



The Ruins of the ancient amphitheater at Philippi

In the passage from Acts which we heard this morning, we read the famous account of the Philippian jailer, this official who is converted to Christianity by the witness and testimony of Paul and his fellow believers. What has changed for the jailer as a result of these happenings? What has changed in his life because of his encounter with the Gospel? Well, the answer is nothing and everything. We can presume from this passage that this prison official went on to maintain his same job, with neither impoverishment nor improvement in his circumstances. We may also assume that his family went on living in the same house, with the same physical advantages and limitations they'd possessed before their Baptism into the faith.

And yet, everything has changed in the profoundest of ways for this man and his household. With the coming of the Gospel into their home, the entire world-view of this family has shifted. What is really important in life, all the key things of their lives have changed forever.

Just look at the difference in this man's state-of-mind before and after his encounter with The Lord. When this jailer learned of the prison doors being flung open by the earthquake, he was so wretched that he decided to take his own life, and in fact came within an inch of doing just that. He was absolutely bereft of any hope, and this absence of hope is so often the foremost emotion in the minds of those who decide to put an end to this life. But isn't it amazing that when the Gospel of the Lord Christ is welcomed into his home, we read that this man is suddenly filled with joy (see Acts 16:34). Nothing and yet everything has changed.

Even though, at least at that time he must have known that his entire livelihood was in jeopardy. After all, these were dangerous people these Christians. Why, these disciples of the Christ were turning the entire known world upside down; they were causing really important people to lose their grip on power, and anytime you shake the people at the top of the heap, they're going to come after you. And that's exactly what was going on with Paul and his friends. They were in prison because they had decided to subvert the dominant authority. Yes, these were dangerous people these Christians, and this prison official must have known that welcoming them into his home was going to win him some pretty powerful enemies. And yet, this man couldn't care less. In fact, the only thing he cared about in his rejoicing was that the Gospel had come under his roof. Yes indeed, while nothing had changed, yet for him everything had changed.

Isn't perspective an amazing thing? How often the people who come through the door of my office are inmates in prisons of their own making. Sometimes they are weighed down by guilt or even shame. From time-to-time I will encounter a man or woman who has become convinced that he or she is absolutely worthless, they've made such a mess of their lives. Yet, the Heavenly Father yearns for each of us to be free, to be truly free from any form of guilt or shame. And he cared enough about each and every one of you to go to the Cross on your behalf. So you must be worth something, in fact in the eyes of the Lord Christ you are worth so much, you're even worth the blood and agony of Golgotha. That's how much you're worth.

Yet, too often I encounter people who are in the most wretched state, and the real tragedy of their predicament is that in order to be truly free from their imprisonment, no great physical change is required. In fact, the only thing that is required for these people to win their freedom back is a change of heart. And so they must change nothing and yet everything.

This passage is full of metaphor, and it is, in the end, the power of the metaphors here which ties this Scripture passage most closely to you and me. There is the violent earthquake; there is the flinging wide of the prison doors; there is the being of a hair's breadth from ending it all; but then, someone heeded his call for light so that he could understand what his situation was; and finally there is salvation which arrives in the very nick of time from the most unimaginable quarter.



Possible site of Paul's prison at Philippi  
(from Unbound Bible – [unbound.biola.edu](http://unbound.biola.edu))

How often in our own lives have we been right there with that prison warden, right there behind bars of our own making, when there was a violent earthquake in our lives, and the prison bars are inexplicably blown away with the coming of light into our world, and then salvation arrives in the strangest and most inexplicable way? How often have we, in the very nick of time, found ourselves in the presence of God, and nothing and yet everything has changed?

And finally, did you notice what the entire passage revolves around – because there is a fulcrum, a kind of center point in this passage from God's word. And this key kernel of truth is the question that the jailer poses in verse 30 of Acts Chapter 16, and it is this: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?...What must I do to be saved?"

It's always the same question, you know. So, dear ones, I need to ask you this morning, have you been in prison? Is your life bent on some path of dependence, or addiction, or destruction? Are your steps wearied by the crushing absence of hope in your life? Are you yearning for light, and life, and freedom?

Well, I know a way to a living freedom. And it is the light of the Gospel and the grace of the Cross. It's the road that indeed leads to a place where everything is changed. It is the road that leads to the cross of Christ.

It's Ascension Sunday today, the last Sunday of Easter. And as we get ready to conclude the great fifty days of the Easter Season, is it time for a change of heart? Are you still waiting to ask the Lord to take up His dwelling within you as Lord of your life? Or were you in the sweetness of that happy place once, but maybe you've wandered away from the light and hope of His countenance? If so, I hope you'll go in quiet to the Cross in these final days of Easter. I hope you'll invite him once again under your roof and into your life. And if you do that, you will indeed find all things made new in the joyous light of His perfect freedom.

Alleluia! The Lord Christ is Risen Indeed! Amen. JWB+ 4/04/16