.*

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to Trust and obey.*

The problem with many Christians is not that they do not know what to do; but, that they simply DO NOT DO WHAT THEY KNOW TO DO! It's called obedience, and according to 1 Samuel 15: 22, it is **"better than sacrifice."**

2. A New DISTRACTION!

While God presents a dynamic opportunity to Paul, Satan presents a diabolical opposition to Paul. God has set Paul out in a new direction that would eventually result in the start of one of the greatest churches in the New Testament; but, when God acts, the devil always reacts.

Such is the case as Paul is faced with a new distraction. For one thing:

A) His FOCUS was TESTED

Paul has just experienced a wonderful time of fellowship in the home of Lydia. God had done a tremendous work in her heart by preparing her for the burden of Paul's heart. This great victory did not call for rest, but for refreshment. And Paul knew that the best means of refreshment was by spending time with God in prayer.

We read in verses **16-17**, **"And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: [17] The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation."**

This demon-possessed girl made her living by soothsaying and telling fortunes. Because of the control of demonic forces, she was able to make

inspired utterances such as, *“These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.”*

Paul knew that this was nothing more than an attempt of the enemy to derail the gospel. And Satan’s best strategy to derail the gospel is to impersonate it and infiltrate it. He disguises this woman as a “spiritual genie,” when in fact she was nothing more than a pawn to make money for her employers.

Yet, today, there are many who claim to have the ability to tell people what sicknesses are in their body, what problems are in their past, or what financial breakthrough are in their future, because, they say that, God revealed it through a “word of knowledge.”

The minds of many are confused as to the reality of such things, but in 2 Corinthians 11: 13-15 Paul makes it easy to understand when he says, ***“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. [14] And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. [15] Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. ”***

Isn’t it amazing that every time we set out to serve God we are confronted with some sort of obstacle? For example, you make up your mind to spend time with God in prayer and the phone will ring off the hook. You determine to sit down and read the Bible, or go on visitation and, all of the sudden, someone shows up at your door that you haven’t seen in 30 years.

Coincidence? No, it’s the plan of the devil to discourage, disillusion, and distract you by testing your focus. Paul was aware of what was taking place, so he did what all need to do. He says in verse **18**, ***“I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”***

Simply put, he told the devil to go back to hell where he belonged, because, although, their focus was tested they would not allow it to be taken.

B) His FAITH was TARGETED

If Plan A fails, the devil will move to Plan B. He has tested their focus, and now he targets their faith. We read in verse 16 that this woman was ***“possessed with a spirit of divination.”***

The phrase, *“spirit of divination,”* is a horrific Greek phrase. It literally reads, “A Pythian spirit, or the spirit of Python.” According to mythology, Python was a snake that guarded the Temple of Apollo, and was eventually killed by Apollo.

Years later, the word “python” would come to mean a demon-possessed person through whom Python would speak. [2] Does that sound familiar? That is exactly the case in our text.

The Python serpent called Satan chose a woman through whom he tried to speak. Python was a god to the Greek culture; thus, Satan attempted to target Paul’s faith in the true God by the deception of a false, pagan god.

Is that not still his game plan today? Satan knows that he cannot convince us to denounce our faith in God; thus, he seeks to distort our faith in God. ***Have you ever considered that when people want to counterfeit something, they don't counterfeit gum wrappers? They counterfeit \$20 bills, \$100 bills... something that's real!***

So it is with Satan. He seeks to counterfeit something that’s real. He will dangle something before us with enough truth to entice us, but there is just enough truth in it to make it lethal. As R. Kent Hughes said, *“He loves to distort the gospel just enough to twist it into a deadly heresy.”* [3]

He knows that he cannot *diminish* the finished work of Christ, so he will try to get you to **doubt** the finished work of Christ. He will allow you to believe that Christ died for your sins so that you could be saved, but you can’t be saved forever; because, if you really were saved, you would never have done what you did in the first place.

Can I tell you what to do the next time Satan tests your focus and targets your faith? Take him back to an old rugged and bloody cross and rub his nose in it; then, like Paul, tell him to go back to hell where he belongs, because he is a liar and the father of it.

