



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

UNSTOPPABLE: God's Work in the World

Prison Changes People – Acts 16:19–40

Tim Badal | November 4, 2018



We've been chronicling the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul in our series called "Unstoppable." All of last year we dealt with the first part of Acts, looking at how the church began, in a series called "Unfinished." While much was accomplished in the early church, in the 21st century we still have work to do. So the book of Acts is reminding us that this mission we're on as gospel ambassadors is also an unstoppable work. No matter what was thrown at the early church—whether persecution or imprisonment or other tribulations—every time the devil and this world tried to stop the church, it only got stronger and the gospel went farther and farther.

We need to realize today that God has given us an unstoppable gospel. Let us never forget, brothers and sisters, that Jesus wins—amen? We have this opportunity to be on the winning team, declaring to the world their need to turn from their sins and throw themselves into the arms of Jesus, Who alone is able to save.

Today we're going to read about the work God did in Philippi. Last week we learned that Philippi was a leading city in the region of Macedonia, which is now modern-day Greece. Paul and his team had been working in what is now modern-day Turkey, but on their second missionary journey, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke headed over to Macedonia and went into Philippi. There they came into contact with a group of women who prayed by a riverside. When they shared the good news of Jesus Christ with them, Lydia, a wealthy woman, had her heart opened to receive the truth they brought, and she became a follower of Jesus. She was baptized, after which she opened her home to this missionary team.

As the men continued to share the gospel in that city, a slave girl who was inhabited by a demon spirit mocked them as they came and went. She called them "servants of the Most High God" who had come to bring the way of salvation. At some point, we're told, Paul became aggravated with her, so he commanded the spirit to come out of her. The demon was exorcised, and she was brought into the family of God.

In both Lydia's conversion and the exorcism of the demon from this girl, we see that God's call for Paul to go into Macedonia was validated by the receiving of the gospel in Philippi. Today we'll read the story of a third person who was also brought to Christian faith. These were three very different people with very different backgrounds, yet God used the same gospel to change their lives.

As a result, a church eventually was started in that city and it became such a great source of joy to Paul that he later wrote them a letter we know as the book of Philippians. Some people believe, based on what Paul wrote to them, that the church in Philippi was his favorite. One scholar said this:

The church at Philippi was always a favorite with Paul, as you can see reading the letter to the Philippians. The nucleus of that church was made up of a wealthy woman, a slave girl and a Roman jailer. Such is the grace of God. Christ takes the weak things of the world and confounds the mighty.

God is doing the same thing today. He's taking people from all walks of life—rich and poor, young and old, men and women. He finds people who are hungry for Him and people who want nothing to do with Him, but in His grace He brings them together through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did it in the first century, and brothers and sisters, He does it today as well. We are seeing His unstoppable work not only in the Fox Valley area, but all over the world through our missionary partners. That's why we praise the name of Jesus Christ.

Today we're in Acts 16. What began as a good experience in Philippi quickly turned bad. It wasn't because Paul and his friends had done anything wrong—rather, they had exorcised a demon out of a servant girl. What followed might seem confounding, as we'll read in Acts 16:19--34:

¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 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 everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

It has been said that prison changes people. Maybe it's the hard life there, or maybe it's the opportunity to sit and think about the wrongs that were done. But we have learned that prison uniquely changes the hearts of those who spend time there. That's one reason our church sends teams into state penitentiaries to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the inmates. Because they are not otherwise distracted, these people hear the gospel and are often changed in ways that those who are free are not. This desire to share the gospel with prisoners, which first began in Philippi, has been going on for centuries.

I'd like to introduce you to a man named Tom. As a young man, Tom spent more time in prison than he did outside. He was first incarcerated as a juvenile prisoner when he was 15 years old. Over the next 15 years, various drinking, drug and burglary charges took him in and out of prison. Tom never had any idea that his life could change. Each time he was released he tried to turn his life around, but each time his bad habits remained. He was the kind of guy you didn't want your daughter to bring home for Thanksgiving. Back in 1977 in Omaha, after he had been charged with dealing marijuana and cocaine. His life was going nowhere.

