

Loving Others Acts 16: 35-40

Well, this morning we come to the conclusion of Paul and Silas' ministry in the city of Philippi. And what an exciting chapter. We have seen the Macedonian call, and we have seen the missionaries go into Europe. We saw the conversion of Lydia, and casting out of a demon from this slave girl. We saw the response of her owners and the arrest and beating of Paul and Silas. They were thrown into prison where they sang at midnight. There was an earthquake, and then we have the conversion of the Philippian jailor. And what we have at the end of this chapter is a young church established and planted in this city. The gospel is now firmly rooted in Europe.

This last paragraph wraps up their ministry here. The personal words of an eyewitness account of Luke drop off after this text, so Luke and maybe some others stayed behind to help teach and ground these new believers in the truths of Christ. They can certainly join Paul and the others there later. And we see here that Paul is released from prison and is told to leave the city. And it is kind of a strange passage because in it Paul asks for the officials of the city to come and escort them out of the prison, and we wonder why he does this. Why the claiming of your Roman citizenship now? Is it just revenge or to humiliate the magistrates? I mean why does he do it? Certainly he does not leave this district right away because after they are released they go to Lydia's house, and they seem to remain there for a while. It seems to many to be a transitional passage just leading us out of the city to Paul's next major stop in Thessalonica. Some think there really is not that much here.

But let me say there are a couple of principles that are taught here. And one of them is, something that we mentioned last time, the importance of loving others in the household of faith. Part of love is a deep rooted concern for the welfare of others. We rejoice with those who rejoice but we also mourn with those who mourn. There is a care, and in that care there is also protection. We want to protect others from harm and undo adversity. We see this with our children. We protect them from evil influences that might come into their lives. Why? Because we want the best for them and love them. And here both Paul and Silas love the individuals which made up this small church. They loved them in the Lord. They were involved in their lives, and that caused them to care for their welfare. We often care about our own welfare but again Biblical love patterned after Jesus Christ care for others, desires the best and works for the best in others lives. How often are we caring and protecting others? In order to have this kind of ministry, we have certainly to be involved in the lives of others.

The other thing that love does is it seeks what is highest and best for the person who is being loved. Christ knew what was best for us, and he came and laid down his life because we needed forgiveness of sins most of all. We needed to be reconciled to our God. God the Father loved us by sending his Son. And we need to seek what is highest in the lives of those around us. I believe we give others what we love the most, what we cherish the most. As believers that should be Christ. We need to show them or communicate to them the most glorious and encouraging truths of Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen from the grave. We must become experts at relaying these truths in wide variety of situations and trials in people's lives. The counsel we often give is often more worldly than biblical, that these things will come to pass, or you don't

deserve it, or whatever, are not loving responses. The highest way that we can love others is by relaying the glorious truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the implications in our lives.

So how are you doing in loving others? Are you seeking to protect them from the evil and harmful influences around them? Are you seeking to relate the glorious promises of Christ to those around you? Through your love are people more encouraged in following Christ or discouraged, is Christ absent from your relationships? God wants us to build loving relationship that are beneficial to others for the glory of Christ. I want us to see Paul's loving relationship to the Philippian believers in a couple of ways in this passage.

1. We love others through protection. Vv. 35-39.

I heard a story a while back about a child who was just about to be hit by a car, but his father rushed out and pushed the child away and he took the hit himself. And that is an example of sacrificial love. He gave his life for the welfare of his child. So if we love others it will bring problems and difficulties because we care and truly want to protect them. In the church, godly pastors preach the truth but also warn the sheep of wolves who want to come in with their damnable heresies. Why? Because they want to protect them. They love the sheep. A pastor may go and rebuke someone or warn them about the direction they are on. But the whole motivation of the warning, hopefully is inspired by love. And it is to be a ministry in which we are all involved in. We are to help and protect one another. We know how easy it is to go astray, so in love we need to be involved in the lives of one another. It is so easy to let others do it, or say that is not my problem. Love sacrifices its own comfort for the welfare of others. One way love sacrifices is it protects at even a cost to oneself.

And look at this passage because things seem to take a dramatic turn and twist because look at verses 35-36, **“But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.’”** So here the magistrates, the very people who were responsible for Paul and Silas' imprisonment and beating send word to let them go. And there is a fuller explanation by the jailor that they are free to go. And what is implied in these instructions is that these two men would leave the city at this time. The jailor wishes the best for them through the peace of Christ.

