

59. Paul Confronted the Roman Leaders

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the fact that the Philippian jailor and his entire household repented of their sin of unbelief and placed their faith in Christ that same night. Sometimes, we will see a whole household become Christians at the same time as we clearly explain the Gospel to them. We saw that this is what happened that night following a great earthquake. That earthquake also freed Paul and Silas from the stocks and opened the prison. In this topic, we are going to see what happened the next day.

In Acts 16:35-36, we read, “And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.’” We saw in our last topic that the city of Philippi had experienced a great earthquake that had opened the prison the previous night. A major earthquake like that certainly had to have a major effect on all of the buildings in the city. As a result, the leaders of the city probably had many concerns that next day.

The magistrates then sent officers to the jailor with instructions to let Paul and Silas go. By morning, the magistrates had time to think about what they had done the previous day. The two magistrates were the judges who held trials for those who were accused of crimes. Paul and Silas had been accused of teaching customs that were not lawful for Romans to receive. However, the magistrates had not had a trial to see if these accusations were true. Instead, they had beaten Paul and Silas severely and thrown them in prison without a trial. Now, the great earthquake during the night quickly made them realize they had broken the law instead of upholding the law.

As a result, the magistrates sent the officers to tell Paul and Silas they could leave. They probably did not want to take the risk of being accused of breaking the very laws they were supposed to uphold. The officers came and told the jailor to let these men go. The jailor then came to Paul and Silas and told them that the magistrates had said they could leave the prison. They were free to depart. The jailor told them that they could depart in peace. Instead of just leaving the prison and going on their way, Paul did something that was very unusual for him.

Acts 16:37-38 says, “But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.’ And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.” Here, we see that Paul spoke to the officers that had been sent from the magistrates. Paul said that they would not be leaving the prison immediately. Instead, Paul gave the officers a message to take back to the magistrates.

Paul said that the magistrates had beaten them in public so that many of the people in the city would have heard about the beating. They had also thrown Paul and Silas into the prison. However, Paul also said that they had been beaten and thrown in prison when they had not been convicted in a trial. Paul also said that they were Romans. Suddenly, the officers were probably very fearful when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.

To beat a Roman citizen was a very serious crime, especially since Paul and Silas had not been given a trial. Acts 22:24-29 says, “The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?’ When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, ‘Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.’ Then the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was born a *citizen*.’ Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.” Here, we see that the Roman commander was filled with fear, because he had bound a Roman citizen. They had not even started to beat Paul here.

After Paul had told the officers from the magistrates that they were uncondemned Romans, Paul said that there was no way that the magistrates were going to release them secretly. Paul said that the only way he and Silas would leave would be if the magistrates personally came and got them out of the prison. At first, this seems like a very unusual action for Paul. However, he was not doing it for his own sake. Instead, he was doing it for the sake of the new Christians in Philippi. Lydia and her household, the jailor and his household, and the others who had become Christians had only been Christians for a very short time. If Paul and Silas would have left privately, the people would have felt free to persecute these new Christians. They would have had no protection in the city of Philippi. Paul and Silas did not want that to happen to the new Christians.

Here, we see that Paul had a great love and concern for new Christians in every city where he shared the Gospel. He was very willing to suffer persecution himself and he understood that all Christians will suffer persecution. In fact, Paul wrote years later, in 2 Timothy 3:12, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” Paul realized that it takes time for new Christians to grow, so he chose to send this message to the magistrates that the only way they would leave would be if the magistrates came themselves and took them out of prison.

Acts 16:39-40 says, “Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and entered *the house* of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.” The magistrates probably came very quickly when they heard that Paul and Silas were Romans. To give a beating to a Roman citizen was a very serious crime. It was even more serious if it was done without a trial. Such a crime could have an impact both on the magistrates and on the city of Philippi. The magistrates could have been removed from their position as magistrates. The city of Philippi could have had its privileges as a Roman colony taken away. That would have caused further problems for the magistrates and so they quickly came to the prison.

The word translated “pleaded” usually means *to beseech, to comfort or to exhort*. However, it can also mean *to beg or to try to appease by a request*. That is the way that the word is used in these verses. The magistrates actually were begging Paul and Silas to leave the prison. The word translated “brought them out” means *to lead out*. It is the word used in Acts 5:19-20 where we

read, “But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’” We see that the magistrates were eager to get Paul and Silas to leave the city, because the magistrates knew they had broken the law and were in danger of losing their positions as magistrates.

It was important for the new church in Philippi that the magistrates personally came and brought Paul and Silas out of the prison, because it told the people of the city that the two men had done nothing wrong. Paul and Silas caused the magistrates and the rest of the people of the city to realize that they needed to treat the new Christians with respect, because the beliefs of the Christians were not wrong. The magistrates brought Paul and Silas out of the prison and then requested that they leave the city.

Paul had cast a demon out of the girl that had been telling fortunes, because she had been following them for many days and saying that they were the servants of the Most High God. That was why her owners had caught Paul and Silas and brought them to the magistrates. Even though the magistrates had beaten them without a trial, we see that Paul and Silas still showed a submissive attitude and left the city after they took the time to encourage those who had become Christians in Philippi.

When Paul and Silas left the prison, they went to the home of Lydia. There, the other brethren that had become Christians came to see them before they left the city of Philippi. Most of these other brethren had probably become Christians during the time that the girl with the demon had been following Paul and Silas. Even though she had followed them for many days, it still meant that the rest of these Christians had not been Christians for a very long period of time. Paul and Silas realized the need to encourage these Christians before they left the city. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Paul and Silas wanted to encourage the brethren and let them know that they were loved before they left Philippi.

In the same way, we also need to realize the importance of encouraging our physical and spiritual children because it is a blessing to all Christians when they are encouraged. We see in the verses mentioned above that getting together and encouraging one another in the Lord helps to stir up our desire to love and do good works. We provide an example for our children as we encourage them in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you regularly encourage your children.