

GOD DREAMS: Philippi - Pushing through Pushback

January 30, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord’s Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world awakens from almost 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favor” is a dream whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can dream God’s dream.

Reflect on this Scripture: Acts 16:16-34 ¹⁶ *One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” ¹⁸ She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰ When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹ and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³ After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴ Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them*

outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴ He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

This Week: Acts 16:16-34

After the spiritual deliverance of the slave girl ended her exploitation (and the profiteering of her owners), Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten. The beating was severe and was followed by imprisonment. The command to *the jailer to keep them safely* has its dramatic purpose in preparing the reader for the miraculous escape of the missionaries: no matter how securely men bind them, God can set them free. On a historical level the magistrates may possibly have feared that such prisoners, who had displayed supernatural powers, needed to be guarded especially carefully. The jailer therefore placed them in the inmost and securest part of the prison, and took the further precaution of fastening their legs securely in wooden *stocks*.

There was no sleep for the missionaries that night, thanks to their pain and their uncomfortable position. But in the midst of their suffering they displayed their trust in God's dream by *praying and singing* praise to God. There is no suggestion that the prisoners prayed for release, although the fact that the other prisoners heard them is perhaps meant to convey the point that they would then regard the miraculous release which followed as an answer to the missionaries' prayers to their God.

In answer to the joyful confession by the missionaries there suddenly came an *earthquake* which shook the prison building, causing the *doors* to fly open and the bonds securing the prisoners to the walls to be loosened. Escape thus became possible, although presumably the *fetters* would still be attached to the prisoners' arms or legs. The point of the story, however, is that the prisoners made no attempt to escape. The miracle served a different purpose – to underscore that God's kingdom dream may be temporarily deferred, but never defeated.

-Adapted from Tyndale NT Commentary ACTS 271-272

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. The owners of a slave girl were living their 'dream' (a nightmare for the girl). They were profiteering from her exploitation. By contrast, Paul and Silas lived into God's dream, leading to her liberation from this exploitation. What are some 'God dreams' that we could live into today that might benefit, bless or even liberate those in need?
2. As Paul and Silas lived into God's liberating dream, this led to pushback (flogging and incarceration). The dream seemed to be deferred and possibly defeated. Have you ever had a dream that was seemingly defeated or at least deferred? How did things ultimately turn out?
3. As Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns in the cell, "*the prisoners were listening to them.*" Why do you think this detail was included in the Scripture? What might they have been thinking as they listened?
4. Their time of prayer and hymn singing had a seismic impact and changed everything for Paul, Silas and ultimately for their Philippian jailor! Can you remember a time in prayer or worship that was liberating or transformative for you or others in some way?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC
2. Read and reflect through your **God Dreams** journal (beginning on page 12)
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: **Acts 16:25-26** ²⁵ *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.* ²⁶ *Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.*