

Our God of Hope Gives Hope in a Hopeless World

Acts 16:22-34, Mission Sunday (Trinity XVIII)

October 7, 2007

Beloved of the Lord.....Our God is a God of Hope! Our God of Hope gives us hope in a world which seems quite hopeless. Take Paul and Silas of our lesson. The God of Hope lived in their heart by faith. After they were beaten and put in the deepest prison, their situation seemed quite hopeless. Yet the God of Hope comforted them and strengthened them so much, that they were able to sing hymns of praise to their God on high! Now compare this to the jailer who was not beaten nor imprisoned. What hope did he have? Truly he was hopeless at first, because he didn't know the Lord by faith. In desperation and trembling he cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved!" Yet the God of Hope immediately changed this jailer's life when he heard those precious life-giving words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

What Paul and Silas did for this jailer, is what you and I are to do in our world today. We are to give the hope of Christ to this hopeless world. We are to point out the one and only way of salvation, giving hope to those who have no hope. That is the job of each and every disciple of the Lord, "a light on a hill cannot be hid." Our desire, our hope, is that by preaching and teaching the Word of God to the hopeless, they will repent and find in Christ Jesus their Savior from sin. And let us rejoice especially today dear people, that Christ Jesus is always the hope of our life. He is our God of Hope, who gives hope in a hopeless world.

I. The broken and hopeless heart of the jailer. In our lesson today Paul and Silas were first publicly beaten with rods by the city officials, and then unjustly cast into prison. This was their "punishment" from the crime of preaching the Gospel, and also casting a demon out of a poor slave woman. The jailer decided to put them in the innermost ward, even placing their feet in tortuous wooden stocks, which restricted the flow of blood. Paul and Silas, faithful servants of the Word, were still bleeding from their beating. Their bodies ached from pain. Here was a picture of true suffering for the sake of the Lord.

Certainly it appears their situation is hopeless. And where was their comfort? It is likely that their own flesh tempted them to think God had abandoned them. Why does God allow me to suffer so if He loves me, they thought. In such cases as these however, Christians must remember that our God is a God of Hope, in the midst of a hopeless world. By faith they knew well that God had not abandoned them, and with God there is always hope! Therefore, "At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." The God of Hope moved them to pray! The God of Hope

moved them to sing! Praise God from whom all blessings flow! I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home! Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me! I know that my Redeemer lives! Now, we don't know the hymns they sang! We don't need to! For we know the hymns they sang! They sang of Jesus! their Savior! their Redeemer! the one and only God of Hope! They sang the Gospel, because the joy of the Gospel still filled their heart and gave hope to their heart in the midst of their shackles, in the midst of prison! And everyone, every the murderous and vile imprisoned criminals heard these Christians singing! The sound of music bounced off the walls from one cell to the other! And though the jailer himself fell asleep, it is likely he fell asleep hearing these Gospel hymns! Certainly he wondered, "Why are these men filled with hope?" For this jailer had no hope himself. The joy of the Gospel did not live in this jailer's heart. And though he was a free man in the Roman world, spiritually speaking, he was very much a prisoner of sin. The Bible says, "Whoever commits sin, is the servant of sin." I Jn. 3 Sin was the master of this jailer, and that is why he had no hope. Spiritually speaking, he was the one in chains, and not Paul and Silas.

That is the way it is for all men in this world, who do not know Christ by faith. Sin is their master. They have never loved God because they love only their sin, and their love for sin keeps them from repenting. This is true even among many church-going people. They reason that since God forgives sins, they can sin all they want and just ask God to forgive them later. People who think this way are still spiritually dead and if they die without repentance and faith, they will be damned. They think there's nothing wrong with getting drunk, or fornication, or holding a grudge, or loving money, or telling a white lie every now and then. They excuse their sin by saying, "everybody does it", or "God understands", or "my sins are small compared to others." But a person who makes these excuses for their own sins does not know God at all, nor do they know the true meaning of the word "repent". They are on the path to hell, and they don't even know it! Jesus said, "wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." Heaven is closed to all sinners who cling to their sins rather than repent of them. As Christians, when we witness to such people, we can only give them the law. For if they have not yet learned to look with horror at their sins, they will be no room for Christ in the heart.

Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that God desires the repentance of sinners. This poor jailer is a good example. The God of Hope had a plan and a purpose for him, just as God has a plan and purpose for us. It was no coincidence that Paul and Silas were placed in his prison, and put under his personal care. That was God's design. After Paul and Silas said their prayers and sang their hymns, "suddenly there was a great earthquake,

so that the foundations of the prison were shaken." The jailer took this as a sign of God's punishment falling upon him! Even worse, all the cell doors were opened. He assumed all his prisoners had escaped. Assuming he would receive the death penalty for their escape, he drew out his sword. Such is the picture of the utter hopelessness of this world.

Yet the God of Hope was merciful to this poor hopeless jailer. "Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." At that crucial moment in the jailer's life, even as he stands on the brink of death, God gives him hope! God is the true Hope for all lost and condemned sinners! The jailer called "for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Due to the terrors of conscience, fear of hell, fear of God's punishment in the earthquake, this man was now broken in heart. God, by means of conscience, the word, and the earthquake, had man this man contrite, which is to say, he was now sorry for his sins, and also fearful of God. Knowing that Paul and Silas have a hope that he does not have, the jailer falls down on his hands and knees trembling before them. More importantly, he is trembling before God in his heart. In the midst of his despair he cries out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved!" Such is the desperate cry of the broken and hopeless sinner.

II. Our God of Hope receives sinners. But beloved of the Lord,...our God is a gracious God! Immediately and without hesitation the way of salvation for the jailer is made clear, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Jesus Christ is the hope of every hopeless heart! The God of Hope has come to save, and faith alone is the only requirement! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved!" Those words carry in themselves the power to create godly faith and hope in the heart! Those words keep us from despair! For once God through the law has emptied us of our own self-righteousness, the Holy Ghost through the Gospel enters in with the glorious message of the forgiveness of sins, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Neither is there salvation in any other name! Though the hopeless jailer couldn't save himself, once he realized his cause was hopeless, the hope of God entered in! Dear sinner, if you desire to be saved from your sins, all you need to do is believe! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved! God in the Gospel places no conditions nor demands upon the sinner. And while we are indeed to believe this glorious news (for God cannot lie), God creates in our heart the very faith He desires us to have. Truly, our God is a God of Hope!

Truly, when the work of the law has done its job, we are very much afraid of God, and truly very hopeless. Yet trembling sinners need to learn that they can approach

God, even when they are afraid of Him. We do not have to come up with our own love for God, and then approach His heavenly throne. When we repent of our sins and are fearful of His wrath, it is God that comes to us through the Gospel. That is why God says, "Fear not, only believe." You see those precious words of Jesus remove all fear, and His love creates our faith. And when we see that all God requires of us is faith in His Son, the Holy Ghost Himself removes from us all fear and terror. God gives in its place hope and joy and peace! You and I, dear sinner, are no different from this jailer, nor are we different from the prodigal son, or the thief on the cross. The God of Hope, through Christ, receives sinners just as they are, trembling and all. God does not despise the broken and contrite heart. He receives us just as we are, just as I am without one plea. Therefore fear not, only believe.

When this poor and hopeless jailer heard these glorious words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house", a great hope and joy suddenly filled his heart to the brim. Gone were his suicidal thoughts. Gone was his terror. Gone was his fear. Now this jailer had hope. He trusted in His God of Hope. With joy he left all, and took Paul and Silas home. He washed their stripes, and bound up their wounds. His love for God flowed freely in his love for his neighbor. His joy in the forgiveness of sins, could hardly be contained. And thanks be to God, He "was baptized, he and all his straightway." What a picture, what a sight to behold! First the jailer washes away the blood yet remaining on Paul and Silas, then Paul and Silas wash away the sins of the jailer and his family, by the blood of Jesus Christ! With joy they are all baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost! "He set meat before them, and rejoicing, believed in God with all his house." How happy he was, and oh how the joy of Christ gave hope to his heart! Our God of Hope removes all hopelessness.

Beloved of the Lord, redeemed children of God, your Lord Jesus Christ has done the same for you, as He has done for the jailer. He has saved you from all sin, redeemed and purchased you with His holy and precious and innocent blood. Yes, we live in a hopeless and sin filled world, but God is our strength and hope! In Him do we trust! May we as true disciples of Jesus never fail to share this hope, with others. For we have something that our poor world does not have. We have hope, and our God of Hope has given us the hope of everlasting life in heaven with our Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Therefore, may "the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Amen.