

ESF Lord's day service message
9/18/2016

Songs in the Night

Acts 16:16-26

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

If we searched a man in the Bible who lived the most troubled life, he would be Job. He lost all his children by natural disasters. All of his properties were destroyed by disaster or taken by bandits. He got sick from head to foot. His wife told him to curse God and die. His life was

filled with darkness. But in such unbearable trials and darkness, he was able to sing. Job 35:10 says, “*But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night..'*”

By singing songs in dark trials, he overcame the trials. God blessed him with healing, more children, and abundant possessions.

Job confessed that it was not he but God who enabled him to sing songs in the night. In today's story of Paul and Silas, we can find the God who gives us songs in the night of trials and who enables us to overcome trials. Let's see how we can sing songs in the night and turn trials to opportunity for receiving God's abundant blessings.

Focus not on people but on God

When Paul and Silas went to Philippi to start a mission, they met a slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit. By the evil spirit she predicted the future. Some people owned the slave girl and were making money through her fortune-telling. When Paul saw the girl enslaved by the evil spirit, he felt sorry for her. So he expelled the evil spirit with the power of Jesus' name. She was set free from the evil spirit. And she stopped fortune-telling.

However, the people in the city didn't like what Paul did to the girl. The owners of the slave girl accused Paul and Silas of ruining their business. They stirred up the crowd and the magistrates of the city to strip Paul and Silas, beat them and put them in a prison.

At that time, if Paul and Silas had thought only about what the people had done to them, they would have been angry and bitter. But instead they thought about the blessings that Jesus had done for the poor slave girl. They focused not on what people had done to them, but what Jesus had done for them. When they focused on Jesus and what Jesus had

done, peace and joy filled their hearts. With peace and joy, they were able to overcome the sufferings and sing hymns to God.

In Philippians 1:18 Paul testifies to this truth,
“But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,”

As Paul and Silas did, if we focus not on the trials that people have brought to us but on the blessings that Jesus has given to us, peace and joy will fill our hearts. And with the peace and joy we will overcome the trials.

Jesus says in John 16:33, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

There was a new city bus driver in New York City and he was on the first day of his new job and route. Things were going well until he realized he took a wrong turn and found himself driving through a park. Although this was an express run, they were traveling by flowers that were in bloom, trees that were budding and green grass. He was relieved to arrive at the terminal only a few minutes late and thought maybe no one noticed. When they stopped an elderly lady said, as she got off the bus, “young man that was lovely! I’ve been riding this bus for years, and that was the first time I was treated to a free tour of the park in spring time.”

Life is full of detours and trials. It may be an illness; loss of a job; financial stress; troubles at work; troubles with a boss; family troubles; loss of a loved one or many other things that can arise in our lives. All of us have detours and trials in our lives from time to time.

With Jesus who has overcome all trials, we can find the bright side of dark trials. In Jesus, trials are not an endless darkness but a beginning of a new blessing. With this faith, we can sing joyful songs in trials.

Overcome evil with good

The people who beat Paul and Silas and put them into a prison were unjust. The owners of the slave girl were inhumane and greedy. For them money was more important than the slave girl's freedom. For them the girl was not a decent human being, but just a money making slave. The magistrates should rule the people according to the law of justice. They should investigate the owners' accusation against Paul and Silas fairly. But they didn't give Paul and Silas any chance to defend themselves. They allowed the senseless crowd to beat Paul and Silas. They sided with the crowd. Why? They did it to please the crowd for their political gains.

Because of the greedy people and unjust magistrates Paul and Silas were falsely accused, publicly humiliated, flogged, and thrown into jail.

If Paul and Silas thought about the greedy, unjust people who had brought them so much pain, they would not have had peace of mind. They would have cursed them with bitterness. They would have thought how to revenge themselves on the unjust people.

But they chose not to do so. Instead of cursing them, they blessed them. Instead of choosing revenge, they put the matter in God's hands.

Why? In Romans 12:14-21, Paul explains the reason. *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Do not repay anyone evil for evil.Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's*

wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

They believed that it was God's will for them not to revenge their adversaries. They believed that it was God's will to forgive their enemies. They believed that by forgiving and blessing their enemies, they could overcome evil with good. As they believed, they obeyed. And God filled their hearts with peace. With the peace of God, they were able to sing in the night.

A young woman lived in war-torn Armenia in the early 1900s. A Turkish soldier chased her and her brother down a dead-end alley. The soldier killed her brother, but she escaped. Later she was captured and put to work in a military hospital.

One day the man who had murdered her brother was a patient in the hospital and was assigned to her ward. When she recognized him, she was horrified. But he had been critically wounded and she knew that the slightest neglect would cause his death.

Suddenly, a battle waged within her. One side of her wanted vengeance. She thought, "Here's my chance. No one will ever know." But Christ's Spirit reigned victorious inside her. She nursed him back to health and prayed for him daily.

When the soldier finally recovered, he asked the nurse in amazement, "Why? You recognized me. Why did you care for me so faithfully?" She replied, "Because I serve Him Who said, 'Love your enemies and do them good.' That is my faith." The soldier was silent as he reflected on such foreign words. Then he replied, "Tell me more of your religion. Tell me more of your Lord. I would give anything to have a faith like yours!"

When we suffer from people's unjust treatment, we may have choices. We may stay locked up in the prison of bitterness, or we may seize the opportunity to overcome evil with good.

When you suffer from the trials caused by unjust people, don't curse them, don't revenge yourself on them. Forgive them. Bless them. Put them in God's just hands. God will fill your heart with His peace. With God's peace you can sing songs in the night. And you can overcome evil with good.

Give thanks in all circumstances

At midnight in the jail, Paul and Silas must have been in great pain. They did not know what the people would do to them next. Their mission just got started in the city. But they didn't know how to continue the mission in the jail. They knew nobody who would help them get out of the jail. Everything was uncertain and dark.

If they had thought about their negative situation, they would have remained sad and depressed. However, during their dark situation, they were determined to give thanks to God. They prayed and sang songs unto God. And God not only filled their hearts with peace but also shook the jail with an earthquake.

Paul encourages us in Philippians 4:6-7 to receive the same blessing by giving thanks in all circumstances: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

When darkness falls on our lives, let's give thanks to God.

When we are in a financial disaster, loss of a loved one, breakup of a relationship, or other troubles and trials, let's give thanks to God.

When people misunderstand us, mistreat us, and attack us unjustly, let's give thanks to God. If we give thanks to God in all circumstances, God will give us peace. God will remove the obstacles. God will move the immovable. God will enable us to overcome the darkness.

A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign, which said: "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat. A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.

Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy. That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?" The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way." I wrote, "Today is a beautiful day but I cannot see it." Both signs told people that the boy was blind. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign told people that they were so lucky that they were not blind.

Be thankful for what you have. God will enable you to become positive. When life gives you 10 reasons to cry, show life that you have 12 reasons to smile. Paul encourages us to give thanks in all circumstances in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "*give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*"