The devil is a liar, a thief and a murderer. He has come to “steal, kill and destroy.” But, open the door of your heart and introduce him to the One who has come that **“you might have life and have it more abundantly.”**

I love the story of the old country preacher who talked about the years that he struggled with the assurance of his salvation. But, finally, the day came when he received the full assurance of his faith.

He stood up and testified, “I come to the realization of the fact that I am saved and secured forever. For the devil to steal my soul, he will have to go through the seal of the Holy Spirit. Once he gets through the seal of the Holy Spirit, he will have to go through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. If he gets by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, he has to pry open the hand of God the Father. If he pries open the hand of God the Father, he has to go through the blood; and, if the devil ever gets to the blood, HE WILL BE A SAVED DEVIL!”

Our focus will be tested, our faith will be targeted, but may God help us not to allow it is to distract our eyes from “*looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*”

3. A New DISPOSITION!

Acts 16 is an epic story of the life and times of the apostle Paul. He begins in a new direction which ends in a *purple-seller's house*. He faces a new distraction which leads him to a *possessed house*. Then, he embraces a new disposition as he is escorted into a *prison house*.

Prison would not be something new for Paul, but his disposition in prison is most striking. Notice with me:

A) What BROUGHT Them IN

The charges brought against Paul and Silas were very unusual charges. There was a **racist** charge as they were referred to as **“Jews,”** in verse **20**. There was the **riot** charge as they were accused of **“troubling our city.”** Then, there was the **religious** charge in verse **21**, **“teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.”**

We get the idea that when Paul came to the city of Philippi, with the message of God’s redemptive love and grace, he was not welcomed with a ticker tape parade. He did not receive an escort, or a key to the city.

Instead, in verse **23**, they **“laid many stripes upon them,”** and **“they cast them into prison.”** Then, in verse **24**, they **“thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”**

The officials who punished Paul and Silas were called **lictors** in Latin. It is from that word that we get our expression, “Getting your licks in.” And did they ever get their licks in on Paul and Silas.

In fact, Paul would later graphically describe this night of torture in 2 Corinthians 11: 23, 25 by saying that he was **“in stripes, in prisons more frequent...of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one;”** and, he was **“beaten with rods...a night and a day I have been in the deep.”**

At a religious festival in South America, a series of booths lined the midway. One booth sold trinkets and necklaces. Printed on the front of the booth was a sign that read, “Cheap crosses sold here.”

Many Christians today are looking for “cheap crosses.” They want discipleship without demand, sanctification without sacrifice, and convenience without commitment. But, the phrase “cheap crosses” is an oxymoron. If it’s cheap, it’s not a cross; and, if it’s a cross, it’s not cheap.

Be not deceived, discouraged, or disillusioned, because serving God always costs! We may never face the pain, punishment, and prison time as Paul and Silas, but if we **“live godly in Christ Jesus”** we **“shall suffer persecution.”**

But, I not only want you to notice what brought them in, but also:

B) What BUSTED Them Out

Get the picture. Paul and Silas are bound in stocks and chains in a miserable, vermin-infested pit. They have been brought into prison on the charge of causing trouble, in the city of Philippi, by preaching the gospel.

But, it's interesting to note that while the gospel brought them in, the glory would bust them out. First of all, in verse **25**, we see their **prayer**, because **"at midnight Paul and Silas prayed."** Then, we hear their **praise** as they **"sang praises unto God" so loud that "the prisoners heard them."**

I can imagine that Silas says, "Paul, how's your back?" Paul says, "My back is killing me." Silas asks, "What are we going to do now Paul? Do you think they will beat us again?"

Paul says, "First, we are going to pray, that will take care of tomorrow; and, then we are going to sing." Silas asks, "Sing? What in the world do we have to sing about?"

Paul says, "Don't you remember what Jesus said? **'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name sake. REJOICE AND BE EXCEEDING GLAD...for great is your reward in Heaven.'**"

All of the sudden a rat-infested pit turned into orchestra of praise. We don't know if Paul and Silas were lovely singers, but we do know that they were loud singers, because everyone in the prison heard them singing.

