**What If He Could Tell His Own Story?**

The first time I saw the apostle Paul, he was in pretty bad shape. I was in charge of the Roman prison in Philippi at the time, and the authorities dragged him in with his traveling companion, a man named Silas. They both had been severely beaten with rods, a traumatic experience. They were accused of insurrection, but I later learned that some profiteers were unhappy about lost revenue when Paul healed their “meal ticket” of demon possession. I always took my job seriously, but the chief magistrates seemed especially determined that these two be securely guarded, so I threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. I am ashamed of the way I treated Paul and Silas that night. I wish I could say things would have been different had I known who they were, but that’s probably not true. I’m not the same man I used to be.

I’ve heard many a prayer from men who, realizing they had reached rock bottom, appealed to their gods for some assistance, but these men were different – they were praying and singing praises to their God! Their obvious dedication to their religious convictions and their trust in their God certainly made a profound impression on all of us.

Then at about midnight, there was a massive earthquake that shook the very foundations of the prison. Natural forces might explain some prison doors becoming dislodged, but there was nothing natural about every chain, shackle and stock unfastening! My life was over. Allowing these prisoners to escape on my watch would be judged a capital offence. Knowing what I know now, suicide would not have been an option but at the time, a quick, fatal self-inflicted sword wound seemed much preferred to the slow painful execution methods employed by Roman authorities.

Just when I was prepared to thrust in the sword, I heard a voice coming from the inner prison and my life has never been the same since. Paul, who had been beaten and thrown into my prison; Paul, who could have been long gone, was shouting out to me from the darkness, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” All of them? I couldn’t fathom what could have influenced a group of hardened criminals to remain in their cells when all restraints had been removed! I was touched. Sure, my physical life had just been spared, but there was something truly extraordinary going on. These two men weren’t hardened criminals. They were servants of a God powerful enough to shake the earth and to offer me a chance for redemption in the process!

I was an emotional wreck. I called for lights and brought Paul and Silas out of their cell. I’m sure my understanding of salvation is deeper and more mature now than it was that night, but I knew these men had something I desperately needed. I was painfully aware of the stark contrast between the shame and turmoil of my life with the tranquil peace of mind they clearly derived from the God they worshipped. I needed salvation!

What a night! When I learned about the one true God, my guilt before Him and the redemptive sacrifice His Son made for me, I was overwhelmed. In fact, I and my entire family became disciples of Jesus Christ that very night. I helped Paul and Silas wash their wounds from their brutal beatings, but they assisted me in washing away every sin I had ever committed by baptizing me. To this day, the joy is indescribable. I know Luke, the beloved physician, has included an account of my conversion in his treatise to Theophilus that is being circulated and I’m glad. If my story helps lead someone else to the Savior who redeemed me, I couldn’t be happier!

The Philippian Jailer

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