But in December 1979, in a prison in Nebraska, Tom asked his cellmate a question. Right after Christmas that year, the Gideons had brought them gifts—New Testaments, along with some oranges and apples. Tom saw his cell mate reading the New Testament and in anger, he asked him, "Why are you reading that book? It gives no hope or answers. We're prisoners. We're never going to change." But his cell mate told Tom he had been involved in a Bible study earlier, where he met a pastor who shared some things about Jesus with him. While he had not fully bought into what the pastor told him back then, it was now starting to make lots of sense.

The next time it was visitor day, Tom asked the visiting pastor to meet with him and answer some of his questions. He told the man he too wanted a Bible. On December 28, 1979, that pastor led Tom to know Jesus—and it changed his life. But I need to be honest about this. Even after Tom was released from prison, he still ended up back there over and over again. So why can I say prison changes people? You need to understand something. Tom went back to prison, not as an inmate, but as a missionary who would tell other prisoners how they can be free through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In fact, Tom did that for the rest of his life. He visited prisons in Pennsylvania and Nebraska, then finally late in his life he came to the Fox Valley area through Wayside Cross Mission's New Life Corrections ministry. That's where I and others in this church came to know Tom Beatty, a man who was forever changed by the gospel in a prison cell. He shared the gospel in prisons right up until two years ago, when he died.

You see, prison changes people. The Philippian jailer was changed because of two prisoners who were in his custody for only a few hours. Yet that day the jailer came to understand the grace of almighty God through the suffering of two great missionaries. That prison experience gives us some important truths. You might say to me, "Wait a minute. I've not spent any time in prison." I'm not going to ask how many of you have, because it might not be something you want us to know. But I'm glad most of you can say you haven't spent time in jail or been arrested. That's a good thing for a pastor to know.

Yet can we acknowledge that prison isn't always a place behind bars and locked doors. Some of our prisons are medical or relational or spiritual or emotional. Some of us are in a financial prison right now. Sometimes these prisons can be just as debilitating as a physical jail. No matter what prison we find ourselves in, God can meet us there and change us to be more like His Son.

Let's look at three lessons that we can draw from our text.

Our text teaches us that life stinks.

Our first lesson is the truth that life sometimes stinks. Can I get an amen? There are chapters in our lives that frankly are no fun. There are times when we'd like to say to God, "Time out—I want out." Sometimes these chapters are just for short periods, but others of us have been in these seasons for a very long time. I know as Christians we're not supposed to confess that our lives stink. After all, God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22–24).

There are days when life on earth isn't that much fun, and we reach the point where we just want God to take us home. We might expect Paul and Silas to have some of these same thoughts. They had just accomplished some very encouraging things. They had led Lydia to the Lord and she became a changed person. She was excited about what God was doing. They also set free a demon-possessed girl who was enslaved by her masters because the demon gave her the ability to tell the future. Her masters had no desire for the demon to leave her, but Paul and Silas set her on a course to know the one true God and to be filled by the Holy Spirit rather than a demon spirit. What do these two wonderful events in Philippi get them?

¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."

Their situation was similar to that of Jesus, Who, while He was doing good, was taken into court by the leaders of the city and charged with causing trouble. In the case of Paul and Silas, they were charged because of their ethnicity. "*These men are Jews.*" Racism is something that comes out of us when we start by identifying someone with their nationality or skin color. The Romans were essentially saying, "The Jewishness of these men is a problem. They're those kinds of people." Judging people by their nationality first should never be part of our thinking as Christians. First and foremost, all people are created by God in His image. But the Romans are making a clear statement of anti-Semitism.

There was also a civil charge. Paul and Silas were accused of disturbing their city. What were they doing? They were setting people free and giving them hope. But that was upsetting the status quo. In fact, Paul and Silas had interfered with the ability of the slave owners to make money off this young girl. She had lost her spirit of divination. So why do these men accuse Paul and Silas of "disturbing our city"?

