

HAVE YOU FOUND JOY?

We are given an amazing picture in Acts 16:22-34 of two men—the apostle Paul and his fellow-laborer, Silas—as they “prayed and sang praises unto God.” Now that, in itself, is not so unusual for Christians to do, except that they had been unmercifully scourged, put in chains, and thrown into a prison cell that would not compare favorably at all with modern prison-cells in our country. Who would possibly expect to see a joyful prayer and praise service in such a setting? Hardly! But that’s exactly what the historian, Luke, is describing. It’s not a “woe is me!” service, though we could easily identify with that. Instead, the two of them are engaged in prayer, and in praising God rather than pitying themselves, wondering why God has allowed this to happen to His loyal servants, who are indeed suffering because of their allegiance to Christ. How strange all this must have sounded to the jailer and their fellow-prisoners. I’m sure this was a first for them, as they would be more accustomed to moaning and cursing.

Are we to believe they were “happy” in their situation? I would think not. I’m sure they would have welcomed being elsewhere—about anywhere else. But they were giving evidence of joy. There is a difference between the two. Happiness is based upon what happens in life. Pleasant things make us happy, unpleasant things discourage and drag us down. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit of God that is based upon one’s relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 5:22). It was from prison that Paul would write Christians at Philippi, “I shall continue with you all for your...joy of faith” (Phil. 1:25), encouraging them to “rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4). He had found joy in Christ, and shared that joy with others.

Paul and Silas found what everybody wants regardless of the circumstances of life—JOY! God intervened in their behalf, freeing them of their shackles by an earthquake. The jailer, fearing the disgrace of allowing prisoners to go free, was about to commit suicide, when interrupted by Paul’s shout, “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here!” They had what he needed. He was shackled by sin, and sought spiritual deliverance, crying out, “What must I do to be saved?” Being told to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” he and his family received the message of the gospel, spoken by Paul and Silas, which is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16), and after washing their wounds, were immediately baptized. They now found a joy they had never known while in sin’s bondage. Luke writes that the jailer “rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.” True joy is not found in the pleasures of this world, but in Him who said, “These things have I spoken to you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). Someone once observed, “Joy grows on the Christian tree.” Have you found that joy?
--Ron