

FLOURISHING IN DIFFICULT TIMES

November 6, 2016 Acts 16:16-39 by Bob Branch
International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

BIG IDEA: When we encounter resistance and persecution because of Jesus, we shouldn't lose heart, because God is with us and he's working!

¹⁶ ...were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling...

²² The crowd joined in the attack... and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods.

1. This jail is the center of God's will for Paul and Silas.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...

2. They pray and praise in this tough situation because they brought it with them! It was already a cultivated part of their normal life.

²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose...

²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

3. Sometimes God will miraculously intervene (like here) and, other times, he will provide in the midst of the tough situation.

³⁰ "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

4. There is fruit even in the midst of persecution and trouble.

³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

5. Paul frequently saw opportunity in the midst of trouble, rather than just trouble.

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. **Acts 16:16-39**

APPLY TO US:

- 1. You may be in very hard times and still be in the CENTER of God's will (God's best for you).** What matters is that you see yourself representing him in any and every situation!
- 2. We can and should CULTIVATE a life of joyous praise and prayer (because God is *with* us and *for* us) AND bring that into every situation, easy or difficult!** This is part of the normal Christian life. This is also part of growing up...
- 3. Whether God brings deliverance from persecution or not, we can still TRUST him even when we don't understand everything!** He may liberate you, or he may be with you in the midst of the trial.
- 4. We can be assured that God is always working behind the scenes in ways we DO NOT SEE, even when everything looks hopeless.** So, we can keep shining, even when the darkness closes in.
- 5. Since God is working, even in our darkest times, we prayerfully look for OPPORTUNITIES to partner with him in what he's doing.** Instead of praying constantly for protection (out of fear), we pray for courage and opportunity!