They went on to explain that there was a religious problem, claiming that Paul and Silas were advocating customs that weren't lawful for the Romans. But they don't explain to the magistrates the real reason why they were upset. It's quite possible that making money off this girl's ability to tell fortunes was in fact illegal.

It might be like the mob coming to government officials and saying, "The missionaries are causing trouble." "What are they causing trouble with?" "Never mind. We can't tell you." So these men came up with some cockamamie excuses, none of which actually held any ground in court. But who cares about a court when there's a crowd? Notice in verse 22, "*The crowd joined in.*"

Oh, Christian, be very, very careful in our day and age about joining a crowd, especially one that is doing things that are wrong in the sight of God. This particular mob of people joined in with the accusations against Paul and Silas, possibly because they too had been benefiting from the spirit that was in that slave girl. Here's what happened next:

²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

There was a kangaroo court; the mob took over and began to attack Paul and Silas. The magistrates ordered that they be beaten, then they were put in prison.

Prison life is painful.

One reason why life stinks is that circumstances like this are painful—whatever your particular prison is. Many of you who have grown up in the church have already heard this story, especially about how Paul and Silas were singing in the prison. But we need to be careful with the flannel-graph version of this story. Our Sunday School teachers might have told us that Paul and Silas were beaten up a little, but they were still singing. Please know that what is being described in the Bible was a very hellish experience.

If you were to research what it meant to be “beaten with rods” in Roman history, you would learn that the beating lasted for about 30 minutes. It wasn’t just a few blows. It often was administered by 12 of the strongest men in the city, using birch wood clubs. A person would be stretched out by their four extremities during the beating. Every part of the body was hit. After that, historians tell us that the largest of the men who were doing the beating would bind the person like an animal, leaving his feet exposed, after which the man would break the person’s feet with his club. Think of all the bones in the human foot and the agony of not being able to stop the blows. There was of course a Roman law that the prisoner should not be killed, so it was designed to be painful for a long time thereafter. This wasn’t just a little dust-up. This was heinous. But we have a propensity to sanitize these stories, thinking it was really quite easy for Paul and Silas to sing praises afterward. We think, “I’ve been knocked around a little bit and I’m able to praise God.” No. They were beaten to within an inch of their lives. Luke does a phenomenal job of giving us details regarding what was taking place. We read that the jailer put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet into stocks. That’s important. Think of how much that would hurt for a person whose feet had just been beaten. The person would not be able to move their feet. They couldn’t get comfortable enough to sleep, so add sleep deprivation to the pain. Rather, they would have to stand all night on their broken feet. It was an extremely painful experience. Then what do we read next? “Paul and Silas yelled and screamed at God, ‘How dare You do these things to us, God?’” Do you see that in the text? No. Did they make a deal with God? “God, if You can get us out of this, then we’ll serve You.” No. You don’t see them trying to talk their way out of the prison. There’s no mention of bribes or bartering with the jailer.

What did they do? Verse 25, *“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”* How in the world could they do this? Every good Christian should say, “I want that kind of faith when I’m beaten to within an inch of my life.” The beating could be physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological. But when bad things come, that’s how we want to respond. These men persevered.

Prison life requires perseverance.

Maybe you’re at a point in your life when life stinks. My heart breaks for you. If we had time to hear some of your stories, we would be heartbroken. But God doesn’t say to us, “When the going gets tough, give up. When the going gets tough, you don’t have to be holy anymore.” God is not okay with us spouting off some sinful words. No, when the going gets tough, God tells us through the words of the apostle Paul to endure hardship like a good soldier. That’s what Paul and Silas were doing. They endured. How did they do that? How did they show this kind of perseverance?

1. Perseverance begins by complying with God’s plans. We have to be compliant and flexible. As Christians, we are moldable to the plans of God when everything is going our way. It’s not hard to follow God when there’s money in the bank, when the marriage is strong, when the kids are obedient and everything is good. It is not hard to love God when things are going well.

