

Our God Who Delivers  
Acts 16:26-28

We have been going through this chapter for quite a while. And we have seen that God had called Paul and Silas and the others to come over into Europe and in particular Macedonia, and they enter one of the chief cities of that area — Philippi. And we saw the conversion of Lydia, and then we saw Paul cast out a demon out of a slave girl. But her masters are not too impressed by this because they have lost money with her fortune telling ability. Rather than celebrate her deliverance, which was no doubt awful. God is so good and glorious and sovereign. There is no demonic power that can match God's power or who can ever separate us from our Lord. But the slave owners again, are not impressed and haul Paul and Silas off to prison.

And here is where we find the surprising response to the goodness and sovereignty of God. And I say surprising because when we learn that God is all good and sovereign we expect life to be easy and delightful, and often might question God when life turns in another direction, or might conclude that our suffering is always connected to a particular sin. Sometimes it is, but more often it is not. But if we can just find that sin and repent of it, then we can have the things we want in this life. We have strange and may I say often unbiblical responses to suffering in our lives.

But think of Paul and Silas because this has to be strange. They obey God, and are preaching the Gospel and about their Master's work, they cast out this demon and bring this slave girl deliverance. But what do they get? They get beaten and thrown into prison. God where are you? Life is not suppose to be this way. Is this what we get when we are faithful? We often say because of our sin we deserve hell, but when life goes wrong, when suffering enters our life, we often think we are more deserving then we really are. But look at their response in verse 25, **"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."** Think about it, you have been beaten and derided, but here they are praising God, which speaks of their joy in God, trust in him even when they cannot understand all that is going on, a determination to be a witness. There are prisoners we are told who are listening who know they are there because of their crimes but these two have done nothing worthy of their incarceration.

Think of it, because they must have known the truths that Peter would teach later in 1 Peter 4:12-14, **"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."** They could rejoice because this was not an indicator that they had been forgotten by God, or being punished by him, or there had been some deviation in God's plan because he was not in control, but this is part and parcel of his will. And suffering is amazing because through suffering that we see who we truly trust and what we truly believe and what we is of ultimate importance. Nothing of eternal value was ever at stake in their lives. Their status as God's forever children had not changed. God is still on the throne, and God will still giving them an opportunity to praise Him regardless of their

circumstances or pain. And they didn't know God was going to deliver them. But He is worthy of our trust and praise and delight no matter what we are going through today.

Imagine having that much of a trust and joy in him, imagine realize that God is this big and for us that he can even use being beaten, and then thrown into prison for his glory and our good. There is only one thing to do in the darkness and that is sing praise to him. Whatever is in our hearts will find expression, and the thing we desire most and truly find the most joy, we want to sing about. That is why believers love to sing, and that is why it is such a testimony and witness of our faith. We sing what we believe. We rejoice over our Jesus! And here is the thing we see in the passage, it is evident that God is with them because of the events that transpire. Here the two missionaries have the right response to God because they are already in that frame of mind and heart where they are trusting him. And here is the message I want us to concentrate on this morning — our God is a delivering God! It is quite clear from the text. He delivers Paul and Silas from that dungeon. He will deliver us this coming year.

And so often we concentrate on that because we want specific deliverance from God. We want our circumstances, relationships, ongoing physical ailments, maybe even trapped in a sin pattern that we just cannot seem to break free of, whatever to change in our lives. So what do we mean when we say God delivers us? How can I apply God's deliverance to the circumstances in my life today because I do feel in many ways trapped in life and trapped in my circumstances. God is a God who delivers. Now I hope to explain this a little further and bring light to your life, suffering and trouble wherever you feel trapped and maybe even all alone.

1. We need to see the divine intervention of God in all our circumstances. V.26.

Let me just say a couple of things about God's intervention before we look more further at this verse. One is our circumstances are always changing. And the one who is over all these things is God. He is the one who controls all the events of life and is orchestrating all events towards an intended end. And I find that most of my suffering, not all of it, but most of it has been momentary. And what I mean by that is that it has come and gone. Change is always taking place. Sometimes not as fast as we would like but it is taking place. Many of the things you worried about last year you are not worrying about this new year. Many of you got married the last couple of years. And there was much fretting and anxiety about that day, but that day came and went. And God was faithful and brought you through all of that. Most of our anxieties, worries, suffering change. They really are momentary. God is constantly moving and delivering.

But secondly, the things that catch our attention is not how often God changes our circumstances and delivers us, but it is the things that don't seem to change. It could be a broken and painful relationship, or a marriage that is not all that it was meant to be, or a physical pain because of a body that is breaking down, or loneliness of singleness or whatever. Certainly, God will bring deliverance one day to all our struggles. We realize this. This life really is fleeting and we are one day closer to that finish line. And when we have been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun, we have no less days to sing his praise than when we first begun. 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 says, **“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”** And in ten

thousand years we will look back and it will really seem momentary. It really will seem not that bad compared to what we are enjoying in eternity and the duration of that eternity. It is incredible how stressed we get about momentary things.

