

Acts 16:16-40

The Gospel in all Circumstances

? Acts 16:16-40 is an emotional rollercoaster! Paul and Silas experience several highs, lows and sharp turns. Their circumstances start a chain reaction of emotional ups and downs for other people in the passage as well. Do you like roller coasters, or do you wait for the roller coaster riders to be safe on the ground? Have you ever had a bad roller coaster experience?

Acts 16:16-24 (NIV)

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She 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 annoyed 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 her owners 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 with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

? The demon-possessed slave followed Paul and Silas shouting about their work, which seems like it should have been a positive thing. Why then was Paul “annoyed” (vs.17-18)?

? How does Paul’s response to this situation further the Gospel?

? The slave girl’s owners brought Paul and Silas to the authorities and lied about their work to make sure they were punished. Why do you think they responded that way?

? Paul and Silas were basically punished for doing a good thing. How do you deal with it when you are unfairly treated after doing something good?

Acts 16:25-40 (NIV)

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 everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ 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 household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.



How did Paul and Silas behave when they were imprisoned (vs. 25)? Why is this significant?



God sent a miraculous earthquake to free Paul and Silas (and, incidentally, everyone else in the prison). Why didn't Paul and Silas leave immediately?



Paul and Silas knew the Roman law, that if a jailer's prisoner escaped, he was held liable and would pay their punishment (See Acts 12:19). What was it about Paul and Silas' response that showed the jailer the gospel and brought about a radical heart change in him?



What do you think were the repercussions of the jailer's change of heart and decision to follow God?

? What circumstances has God changed in your life that you thought might destroy you, but were used for good instead?

? The magistrates order that Paul and Silas be released the morning, but they would be sent out quietly. Why does Paul insist on public vindication?

? What does Paul's persistence say about Christians' relationship with those in authority?

? The magistrates, unconvinced by the miracle, still asked Paul and Silas to leave. How can this apply to our understanding of gospel growth today?

? In light of the journey God leads Paul and Silas on, why do you think God guides us on paths other than the easiest one?

? Circumstances affect different people in different ways: the magistrates and the jailer (and the slave owners and the slave) all reacted very differently to Paul and Silas, and to God's miraculous earthquake. Whom do you relate to most in this account? Why?

Roman Citizens vs. Non-Citizens
"Roman citizenship carried with it certain privileges. These Philippian authorities were alarmed because it was illegal to whip a Roman citizen. In addition, every citizen had the right to a fair trial—which Paul and Silas had not been given." (NIV Life Application Bible note on verse 38, pg. 1993, ©1991)

? What was the last thing Paul and Silas did before leaving? Why do you think they did that?

For Discussion and Accountability

? What is a circumstance you have been struggling with? How can you use that situation as an opportunity to witness to those around you?

? Paul and Silas were not alone in their aggravating situation. How can this small group come together to better support each other and encourage gospel-focus when difficult situations arise?