Don’t fall prey to people who would say you’re a faithful individual because your life is always good, you’re healthy, you’re wealthy and all of that. That’s garbage. What we see over and over again is that life sometimes stinks, even for the most faithful followers of Jesus.

Paul and Silas told God, “Whether You’re blessing us beyond measure with all the good things, or whether we’re beaten, abused, accused falsely and are in prison with no release in sight, we’re still going to worship the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s the kind of compliance we need.

After all of Job’s trials, he told his wife, *“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”* (Job 2:10). Some of us live with a 50% Christianity. We’re glad to receive the good from God, but we’re out of here as soon as bad things happen. In the sports

world, we call that type of person a “fair weather fan.” Truly in the end, that person is no fan at all. Paul and Silas were compliant in the good times and in the bad.

2. Perseverance requires that we cultivate joy. How did Paul and Silas cultivate joy? First, we must not confuse joy with happiness. They’re two very different things. Happiness is dependent on our circumstances; joy exists in spite of circumstances. Joy has been defined as “a good feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit as He causes a person to see the beauty of Christ in both times of great triumph and times of great tribulation.”

Do you have joy? Do you have the ability to have a sweet spirit in the most difficult circumstances? Joy doesn’t come naturally to us. Joy is a choice we make. One of my favorite books by John Piper is titled *I Choose Joy*. Think of it this way: Joy is the byproduct of seeing Christ as being greater than our circumstances. When we can see Jesus as being more powerful and more radiant than the problems, pains, or sorrow we face, then we will find joy.

How could Paul and Silas worship in that jail? Because Jesus was far more magnificent in their minds than anything they were encountering—being beaten to within an inch of their lives, being thrown in prison, being falsely accused. Being a follower of Jesus Christ was way better than escaping those hardships.

So when life stinks, when life throws you all kinds of horrific things, you have a choice. You can become bitter or you can become better for Christ. When we choose Christ, by His Holy Spirit He gives us joy that wells up within us, enabling us to say, “My circumstances may stink, but I love Jesus. I want to follow Him and I want to stay with His plans, no matter the difficulties that come.”

3. Perseverance requires confidence in the promises of God. Paul and Silas believed God’s promises were true. Years later, this same Paul—who was beaten and imprisoned yet who was able to sing praises and was ready to give the reason for the hope within him when asked about it by the Philippian jailer—wrote this reminder to us in Romans 8:31: “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” What can man do to us? Paul continued in verse 38, “*In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*”

When we realize we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus, when we realize we have victory in Him, whatever the world may throw our way, we will agree with Paul who wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:17–18, “*For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.*” Then and only then, when life stinks, we will be able to praise and pray to the God Who saves.

Our text teaches us that God saves.

Why could Paul and Silas do what they did? They believed in a God Who saves. They were in prison, then at midnight, as they were singing and praising God, an earthquake came. The jailer ran into the prison, concerned that the prisoners might escape because the earthquake had literally knocked the prison off its foundation. The doors had opened, and the stocks had come off the prisoners’ feet.

We might think, “That’s one unique earthquake!” Of course. It accomplished exactly what God wanted it to do. We don’t know how widespread this earthquake was, but we do know it had an impact on that jail. And at that point the jailer was ready to kill himself. He knew his only job was to keep the prisoners in the prison. What do prisoners do when the prison doors are open? They run. But in this case, none of them left. Why not? Something unique happened in that prison. We might be able to understand why Paul and Silas didn’t run, but we would expect the rest of the prisoners to have escaped. But Paul cried out to the jailer in verse 28, “*Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.*” Something happened at midnight in the lives of those other prisoners—they saw something in Paul and Silas that caused them to be obedient to what the men told them.

