



Life Group Sermon Study Notes

“Love The City: Our Confinement”

Sr. Ps. James Lowe – March 29, 2020

Warm Up (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer or ask another. No right or wrong answers.

- Are there any household chores you secretly enjoy? Which ones — and why?
- Do you have a morning ritual?
- What’s the last book that you couldn’t put down?

Word (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at www.bethelworld.org

Acts 16:25-34 (ESV)

25About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26and 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 bonds were unfastened. 27When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Paul and Silas find themselves in prison through no fault of their own. They were on a missionary journey to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, but now are confined. They had been beaten and humiliated. We also read of a jailer asleep. He woke to a situation he deemed to require that he kill himself. This passage presents tough, tense circumstances; yet, it ends in freedom. It speaks to God’s ability to produce hope in difficult times.

In their suffering Paul and Silas implored God for help. God responded in a mighty way, intervening through nature to bring about freedom. The chains of Paul and Silas and every prisoner there were broken. They could have operated in self-preservation and left immediately; however, they saw the bigger picture of God's ability to use the situation to bring spiritual freedom to those who had never experienced it. The jailer's experience was comprised of despair and fear. With things at work seemingly compromised, he thought his life was over. To his surprise, the situation would lead to a life-changing breakthrough for him and his family. God used the situation to reveal the jailer's spiritual state while showing him the answer through Paul and Silas.

Whether you find yourself walking in faith despite the circumstances, like Paul and Silas, or discouraged and in despair, like the jailer, the answer is always the Gospel. The hope of the Gospel provides a present help and eternal security. Paul and Silas engaged in their assignment, even in confinement, to trust God to use the situation to spread the Gospel. Times of physical confinement can lead to incredible spiritual freedom. We can get a greater vision of our assignment and have more time to align our lives with the will of God. Even though we are confined, we can use technology to engage our city with the gospel.

Pastor James encouraged us with the hymn "Because He Lives". The hymn was written during a time of panic and anxiety by the author Gloria Gaither. As she recalled her husband's sickness and thought about bringing a child into the world when society and the school system promoted the idea that God was dead, she began to pen the song. Through it, she found calmness and assurance that only the Lord can impart:

"Because He lives, I can face tomorrow; Because He lives, all fear is gone; Because I know He holds the future; And life is worth the living, just because He lives."

Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Choose one of the points below and discuss how the lesson applies to our lives.

- How are you processing this time of social distancing and limitations to your typical routine and lifestyle? Do you relate more to Paul & Silas or the jailor right now?
- What do you think gave Paul and Silas courage, peace, and faith in the midst of being confined to jail? How can you apply that to your current situation?
- What can living out the Gospel look like for us during this season?

Prayer (10-15 minutes)

Pray for any of the following, as well as other requests you may have.

- Thank God for the power of prayer and worship.
- Ask God for his presence to be evident to us during this time.
- Ask God to give us His perspective and a mindset to look for opportunities to share the hope of the Gospel.