Now why the change of heart in the magistrates? And there could be many reasons. An earthquake just happened. They knew they treated Paul and Silas unjustly, and they knew they preached about some kind of God, maybe they thought their gods were angry with them so they want to let them go. Maybe they just thought they had suffered enough, and they had appeased the slave owners of the girl who was possessed. But this is what we know, these turns are from the Lord. Remember, they were put in maximum prison, in shackles and viewed as dangerous criminals. These changes are none other than from the Lord. And it is incredible how often we see so many positive blessings in our own life that we would never have imagined come into our lives. We are excited to tell others. And we praise God because we know every good gift comes from the Father of lights. We realize we do not deserve any blessing but he showers with unexpected blessings upon blessings.

What is also surprising in the text is Paul's response. We think hands would be turned upward in gratitude to God, he would come out and that would be the end of the scene here and his ministry in the city. But look at verse 37, **"But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.'"** Paul says five things in this statement in his refusal to go out of the prison. First, they have beaten them publicly. This was done in the presence of all. And the punishment was to send a message to any and all not to follow the path of these men. They, secondly were uncondemned, even though there was no trial. There was no formal charge brought against them. There was no opportunity to plead their case or innocence. Thirdly, and this was a huge one. They were Roman citizens. Roman citizens had more rights. One is — they were always given a trial, and also they were never beaten. Fourth, they threw them into prison. They were treated as notorious criminals. And now fifthly they want them to leave quietly and leave town and the whole episode comes to an end.

So what does Paul want them to do? He wants them to come out publicly and lead them out. This would have been humbling and this would have been an admission that they were innocent of all charges. Now look at the response to this news of the magistrates or the rulers of that city, **"The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens (38)."** Notice fear gripped their hearts. They knew they could not only lose their lucrative positions but they could also be severely punished. In fact, the city itself could lose its status as a Roman city with all the rights and protection that went along with it.

So look at what they did in verse 39, **"So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city."** Notice the three actions taken and remember these are the very men that had them beaten. They apologize. For these proud men this would have been very humiliating and embarrassing. They were the powers that be, but now everything they hold dear is threatened. They took them out of the prison, and this would have been public for all to see. And remember the beating would be fresh in everyone's mind being the day before and it was an admission of their innocence. And then they asked them to leave the city. Notice it is not a demand but now a request. What a reversal. They are no longer in control.

Now why did Paul exercise his Roman citizenship here at this time? And the reason why is not because he wants to get even or just get his revenge by humiliating these men. It is all about the gospel, and the protection of those who he will leave behind. Think of it, when they start preaching Christ, and the accusations come up against believers, remember the accusations above that led to their beating in verses 20-21, **"And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, 'These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.'"** When these accusations are made again, the humbling of these leaders will come back into their minds. They will be reluctant to take any action. What if these two hear of it and report what was done to them? The reason why Paul uses this legal means has nothing to do with anger or getting even but more to do with love and protection of the small church at Philippi. Paul loved these individuals deeply. He cared about their physical care and most of all

their spiritual care. Both of these are tied together. They are free to meet, learn and go out into their community as gospel light. Who would have ever thought that God would use the beating of Paul and Silas not only to reach the Philippian jailor and his family, but protect this infant church? God is truly at the helm of human history.

And God does use our love and care for one another. And we should be so thankful we have rights here in Canada that many people don't have in other parts of the world. We are not hiding or meeting in secret. We can witness and testify of Christ. Our free speech is being eroded even through legal avenues. And we often bemoan and get frustrated about how many of our rights are being taken away. But how thankful are we for our rights, because we realize these rights come from our sovereign God? And they are first and foremost given to us that we might be his gospel witness. Again, these rights are not about us but about him. So think of it, we have Sunday morning come and we have a choice. We can have a good family day or go out to eat or whatever, or we have the right under our laws to come out to church, and not only love God but also love others, encourage them in the things of Christ. How do you think God wants us to use our rights that we say are God-given? How about testifying of him. God has given us a place where we can actually share our faith. How often do we in love take up that right and in gentleness and care for another share Christ? So often we never witness just because we couldn't be bothered.

Think of it, God has given us so many rights and freedoms, and these rights are given that we might not only worship and love Christ but love others. How are we doing? Again, all life is a stewardship. All life is about God. Even our Canadian citizenship is about making much of Christ by loving those around us. This is just another blessing and means God has given us to love others. Paul and Silas use their citizenship as a way to protect others and love others.