When you suffer well for Christ, unbelievers take notice. The jailer rushed into the prison, “*and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas*” (verse 29). Why? What would cause him to do that? Did he think the earthquake came from Paul and Silas’ God? How would he know what God they served? Perhaps it was because he had somehow heard the words the slave girl cried out in Acts 16:17: “*These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.*” He realized these men were with the one true God Who sets His people free. Zeus hadn’t done that. Apollo hadn’t done that. Aphrodite and Hermes had never done that, nor any of the other Greek or Roman gods of their day.

The God these men served, the God Who brought salvation through the message they proclaimed, had opened those jail doors. The jailer realized, “I want to be saved by this God.” How does God save? The jailer asked the greatest question anyone can ask in

verse 30: *"What must I do to be saved?"* Paul and Silas responded, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

1. Notice the simplicity of the gospel. There weren't any rules and regulations. Paul didn't pull out his portfolio of instructions for the Philippian jailer. "Get a pen and paper—you need to write these things down. Number one, number two, number three... Here are all the provisos and disclaimers you must know before you can be saved." No. The gospel is simple.

2. Notice that salvation is not a process. It doesn't mean a person does one thing, waits a while, then does another. Paul simply said, "Do this and you will be saved."

3. Notice there is no preparation. Paul doesn't say, "Study up, then I'll be back on Friday when you can take the test. You need to know Who Jesus is, who Peter is, who Moses and Abraham are." No, there's no preparation required. The gospel is simple and it contains three elements.

This salvation involves a posture.

First, a person must have the right posture before God. Paul told the jailer to believe. We need to realize that believing is more than just mental assent to facts about Jesus. In James 2:19 we read, *"Even the demons believe—and shudder!"* That kind of belief isn't enough to qualify for salvation.

One Bible translator put it this way: "Belief is one person throwing all of who they are into the arms of another." It is what you do at the end of a hard day, when you're exhausted and you throw your entire weight on your bed. You depend on that bed to hold all of you. Brothers and sisters, belief means throwing all of who we are—all our sin, all our dysfunction, all our hopes and dreams, all our temptations—into the arms of Another. Paul was telling the jailer to throw himself completely on to Another, putting himself completely under His command.

This salvation involves a Person.

Who is the "Another" Paul is talking about? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus..."* He wasn't speaking about a religion, a movement or a set of ideals. He was speaking of a Person. We must throw ourselves into the arms of Jesus.

Remember what Jesus said to the crowd upon whom He had compassion in Matthew 11:28: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* When those of us who are weary and broken throw ourselves on Him, with all our sin and dysfunction and troubles, He tells us, "I am able to carry you and sustain you, but even greater, I am able to save you."

How does He do that? He's the Son of God. He lived a life of perfection, then went to the cross to die on our behalf. Through His shed blood, we now can have eternal life. Jesus then proved His power over death and the grave by rising again. He now sits at the right hand of the Father.

This salvation involves a promise.

Whether you're a Philippian jailer, a grocery store worker or a Fortune 500 executive, God says, "All who come I will in no wise cast out." It doesn't matter who you are. This is His promise of salvation to all who believe. No more do we have to strive or toil. No longer do we have to figure this out on our own. We now have the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit living in and through us so that in this life we might find abundance, contentment, and peace; then in the life to come we will spend eternity with our Father and Savior in heaven.

That is what was being offered to the Philippian jailer, and that is what it offered to us today: the gospel of Jesus Christ. The jailer believed, but not only him—his entire family came to faith. After they had heard what happened, all of them were saved that night and were baptized then as well.

I don't want to guilt anybody here, but this is a great reminder that if you are a child of God and you have not been baptized, you are out of place regarding New Testament Christianity. We are to be saved, then "at once" we are to be baptized. Maybe you don't like being in front of people, but the Bible tells us we are to be baptized "at once."

Does baptism bring salvation? No. But it needs to happen. Salvation takes place on the inside, but baptism declares on the outside what is true inside. If you have believed in and trusted Christ, you are saved. But if only God and you know that, that's not what God desires. He wants us to be a light to the world (Matthew 5:14), and the first people we can be a light to is other believers through our baptism.

