

But, about Midnight
Acts 16: 11-34

1. Christ pictured himself as the light of the world and called on each one of us to share the light of faith wherever we may be and whatever we may be doing. But there is also a very important point that needs to be made concerning how God works in darkness, even in the darkest times of life.
 - a. Creation began in the deepest dark there ever was. The Passover miracle that brought freedom to the children of Israel occurred in the dark of night. The birth of Christ occurs at night. The crucifixion of Christ occurred at what should have been the brightest time of the day, but the sky was darkened as if it were night. Time and again we see how the God of the Bible works in the darkest of times to bring light.
 - b. Example of Carlsbad Cavern – As a very young child our family visited Carlsbad Cavern and once underground in that deep cave our guide turned off the lights. It was as dark as it could ever be. I began crying until my sister whispered to me, “Don’t worry, there is a man here who knows how to turn on the lights.” That is the gospel message for each one of us; in the darkest moments of our life there is a man who knows how to turn on the lights.
 - c. The story I want to focus on occurs at midnight in a dark dungeon cell. The story is found in Acts 16 and tells of Paul and Silas in the city of Philippi as they proclaim the story of Christ for the very 1st time on European soil. Let’s look at this story and the truth that God can bring light into the darkest experiences of life.
2. The setting for our story is the city of Philippi where Paul journeyed following a vision that beckoned him, “Come to Macedonia and help us.” On his 2nd missionary journey Paul ventures to Europe for the very 1st time and his 1st stop is the city of Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony, in fact,

in many ways it appeared as a miniature Rome, with its buildings and monuments built in the Roman style.

- a. Paul's usual pattern when coming to an Asian city was to go 1st to its synagogue, but in this very Roman and European city, there evidently was no synagogue. Jewish tradition taught that if no synagogue is available, then find a beautiful site of nature and worship there. So, Paul walks down by the riverfront and there he finds a group of women in prayer. One of those women, Lydia, becomes a Christian believer and opens her house for Paul and his traveling companion, Silas. With Lydia's help and encouragement Paul and Silas carry on a successful preaching ministry in the city of Philippi.
 - b. While in Philippi Paul and Silas encounter a young slave girl being used by some unscrupulous merchants. Paul ministers to the girl and frees her from a demonic sickness. Those who were making a profit from her antics, were now furious, so they bring a very serious charge against Paul. Remember that Philippi was a colony of Rome and ruled by Roman law. Paul is charged with breaking the law that no Jew can attempt to convert a Roman to the Jewish way of life. The Roman Emperor was worshiped as a divine being. In effect, Paul and Silas are charged with treason. It's a serious charge that demands harsh punishment. As a result, Paul and Silas are arrested, savagely beaten, and then thrown into prison facing a possible sentence of death.
3. Here is the focus of the story; here is the one scene to keep in mind. Paul and Silas are in jail. They have been beaten and now they are locked up in a dungeon. It's midnight and guess what they are doing? They are singing! Midnight, prison, beaten up, facing death, in a strange city. The teller of the story makes it very plain – it's midnight, it's the darkest time of the entire day. How do you sing at a time like that?
 - a. Experience of being arrested in Chapel Hill, Tennessee. I was scared to death. I certainly wasn't singing. I was a college student taking a group of boys in our church on a campout. We happened to be at the

wrong place at the wrong time. In jail at midnight, singing was the last thing on my mind.

