
THE SOWER
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Have you visited our web site lately? (www.Arthurcoc.com)

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

THE DEVIL HAS A PLAN

The Devil has been scheming, planning and mangling since before the beginning of time, and certainly is active now. Before God created man, he was figuring out ways to get to him and he started off with a bang when his temptation caused Cane to kill his brother, Abel, and he has never let up since.

World history has confirmed his evil deeds of hate, murder, killing, devastation, hunger, sickness, and the list goes on and on. Annulations of whole races of people are being carried out to this day. Rwanda, Nazis' treatment of the Jews, Stalin's starving Ukrainians, Mao killing of 600 million of his own people in the name of Communism, and Pol Pot destroying 1/3 of the population of Cambodia, and these are just some of the things that have happened in the last 100 years, not to mention all the individual crimes that are committed daily.

But the Devil has a new gimmick today. He's using the COVID pandemic to convince people they don't need the church and God. "After all," he's telling them, "You've been getting along fine staying at home and doing your worshipping without going to meet with others, so why go back now?" "God is everywhere, so you don't need the church or your fellow Christians," he's saying.

Isn't that interesting? The Devil is using human reasoning to convince us that the truth in the Bible about the importance of worshipping and communing together are not important, and if you stop reading the scripture, his arguments may sound pretty good.

BEWARE! Hebrews 10:23-25: “Hold on to your faith”...”stir up one another with love and good works”...”don’t neglect meeting together...but encourage one another.” The Devil knows we can’t do that if we don’t come together, so he keeps us apart and we suffer. Eventually those who stay away lose their faith and commitment, and not only do they die in sin, but they often take their families and friends with them. “We are what we think about...” and our thoughts control our actions. If we aren’t meeting together we aren’t feeding each other, and, without spiritual food we will die spiritually. Don’t get caught in the devil’s deceit.

-Bill Donough, Little Rock, Ark.

BE SAFE, NOT SORRY

Of all things, we cannot afford to take foolish chances on the salvation of our souls. “...*Give diligence to make your calling and election sure...*” (2 Peter 1:10).

There is but one way to make sure: Build your spiritual house on the solid rock of God’s word. Jesus said, “*Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house: and it fell not for it was founded upon a rock*” (Matthew 7:24-25).

Are you building aright? Look to the word of God to see. Don’t depend upon church dogmas and your feelings. “*The heart is deceitful above all things...*” (Jeremiah 17:9). Safe guidance comes not from within us, but from God’s inspired word, the Bible. It is His word that will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).

Follow the commendable example of the Athenians who, when they heard Paul preach, “*searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). God referred to them as “noble”, for they were true seekers for truth . -Ron

“**THE HOW OF FAITH**” will be today’s message, with Romans 10:12-17 as the reading.

PRAYER LIST: Ron McConkey (vertigo and glaucoma); Wayne Polk (Shelbyville minister, health problems); Ruby Bradd (Clinton, cancer recovery); and the many suffering persecution especially in Muslim and Communist countries.