



Joy

the Backbone of Christian Living

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Lesson No. 2

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for *correction*, for *training* in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NASB).

Introduction

In our previous study, we left Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail, severely bruised, in great pain but still in good spirit! We ask, “Why were they in jail?” Let me give you a clue:

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10 NASB).

Let’s face it. God will go to any length to save any soul that thirsts for Him! God’s radar picked up a signal of positive volition in a jail cell and responded in a way that left Paul and Silas with physical bruises but resulted in the salvation of a jailer!

I have heard so many stories told about how people have risked their lives to get the gospel to areas where it’s prohibited. Someone once told me that he joined Muslim worshippers, learned the Koran and their method of prayer so that he could secretly share Christ with them. Another told me that in his desperation to bring a message of hope to the lost in prison he had to commit a minor crime in order to go to jail.

These are true stories. It's not the scope of our study to condone or judge these actions. I just want to make a point that God will go to any length to rescue anyone who desires to be rescued from the eternal consequences of total separation from Holy God, resulting in condemnation to the lake of fire for all eternity. That's why He permitted Paul and Silas to be jailed! Paul and Silas were in prison just for one precious soul! Think of it! That's God's expression of love—grace in action.

Let us pause for a moment. Do you think that the Apostle Paul and Silas knew exactly why they were in jail? Not really; however, the Omniscient One knew! Similarly, Spirit-filled believers often find themselves in a situation in life and can't seem to figure out why God could allow them to be in such a dilemma. The sublime truth is that the All-wise-knowing God knows what He is doing -- both for us and through us! Paul and Silas knew this, which explains why they were relaxed! They knew that God, not the Roman government, was in control! They knew that if God had brought them that far, it must be for His glory! They were not bitter. Rather, songs of joy, came from their lips, filling their jail room, as they fulfilled this Biblical concept:

In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NASB).

Their life became a witness to the jailer! They became "the fifth and the sixth gospels," -- the "gospels of Paul and Silas" respectively. These were the first gospels the jailer had an opportunity to "read"! The jailer knew they were in jail because they had proclaimed the gospel. Many inmates had been kept in custody under this jailors care, and brutalized with the same special Roman whips. But never had he witnessed anything like this! Two people bleeding from their bruises and yet filled with inner peace and joy! The witness of their life dispelled the misconception that joy is only for good times!

Joy in the Midst of Pain and Suffering

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25 NASB).

Their joy stemmed from the fact that the Lord had counted them worthy to share in His suffering. The Lord Himself had previously said,

"Blessed are you when people cast insults at you, and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12 NASB).

Earlier our Lord's disciples had a similar experience. In Luke's account we read,

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and

brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey [believe in] Him.”

When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago **Theudas** appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, **Judas the Galilean** appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. *Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.*”

His speech persuaded them. *They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Jesus]. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:17-42 NIV Italics added for emphasis).

My friends, we pose the question: “What is the secret for having joy even when things fall apart?” Before we answer this question, we return to Paul and Silas in prison to see how their joy attracted a jailer to the Lord. God would authenticate to the soul searching jailer that the inner peace, joy, and message of Paul and Silas were from the Most High God!

The Jailer’s Conversion

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. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house [who also believed]. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family (Acts 16:26-34 NIV).

Amazingly God used these three converts: a business woman, a slave girl and a jailer and their households to lay the foundation of a remarkable church, which the apostle Paul called “MY JOY.”

- Question: Why did God permit Paul and Silas to be jailed?
- Question: Is it possible for a believer to experience abounding joy even in the midst of pain and suffering?
- Why did Paul and Silas not spend their time mewing, whining and complaining about an unfair and unjust punishment?
- What’s the main reason for their joy even in the midst of their pain and suffering?
- What is the purpose of God’s miraculous work while Paul and Silas were in jail?
- Why did the jailer respond to the miraculous work of God and the owner of the slave girl (in lesson 1) did not?
- According to Gamaliel, how many people have been successful in opposing God’s plan?
- How has this lesson impact your life?

Log in next month for a continuation of our introduction of this phenomenal book. Until then, our beloved, may God richly bless you as you seek to deepen your relationship with Him through perception and application of His Word.

Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

To be continued in (lesson 3), God willing.