

Sermon Thoughts Abridged
SERMON Acts 16:20-34
TO SPEND AND TO SAVE – NOT OPPOSITE!

And they brought them [Paul and Silas] to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Ordinarily one would say that "spending" and "saving" are opposite. If someone with a small parttime job earns \$100 a week in hopes of saving some money, but spends \$99 each week, he will save precious little. Spending and saving are counterproductive. Under a different set of circumstances, spending and saving are not so far apart. If a couple wants to "save" their house from going to ruin, they have to "spend" some money to get the leaky roof fixed! Thus spending is really saving! In our text for today, spending and saving are going in the same direction.

Paul and Silas were in the Roman "colony city" of Philippi. Philippi was in Macedonia, today part of Greece. They had gone to Macedonia because God had directed Paul in a dream with a man calling, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" Philippi was chief city of the area. They went there. Being a Roman colony, Philippi had no long-standing Jewish population. Ordinarily Paul would first go to the Jewish synagogue and proclaim to the Jews that the promised Messiah, the Savior from sin, wrath, and eternal death, had come. But no synagogue at Philippi. On the Sabbath Paul met several individuals, we assume Jewish, praying at the riverside. One of them was Lydia, who traded in purple cloth. Lydia became a Christian. She housed Paul and Silas at her home.

Paul and Silas preached Christ in Philippi. A slave girl began to follow them. She was possessed by a demon which enabled her to tell the future--to a certain extent. That is always how Satan does it. Satan knows only general bits and pieces of the future and with lies makes things sound legitimate. God has the whole truth, not Satan. The slave girl made a lot of money for her owners by telling the future. She began to follow Paul and Silas crying out, "These men are servants of the most high God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation!" It sounds like this was a good thing. But as she continued on, her words, rather than words of truth became words of mockery, words that interfered with Paul's proclaiming Christ the Savior from sin. She herself never once mentioned Jesus. The devil operates like that. He acts like he's in line with Christ, but is not. He latches onto a festival like Christmas and fills it with so many other things that the message of rescue in Jesus is lost. He will do that in your church life too. It's a temptation for pastors. Being so busy with everything else, which looks so good and seems like productive church ministry, but it replaces reaching hearts with the Gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Jesus. Beware!

Paul, in the name of Jesus, cast the demon out of her—a blessing! But her owners lost their easy income and were angered. They took the two to the city magistrates, "*These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.*" Satan's true colors were showing. "Stop the preaching of Christ! We are Romans. This isn't our way. It doesn't matter if Christ is the Truth or not, or if the message of Christ is the power of God or not, but if Christ changes our groove in life, we don't want Him." I remember hearing a discussion regarding cultures of Pacific Ocean islanders. The speaker blamed Christianity and Christian missionaries for destroying the old culture of the people. It didn't matter that the old culture was Satanic and Christless. The old culture was worth more than leading souls to Jesus and to heaven. The

devil will play the same game with you. If ties to Jesus and to His church mean that you lose some of your old habits and haunts, speech patterns and social activities, then “Get rid of Jesus--by all means don't let faith in Christ change your culture! “

The slave owners demanded action. The city leaders readily went along with the slave girl's owners and the crowds which got involved--regardless of their sense of right and wrong, of justice and injustice. The city leaders took the side of what got them the most points with the people. That's a big temptation for all people in government. Not to follow what is right and true, but what plays in their favor, what suits peoples' desires and emotions. That's true today—in government, at jobs, in families, in households, or at churches. Going along with what the emotions and wants of most of the people vs. holding to what the Lord and His Word state. Satan is clever.

Paul and Silas were harshly beaten with rods--like “caning”?? Not fun. They were sent to the prison, put in the inner high security cells, with feet locked into the wooden stocks. Harsh. I wonder what they were thinking? Was it, “Why God? Why did you bring us to Philippi? Why?” How do **you** handle such setbacks? Do you jump into the self-pity bag and blame others, or God? That's what the devil wants—to take away your joy and confidence in Christ. I don't know what Paul and Silas were first thinking at, but we do know, at the middle of the night, they were **not** feeling sorry for themselves, or whining, or accusing God. They were singing hymns and praying to God aloud so all the prisoners could hear! With full confidence in God's wisdom and love, they continued onward in their Christian lives. They relished the Lord's forgiveness and relished the privilege of being witnesses for Christ, regardless of suffering and inconvenience. The prisoners were listening. (Talk about having a captive audience!) These men needed to know about Jesus who in love set them at peace before Almighty God in heaven. Antidotes When you feel discouraged and useless, pray to the Lord and sing hymns reminding self and others of God's love for you in Christ. The value of hymns learned by heart in childhood is a tremendous. What a Friend We Have in Jesus! The Lord's My Shepherd! A Mighty Fortress Is Our God! Rock of Ages! I Know That My Redeemer Lives! Joy to the World the Lord Is Come! The message and the music lift the heart and lift the soul. Music is a gift of God.

The most striking was yet to come. God had something extraordinary at hand. He sent an earthquake, by which the foundations of the prison were shaken, so that all the doors came open. (A mobile home going down the road can start out with all the interior doors shut, but the bouncing and waving of the frame makes easy work of opening all the doors by journey's end.) It wasn't just the cell doors opening up from the quake, but everyone's chains were loosed! God's miracle! The same God sets us free from sin and death through Christ.

The jailer was startled awake and naturally assumed the prisoners had fled. In despair he was about to kill himself. (A Roman soldier who let his prisoner escape was put to death.) But Paul called out and stopped him, assuring him that, unbelievably, everyone was still there! The jailer was shaken to the core. Trembling, at Paul and Silas's feet, he said, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” He wasn't talking about being saved from Roman execution, for none of the prisoners were missing. He was filled with terror about standing before the true God. How did he know about the true God. Had he, from his residence likely attached to the prison building, heard Paul and Silas singing and praying? Perhaps; but the text says he had been awakened from sleep. Had he earlier heard what Paul and Silas were preaching? Was he struck by Paul's casting the demon out of the slave-girl? At any rate, his conscience was bothering him grievously. Was it something he had done? Was it the pointless Roman worship of gods and goddesses? Was it the fact that he would die—sooner or later? His conscience was pounding at him about something. Conscience is a gift of God. It's the voice within that bears witness to the law of God—God's rules of right and wrong—written in the heart, rules with which one is born. Conscience tells you how well you are doing in fulfilling God's laws. Thank God for your conscience! It drives you to see your need for the Savior!

This jailer pleaded with Paul and Silas for their help. They answered, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. What a golden opportunity God had placed before Paul and Silas. The jailer was not just a curious inquirer, but a sinner longing to know he was forgiven and that the true God was at peace with him. Paul and Silas shared the message of the Savior from sin, Christ-crucified-and-risen. The shared the message with him and all his household. The message took root. When Paul and Silas's wounds were washed, the jailer and all his family were washed too—baptized!—sins washed away in Jesus. They rejoiced!—a horrid night, and a dead-end life, turned to joy!

And so we come all the way back to where we started. Paul and Silas were “spending”--they “spent themselves” in the name of Jesus—so that the warden and his family and others were “saved.” Jesus spent Himself too, so that all the world would be saved. It is your privilege to do the same. Spend of yourselves to save others!

Amen. So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---