But the other thing to remember is God can and does so often change our circumstances when we least expect it. What he has called us to do is trust in him and to keep seeking to be his witnesses of him regardless of the circumstances. Now look at our verse, **“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.”** Here is the thing you have to understand about earthquakes in that region — they were very rare, and yet this one seems to be rather a large one. It shakes the foundations of the prison, which would have been a stone building meant to house the inmates and made so solid and secure that there was no way that any could ever break out. And the outcome of that great earthquake is that the doors had come off their hinges and were now opened, but also every prisoner’s bonds were unfastened. They would have been in stocks, but the security of these bonds is the chains that were on the wall leading to the prisoners. These all came loose, so that the outcome is that the prisoners were not secure any longer. The doors were open and there was nothing keeping them chained in that inner cell.

The ancients looked at earthquakes or any weather or what we would call natural disaster as coming from God. And we recognize as believers in Christ that God controls all things even natural disasters. The command to love our enemies is given in the context that God controls the weather. Listen to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:45, **“so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”** And remember the great storm on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus was asleep in the boat and the disciples awake him thinking they are going to perish, We read in Mark 4:39, **“And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”** God is in control of even the weather we are experiencing today. Listen to also to Psalm 135:6, **“Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.”** The earth, and seas are places where earthquakes and tsunamis and hurricanes take place. He controls all.

And the text leads us to that conclusion that the immediate cause of this earthquake is none other than God. And there is some or much mystery here, because this does not seem to be localized to the prison but would have brought so much devastation to much of the city. There would have been loss of life and homes destroyed, and in much of what we call natural disasters there is mystery, but God has his purposes, and just because we cannot understand his purposes doesn’t mean that we should deny either that he is all good or that he is in control. He truly is the all good and all sovereign God. Listen to what John Piper writes on this, **“If we believe the Bible, and if we believe the Bible teaches the foreknowledge of God (which I do), then when he foresees a tsunami heading for a village or a virus heading for a pandemic, and he permits all that he sees, then this permitted act is part of his plan, since he could have stopped it. He doesn’t make such choices to permit or to stop whimsically or aimlessly. He is infinitely wise. He makes such choices to**

**permit or not to permit wisely — that is, according to the counsel of his will.”** And no doubt there were many things God was doing here. There is always a mixture of judgment and mercy, but also a message that we need to turn and trust Christ because life is both fragile and short.

But the purpose here is for the deliverance of both Paul and Silas from that prison. And here is the thing, we often feel trapped by life, by the circumstances of life, of even the body that we have. There is no way, there is no deliverance, there is no good that God can bring out of life or my circumstances. Have you ever thought that? Are you there right now with whatever you are struggling with? If you are, let me say If God can control all that this one verse is talking about, not to bring the prison down, but to shake it enough to open the doors and unloosen the fetters releasing the prisoners, don't you think God is sovereign enough and good enough to control your circumstances? Don't you think he is good enough to give you the necessary grace to overcome that stubborn and exhausting and humbling sin problem? Don't you think he can deliver you from lust, or lying lips, or anger, whatever? God is a God who delivers. And the greatest evidence is not opening these prison doors but opening your heart that you might not only see your sin, but see the glory of Jesus Christ.

Regardless of your circumstances or afflictions, God is a God of great deliverance. And he really does deliver in one way or another. For Paul and Silas it was either going to be deliverance from prison or execution, but they knew there was freedom in serving Christ. And they trusted him that he was in control and he would give the necessary grace to trust in him. Where do you need to trust in the God who has delivered you and is continuing to deliver you?

2. God's will often is to stay where life is difficult. Vv. 27-28.

One of the things I think we forget in suffering is how impactful our lives are in one way or another. We are not the only ones involved when we suffer. But there are always people watching. We watch others suffer. There are those when they suffer don't have that focus on Christ. It might be that they always talk about how unfair God is, and really how undeserving they are. If the suffering is caused by others, how ungodly they are, and it is almost like poison comes from their lips. We can feel rage and anger grow even in us. And here is the thing, all the while couching their words in religious language. There really is not that trust in Christ or that seeing him as sovereign and gracing us even in our trials. We probably know individuals like that, but are we those kind of individuals? Are we pointing away from Christ because we are so frustrated with the circumstances and people in our lives — with our God-ordained suffering?

