



Awakened to Praise
Message Notes, October 29, 2017
Acts 16:16-40

The final message in our “Acts Awakenings” series focuses on the story of Paul and Silas, who model for us the power of praise even in the face of adversity. May we take their example to heart.

The short of this Acts 16 story: Because they cast an evil spirit out of a fortune-telling girl, and her owners became upset at the loss of their revenue stream, Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten and put in prison. This is yet another Acts example of “a move of God” (girl is delivered) followed by “opposition” (arrest, beating, imprisonment) that creates opportunity for “Kingdom advancement.”

This opposition that Paul and Silas faced reveals the key tactics of our enemy:

1. *Intimidation*. The disgruntled owners, the rowdy mob, the court officials – all pressuring them to shrink back in fear.
2. *Humiliation*. They stripped Paul and Silas of their clothes. Vulnerable and exposed!
3. *Pain and suffering*. They were “beaten many times with rods.”
4. *Extinguish hope*. They were locked away in a dark cell in stocks and chains.

The enemy’s objective through all of these tactics was simply:

5. *To destroy their faith*.

How would you respond to such opposition?

How did Paul and Silas respond?

Remember, they didn’t have the end of the story. They are in the midst of it. They did *not* respond with:

- *Victimization* (i.e., “Woe are we!”)
- *Blame* (“These wicked people ... this corrupt justice ... where are our supporters?”)
- *Loss of faith* (“This whole following Jesus gospel is not working, not worth all this persecution.”)

They responded with:

- *Prayer*. This one we can understand – perhaps praying for help, for release, for justice. But beyond prayer, they responded with:
- *Praise*. Gaping wounds from their beating, hands and feet in stocks and chains, a cold dark cell, and they were “singing hymns of praise”!

Singing has always been a characteristic of the people of God:

- Psalms are a powerful expression of praise for the people of God. For example: Psalm 47:6, 13:6, 21:3, 66:2, 92:1, 95:1, 104:33
- Ephesians 5:19 reveals the central nature of singing and praise for the early church.
- God sings – see Zephaniah 3:17, an expression of how God “rejoices over us with singing.”
- Jesus sings. Hebrews 2:11-12 describes Jesus praising God among His assembled people.

Singing has a unique place in God’s design of the human brain. Information and truth set to melodies are more easily absorbed and retained in our brains and more readily settle in our souls.



What we sing matters! See Matthew 12:34, Proverbs 4:23, Philippians 4:8

The “hymns” the early believers would sing (and so many we sing today) were the words of scripture or the fresh words of Jesus (that later became scripture) – the eternal, God-breathed truths about who He is, who we are, and what life is really about. How strengthening for us to plant these truths into our minds and spirits through the reinforcing medium of song.

Paul and Silas chose to respond to their adversity by singing to their great God about the glory of who He is, in the midst of and in spite of their painful circumstances.

Praise will often involve emotion, but sometimes we pray, by faith, devoid of emotion or in spite of our emotions.

Praise does not deny circumstances. It is simply a choice to focus on God in the midst of difficulties. In the end, our praise and hope are rooted in the deep, eternal, unshakeable love of God that no circumstances can extinguish. Paul captures this beautifully in Romans 8:34-39.

We live and walk and praise by faith, not by sight (Psalm 42:5, Habakkuk 3:17-19).

Praise is not a “magic coin” that brings automatic results, but when God’s people focus on God and His truth, through faith and praise, He responds! The means of His response certainly varies (as varied as our unique walks with Him), but he delights to respond to the praises of His people.

Our regular, corporate worship is meaningful in itself – to exalt and experience our living God – but it also kneads into our minds and spirits the powerful, eternal truths of God that become for us a source of strength, hope and faith in the face of difficult circumstances.

The fruit of Paul and Silas’ courageous worship in the midst of their imprisonment was that their jailer and all his family came to faith in Jesus and were saved for eternity! How’s that for “kingdom results” arising out of “opposition?”

Praise is not an occasional/seasonal experience for followers of Jesus; it is a lifestyle. In good times and in bad, worship and praise are part of the fabric of our life of faith.

Reflection Questions

1. In times of trouble, do hymns or spiritual songs come to mind, and are these a source of strength and hope for you?
2. Are you facing any of the “tactics of the enemy” right now in your life? How are you battling these? Do you feel praise can be a source of encouragement for you?
3. What is one of your favorite spiritual songs? What specific truths are expressed in this song?
4. Have you had a personal “Paul and Silas” experience in which you responded to turmoil with praise and met with God’s upholding grace or even His delivering provision? Take time in your group to share such encounters.