Remember that Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28:19, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* It’s the first command every Christian needs to follow. The jailer was baptized “at once.”

Our text teaches us that Christians share.

Brothers and sisters, in our difficult times, are we ready to share the good news of Jesus Christ—or are we licking our wounds? Paul and Silas were able to share the good news because their gaze was not on their circumstances, but on Christ the entire time. When life stinks, God saves and Christians share. We see in this text two types of sharing.

We are called to share our hope.

When you leave this place and head to your workplace or school, ask yourself, “Who around me needs hope? Who needs peace? Who is missing joy?” When you see that in someone, proclaim the gospel to them.

This last week I was dropping off Amanda’s car to be fixed by a mechanic I have been gradually getting to know. When I asked him how he was doing, he openly replied, “Man, I’m not doing real well. I’ve been running this business for the past three years and I just found out that I have to move. I have no place to go. The business I’ve built up will fall apart unless I can find a place to fix cars.”

So I said, “Well, let me tell you what I do when I have no hope. I turn to God. I pray, asking Him to lead and guide me. Asking Him to give me wisdom. Friend, I want to pray that for you.” He said, “You would do that?” I said, “Yeah, I’ll do that.” So right there, amongst the lifts and all the tools, I prayed with this man. Just as I was praying, another customer walked in. “Whoa, I thought this was a mechanics shop. My bad.” “No, come on in. I’m just praying for this guy. I want to keep him in business. I want him to find hope.” It didn’t help when the bill came, by the way, but that’s all right, because God had given me an opportunity to give a reason for the hope I have in Christ Jesus.

Listen, that’s not just my job because I’m a pastor. I never told this man I was a pastor. He knows me as Tim from 5-B’s. But I shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with him, telling him where he can find hope. It’s not found in whether he has a place to do business.

Brothers and sisters, we have opportunities to share the hope we have. First Peter 3:15 says we should *“always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”* That’s our role this coming week.

We are called to share our homes.

Finally, we are also called to share our homes. You’re thinking, “What? Share our homes?” We read in verse 34, *“Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”* The first thing this Christian guy did after being baptized was he opened his house with hospitality.

This isn’t the first time we see this in Acts. Back in Acts 16:15 we read, *“After [Lydia] was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.”*

We share our hope, but in many ways that’s theoretical. This new-found hope holds our souls in place, but it can be hard to communicate that. So what can we also share with them? Our homes, our temporal dwellings. Lydia did this, the jailer did this. We as Christians need to do this as well. In 2018, we live in mansions compared to where they lived in Philippi. “But my house isn’t nice enough.” That’s okay. They weren’t that nice in Philippi. “My food isn’t that great.” That’s all right—it wasn’t that great in Philippi. And who says you have to offer food?

Notice that the jailer washed and bound up their wounds. Is there someone around you who is broken, who needs some wounds washed and bound up? Invite them into your home. Love on them. Care for them. Encourage them. Minister to them. It might be another follower of Christ, it might be a neighbor or someone else who needs encouragement and hope.

One of the ways we proclaim the good news of the hope we have in Jesus Christ is by sharing our temporal goods, whether it’s our homes, our cars, our money, our time or other resources with those around us. Someone might respond, “But that’s not my spiritual gift.” Well, get that gift. “I’m an introvert.” That’s okay. Invite other introverts over. Share your hope by sharing your home.

Acts 16 reminds us that sometimes God allows prisons. Another sermon series I want to do at some point is to look at all the references to prisons throughout the Old and New Testaments. It’s a fascinating study in how God used prisons masterfully in the lives of His children.

Sometimes God will call you to live in some kind of prison where life is going to stink. But in those moments, suffer well. Sing and praise God, knowing that He is greater than your circumstances. When you do this, He will give unique opportunities in those prisons to share the good news of Jesus Christ. And when those opportunities come, share the hope you have and whatever else you have at your disposal, even as God has shared His goodness and love with you by bringing you out of death and into life.

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