There are others, who have probably gone through worse, and their circumstances still have not changed, and although they don't do this perfectly, they always have a sweetness about their words. They are always mixed with gratitude toward God and trust in him. And you never hear vengeance or bitterness from their lips, but a true trust in God's sovereignty. They point us to Christ. And we are thankful for those individuals and the example they have given us. That example among believers is also contagious, because we do not want to be bitter and resentful of God and others, but we want that disposition of Christ regardless of our circumstances.

And this is what you see here. It is a fascinating couple of verses for a number of reasons. One is why did Paul and Silas stay in the prison? We read early in the Book of Acts that an angel led Peter out of prison, well isn't it obvious that God opened the prison? Isn't it time to sing Charles Wesley's old song and march out of prison, "**Long my imprisoned spirit lay Fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.**" And even the other prisoners stayed. Why? This was their chance. Maybe even some of them were waiting execution.

This is exactly what the jailor thought. Listen again to verse 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.**" Here, the jailor would have a bed and a residence right in the jail itself. When the earthquake awoke him, his immediate response were the prisoners that he was responsible for. He goes, and sees the prison doors ajar, and he thinks the worse — all the prisoners had fled. Why would they stay? And therefore he drew his sword to kill himself. And for a Roman soldier there are two things in play here. One is honour. This is his responsibility no matter the situation, but also it would be far better to kill himself than face his superiors. He would die a painful death at their hands. And even in battle, if you were losing the fight, it was better to die than to surrender. The consequences from Rome would be more severe. So the Roman soldier would never surrender. He knew the consequences.

And here is the shame in all of this because they thought it would be better, but behind that notion is death is the end of all suffering. It is basically God will accept us as we are. But we realize God is holy and we are not. We realize there is a great judgment that awaits all those who are outside of Christ. This is one of the blessings of being a believers is for us death is not loss but gain. Oh, the delight of being with Jesus. Oh the glory of finishing our course and being with our beloved!

But let's continue with the narrative, look at what happens next, "**But Paul cried with a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.'**" Here Paul cries with a loud voice. He realizes what is about to take place. There is no escape or loss of any prisoners. Everyone is accounted for. There is no need for you to lose your life. Now again, there are so many questions. Why are Paul and Silas still there? Why didn't they just go to Lydia's house where no doubt there is an all night prayer meeting like they did with Peter at Jerusalem, and praise God with the people of God for answered prayer? And why were the other prisoners there? Was it because the building was unsafe and they thought it could come crashing down on them? We are not told in the text, but what the text concentrates on is the dialogue of Paul with the jailor.

But here is what I surmise as why the missionaries and prisoners are still there. First Paul and Silas realize unlike the angel leading Peter out of prison that God has a reason for them to stay. And isn't that amazing? They do not know the jailor is going to ask the question — what must I do to be saved, and then take them out and dress their wounds — but they realize it is God's will for them to stay where they are. Wow! Often all we can think of is God's will must be deliverance from the situation that we are in. Often we pray — God get me out of this relationship, somehow move me on, do something miraculous about the people and circumstances of our lives. But these two

men stay in the midst of the adversity that is called their lives. And here is the thing, they could have easily deserted the prison, God could have still used them and would have used them in other ways, but by waiting God gives this glorious and wonderful fruit that we are still talking about two thousands years later, and has been used in countless lives to bring people to Christ and show the glory and relevance of the gospel of Christ. And it is all because they patiently stay and trust in God, and put themselves in a place where God can use them.

Now why do the prisoners stay? And I wish we had more information given in the text, but this is what God has chosen to give. Maybe as they listen to Paul and Silas singing and praying and rehearsing the truths about Christ, they realize this earthquake came from the hands of their God and if these two men are not moving we are not moving. Maybe they are petrified by fear. But maybe as they look at these two men who have been beaten and assaulted for no evil work or deed, maybe this was the means that God had used to open their hearts to the gospel of Christ. Paul wrote 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.”** You can imagine. We are so sinful and angry and fearful, yet these two have such a peace that passes understanding, such a joy. I wish I had that joy. Where is the source of your joy and peace? In the midst of that prison they had found true freedom!

Often we concentrate so much on our suffering and how God develops Christ in us, and that is a glorious truth. But so often we forget that impact where God uses ongoing suffering in our lives, where there has not been that deliverance of our pain and suffering, that others are looking at how we respond. They want to see the interpretation of our suffering. They notice what we truly believe. So look at where your life is hard and difficult, look where you suffering, what message giving about our God? There really is deliverance in this: God really does use the suffering of his children when they look to him for the comfort and salvation of others. And the only way we can have that attitude is truly to preach the gospel of his wonderful sovereign grace to our hearts. That is what you need most, not the deliverance, but to see our glorious Lord and praise him. God never wastes our suffering! He truly does use it in the lives of others. The only question is what are people seeing?