2. In love we point others to Christ. V. 40.

Let me say that some verses often shock me and surprise me and challenge me. And this is one of these verses. And the reason why is because when any of us have gone through loss, or we are going through difficulties, or trials seem to be consuming our lives, we want to cry out for help. And we are often frustrated when we do not get it. We want to cry out, "Don't you know what I am going through?" We want to point to ourselves and the spotlight on us. And we should be coming around those who are hurting and seeking to help, comfort, and encourage them in the Lord. We should be sensitive to the needs of others. But often even in hurt are we seeking to encourage others? This is what is so impressive about our Lord. In the night in which he was betrayed, the disciples are arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. And as they enter the Upper Room, Jesus knows all that is going to take place that night. He knows that he will bear the sins of all those who will ever trust in him the next day. But there is no servant to wash their feet. But instead of rebuking them and saying, "Don't you know what I am going through???", he takes off his outer garment and washes their feet. He meets their need. He loves them, and gives an example that points to the extraordinary love of the Father. It's all about pointing.

And think of the suffering and obstacles we go through. What is the purpose? And we say, and rightly so, it is to conform us more and more into the image of Christ. But there is always another purpose or reason for our suffering. There is always a

testimony to others about Christ that brings comfort and assurance about the glories of Christ. God actually gives us a ministry to others to help others see him. Listen to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:6, **“If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.”** The part I want us to dwell on is “if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.” My afflictions, your afflictions are for the comfort and assurance of others. We can be so consumed with what is going on, so angry at life and others that we forget this component. Again, all life is a stewardship and has reason. What kind of testimony is this? How does it give comfort and assurance? Basically this way, when they see you or me going through adversity and trusting Christ, they certainly do not want your problems and sorrow and heartache, but they as believers want that trust — that assurance that my God is always good — my God is always in control. Jesus has never left me and certainly will never forsake me.

This is why I find this verse so extraordinary because look at what it says, and think through it, **“So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.”** The place they would go to is the place of safety and security and acceptance, and Lydia’s is not only a place where they were staying but it is where the brothers or the church met. And that is not what is unusual. We are thankful for our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are such an encouragement to us in hard and difficult times, and we often lean on them. But what I find really challenging is the last line, **“and they encouraged them and departed.”** We would think just before Paul and Silas departed that the church would be ministering and encouraging them, but it is the other way around. Think of the open wounds. Think that Paul has not only been stoned now but now beaten or whipped. And yet we read “they encouraged them.” Wow! What a challenge?

What message do you think they encouraged them with? Well, after Paul was stone and he revisited the church that he has just planted, we read how they ministered, **“strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. (14:22)”** Notice they encouraged them to continue in the faith. And then gave this message — “though many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” Their lives were a living example of that. But it is not tribulations just in and of themselves. But these tribulations have purpose. “We must.” Not we might. God is in control. He really is. He is the all sovereign and all authoritative one. He uses these trials in our lives for our good but also the good of others. Paul no doubt rehearsed that their beating and imprisonment led to the jailor and his family coming to Christ, led to their protection and greater freedom to make known Christ. Can you imagine the joy when this once hardened man walked into Lydia’s house praising Christ for his mercy? He no doubt rehearsed the humbling of the magistrates and their protection to carry out the gospel mandate of making and maturing of Christ. Yes, we have tribulations — but look at our God, look how he uses these things to accomplish his will.

And think how intimidated these believers at the Philippian church would have been at the beating and arrest of Paul and Silas, and think of how encouraged they were after these meeting. My God is still and will always be on the throne! Have you

ever had individuals like that in your life? You love to be around them. They are such an encouragement. You seem to be directed to Christ and have a greater joy and confidence in Christ by being in their presence. And you realize or should realize, their lives have not been easy. But they have this great big Lord and Saviour over their lives. I can remember walking into the home of someone who had just gone through an extremely difficult time in her life. I was pondering what to say and how to give hope. I wanted so to take their pain away. As I walked in to encourage them, I walked out about two hours later so encouraged. And the reason why is not what I said but her faith and trust in Christ. The way she talk about her struggles was honest and raw, but so laden with hope and joy and confidence in Christ. I came to minister to her but she ended up ministering and encouraging me.

And I picture this scene in Lydia's house the same way. No doubt these believers wanted to be an encouragement to Paul and Silas, but our Lord can do amazing things in the lives of others through our suffering. God doesn't waste our suffering! Now, we can be in the presence of some who complain all the time, and life is always about them. And we can feel deflated and or even a bit soiled any time we are in their presence. But loving God and seeing his hand in our trials causes us to love others, and have this ministry of encouragement. This ministry of truly seeking to direct others to Christ. Do you have that ministry? Are the truths of Christ and his sacrifice so saturating your mind and heart that you cannot help but joyfully and encouragingly point to him? Who would have ever thought that a beating and an imprisonment would be a means of encouraging other believers. But this is our God. Let us seek to love Christ. And let us seek to love others well by directing them to our Lord.