- b. Yet at midnight an earthquake occurs, the prison doors are open, Paul and Silas can walk out, and they'll be free. Fearing the escape of his prisoners, the jailer prepares to kill himself. The laws in a Roman colony were very clear, if prisoners escape their prison guard was to be given the same punishment facing the escaped prisoners. But Paul and Silas call out to the jailer, do not hurt yourself, we are still here.
 - c. The jailer is certainly intrigued by these 2 men who sing in prison at midnight and who care for the life of the one who imprisoned them and perhaps he is the one who had beaten them up. Imagine the jailer as he gazes in astonishment at these guys singing a duet on death row. Can't you imagine that he would have asked them how can you be singing, why do you care anything about me your jailer? I can imagine the jailer would have asked Paul and Silas, "Can you teach me to sing like that?"
 - d. Paul unveils the love of Christ to that jailer and the jailer then invites Paul and Silas to share the love of Christ with his entire family. As a result, the jailer's entire household is converted to the loving way of Christ.
4. The Experience of Christian Joy and Celebration
- a. Some people would say that joy and celebration in our lives can occur only in the absence of pain and trouble. It can only happen when we escape from the turmoil and hardships of life and when we are immersed in music, dance, and laughter. They would say celebration can come in our life only when every sorrow and anxiety is expelled. But you know that life is never like that. Celebration is not a total escape from the problems of reality. No, Christian celebration is a shout of praise that God is still Lord regardless of the circumstances. That night in jail Paul didn't look at his watch and say to Silas,

another 5 minutes and we are going to be out here; let's start singing! No, remember when the earthquake occurred Paul stayed right there in jail. The truth is, in jail or out Paul could sing the melody of faith.

- b. The genius of our faith is that we can sing at midnight. It is easy to foster joy in times of pleasure, good health, when we are among friends. It's easy to sing a song in the sunshine. But to sing at midnight, to sing in the rain, to sing in the shadowlands of life, that is the gift of God. Years later Paul is again in prison in Rome and he is writing a letter to this church in Philippi. Listen to what he says as he writes his letter from prison: "I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." (Philippians 1:12) "Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (1:19-21) "Rejoice in the Lord always." (4:4) "I have learned that whatever state I am in to be content." (4:11) Those are not the words of some Pollyanna who never faced misery. These are the words written from prison by a man facing death because of his bold witness. These are the words of a man who came close to losing his life in a shipwreck. These are the words of a man who was plagued by a lifelong ailment.
 - c. What is the source of such faith? The joy of Paul's faith that gave him the ability to sing at midnight comes from his learning to lean on Jesus Christ. His joy was not that he would escape from jail that night, but that in jail or out of jail, he would continue to rely on the presence of his Lord. When Tertullian commented on this passage he wrote, "The legs feel nothing in the shackles, when the heart is in heaven." The joy of Paul's faith comes from his belief that life is never at a hopeless end, but rather that life always points to an endless hope.
5. Conclusion. As we read this story in Acts 16 the prison bars seem to be the end of the story. Then come the words – but about midnight – the darkest point of the night. And then we understand that what we thought was a

period was only a comma. Here is the good news of our gospel: the God who takes a cross and turns it into a resurrection, who takes a prisoner and turns him into an evangelist of freedom, is the same God that comes to you in your sorrow, your difficult, your defeat and says – learn to lean on Christ and I will usher you into a life of endless hope. Here is the good news of the gospel: you too can sing at midnight.

- a. I am a fan of old movies, movies like Casablanca and Citizen Kane. One of the best is Singing in the Rain where Gene Kelly dances with joy amid a downpour. Jumping up and down in puddles as he is singing and dancing. And that is exactly what Paul and Silas were doing – Singing in the Rain, singing at midnight in a dark and stinking dungeon.
- b. Late in his life C. S. Lewis was a convert to the Christian faith when his wife was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He expected that his new faith would allow him to escape the deep sorrows of life. He hoped that his new faith would shield him from pain, tragedy, and agony. He found in Isaiah 40 a passage that best described the resources of his new faith:

“He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

He initially thought that his Christian faith would allow him like the eagles to fly away from his sorrow, but that did not happen. He then thought that his new Christian faith would allow him to stay active pursuing all his work at a breakneck speed, that he could “run and not be weary.” But that did not happen either. Finally, he realized his new Christian faith gave him the simple ability to continue going on in life, putting one foot in front of another, the ability to keep on

keeping on. His new Christian faith allowed him in his immense sorrow “to walk and not faint.” Sometimes that’s all the light there is for us, but at times like that, it’s enough. Even in the midnight times of life, there’s a man who knows how to turn on the lights.