Isn't that amazing? Right in the midst of trouble they were able to triumph. Right in the midst of prison they were able to praise. Right in the midst of sorrow they were able to sing. Right in the midst of rejection they were able to rejoice.

C. H. Spurgeon said, *"Any fool can sing in the day. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but, the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by. Songs in the night come only from God."* [4]

What happened? Well, their prayer and praise brought down the **power**. All of the sudden, God leans over to His earthquake angel and says, "Go down there and get Paul and Silas out of jail."

So, in verse **26**, **"And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed."**

I love the commercial where a couple of fellows are sitting at an opera. They have snuck in bottles of beer by putting it in their coats. All of the sudden the aria goes into falsetto voice and the beer bottles burst in their pockets, causing beer to go everywhere. I love it because I'm thinking, "That's what you boys get for having that beer anyway."

Paul and Silas are in prayer, and then they break forth with praise. They finally go into falsetto voice, and it was more than the stone and mortar of that prison cell could take. Their praise and prayer connected with God's power, and the walls came tumbling down.

As a result of God's power, **lives were spared**. In verse **26**, **"all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed."** Then, in verse **27**, the jailor attempts to take his own life, but Paul intervenes and spares his life.

As a result of God's power, **lives were saved**. In verse **31**, the Philippian jailor asks one of the GREATEST questions in the Bible, **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**

Notice Paul did not instruct him to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses, but rather, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."** The power of God brought household salvation, not because of the jailer's belief, but because every member of the family believed.

Finally, as a result of God's power lives were spared, lives were saved; and **lives were solidified**. I love how the scene changes. Here is a jailor who was hired to create Paul's wounds; but, he meets Jesus, and now he brings them to his house to comfort Paul's wounds.

The town council holds a meeting and decided to let Paul and Silas go quietly; but, the only problem was that Paul and Silas did not want to go quietly. Paul demands, in verse 37, **"They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out."**

Paul says, "Boys, you aren't going to get off that easy, because we want everyone in the city to see, know and understand what God has done from the purple-seller's house to the prison house to the Philippiian jailor's house."

As a result, lives were spared, lives were saved, and lives were solidified as they come into "**the house of Lydia,**" in verse 40, and the wonderful church of Philippi is officially incorporated.

Do you find yourself in jail today? Perhaps not a literal jail, but in an emotional jail, a physical jail, a financial jail, or a spiritual jail? You are bound in the "stocks" of suffering, sorrow, pain, problems, troubles and trials, and you think there is no way out.

Can I tell you how to get busted out of your jail? Prayer and praise somehow supernaturally gives God permission to release His power. When we pray, we are trusting through the circumstance. When we praise, we are triumphing over the circumstance and thanking God in advance for what He is going to do.

That's when His power comes into play to cause:
*Those chains that seem to bind you,
Serve only to remind you
That they'll drop powerless behind you,
When you praise the Lord!*

Several years ago, a missionary in Texas led a man to the Lord. The man, in his 60's, was not able to read or write, so he asked the missionary to teach him John 3: 16, and one verse of the song they had sang that day during the service, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

He promised to come back to church to be baptized; however, 3 weeks passed and the man didn't show up. But, on the 4th Sunday, here the man came with 10 other men to the service. When the invitation was given, all 10 men walked the aisle to present themselves for baptism.

The old man said, "I led them to the Lord this week with John 3: 16, and one stanza of 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus.'" The old man only lived 2 years after he was converted, but he took one verse in the Bible, and one stanza of a song and led 100 men to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Was it because the man was a great orator, an eloquent speaker, or a dynamic soul-winner? No, it was because the man relied on the power of God to do what he was not able to do.

Friend, long before Elvis Aaron Presley ever thought of it, God orchestrated Jailhouse Rock to demonstrate His power in the lives of His people. If He is the "*same yesterday, today and forever,*" let your prayer and praise connect with His power that is still able to do "*exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think.*"

Endnotes

- 1) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jailhouse_Rock_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jailhouse_Rock_(song))
 - 2) Acts: *The Church Afire*, R. Kent Hughes, pg. 214.
 - 3) IBID.
 - 4) "*Be Daring,*" Acts 13-28, Warren Wiersbe, pg. 40.
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