

Perspective Amidst Persecution (Acts 16:16-24)^a

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Context

1. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke on the 2nd Missionary Journey
2. Evangelizing in Philippi
3. Slave girl, making money for her masters through fortune telling.
4. Delivered from possession by the unclean spirit, resulting in loss of income to her masters.
5. Paul and Silas accused of teaching unlawful things.
6. Crowd dynamics — magistrates unlawfully beat them, imprison them, feet fastened in stocks.
7. Slave girl freed from bondage, Paul and Silas now find themselves bound and in prison.

Passage (Acts 16:25-40)

[25] But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. [26] 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. [27] 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. [28] But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." [29] Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. [30] And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [31] So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed [their] stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. [34] 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. [35] And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." [36] 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." [37] 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." [38] And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. [39] Then they came and pleaded with them and brought [them] out, and asked [them] to depart from the city. [40] 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.¹

Parallels between Peter and Paul in the book of Acts

What Peter did by apostolic authority so did Paul — this authenticates Paul's apostolic authority (2Co 11:5, 2Co 11:12; 2Co 11:11-12).²

1. Both heal a lame man, Peter (Acts 3:6-7), Paul (Acts 14:8-10).
2. Both heal through indirect media, Peter via a shadow (Acts 5:15), Paul via handkerchiefs (Acts 19:11-12).
3. Both impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, Peter (Acts 8:14-17), Paul (Acts 19:6).
4. Both oppose a sorcerer, Peter (Acts 8:20), Paul (Acts 13:6-12).
5. Both worshiped, Peter (Acts 10:25), Paul (Acts 14:11-13).
6. Both miraculously released from prison, Peter (Acts 12:7-11), Paul (Acts 16:26-29). [TODAY'S PASSAGE]
7. Both raise the dead, Peter (Acts 9:36-42), Paul (Acts 20:9-12).
8. Both render swift judgment, Peter (Ananias and Sapphira drop dead, Acts 5:4-5, 9-10), Paul (Elymas the sorcerer blinded, Acts 13:11).
9. Both have one complete sermon recorded by Luke, Peter (Acts 2:14-40), Paul (Acts 13:16-41)
10. Both entrusted with gospel to people groups, Peter to Jews (Gal. 2:7-8), Paul to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7-8).

Evangelism, whether free or bound

1. Evangelism = witnessing concerning the “good news”

A. Witnessing by action and by word

I. The pithy statement: “preach the gospel, use words if necessary”

- a. A valuable insight: our testimony consists of both actions and words

II. By action — our behavior

- a. Behavior flows from *belief*
- b. What sort of behavior?
 - i. *Unnatural* behavior — demonstrating a belief in things which can't be seen
 - ii. Behavior resulting from a biblical worldview — a knowledge of truth as defined by God

III. By word

- a. Pithy statement gets one part wrong: words will ALWAYS be required eventually

- b. How else can the question of the jailer be answered, “what must I do to be saved?”

2. The unnatural behavior of Paul and Silas

A. Unnatural behavior #1 — joy in the midst of suffering

I. Afflictions

- a. Beaten with rods - the magistrates “laid many stripes on them”
- b. Inner prison - the darkest, most secure, and probably darkest area
- c. Feet fastened in stocks

II. Response

- a. Praying
- b. Singing hymns

III. Testimony

- a. IMPORTANT: they are not praying and singing in order to evangelize
- b. Their “unnatural” behavior is a normal response—motivated out of their walk and relationship with God
- c. Genuine testimony is neither manipulative nor calculated
- d. MOTIVE TEST: would you do the same thing if you were alone?
 - i. Would Paul and Silas have prayed and sung if the prison were empty of other inmates? Not even the jailer was present?
 - ii. That which the prisoners and jailer overheard was “the real deal!” They knew it was genuine!

B. Unnatural behavior #2 — did not flee

- I. Miraculous deliverance: *immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed* (Acts 16:26)

II. Time to book it out of there!

- III. Not just Paul and Silas, but all the prisoners remained: *Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.* (Acts 16:28)

IV. Testimony

- a. “Everyone knows” if you are imprisoned, especially wrongfully, if the opportunity presents itself, you escape!
- b. This is *natural* behavior!
- c. They willingly stayed—this was what riveted the attention of the jailer!
 - i. Not because of the great earthquake—which opened the doors and loosened the chains
 - ii. Was preparing to kill himself, knowing he would lose his life for allowing the prisoners to escape

V. The cumulative witness

- a. The *unnatural* joy and worship by Paul and Silas in the midst of adversity
- b. The *unnatural* lack of fear of imprisonment and persecution
- c. The *unnatural* choice of Paul, Silas, and their apparent influence on the other prisoners not to flee
- d. The jailer’s conclusion
 - i. What is it that these guys have or know?! (The real demonstration, genuineness of their faith.)
 - ii. Who is this Jesus they’ve been praying and singing to?
 - iii. How can I have what they’ve got?
 - iv. *29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:29-30) [BINGO!]*
- e. Testimony: genuine, *unnatural* behavior catches people’s attention, leading to puzzlement and curiosity, then progresses to desire, eventually leading to questions!
 - i. This is the “use words when necessary” which will always be necessary because salvation involves knowledgeable assent to truth propositions
 - ii. *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?* (Rom. 10:14)
 - iii. Preaching requires *words*, whether verbal or written

C. Unnatural behavior #3 — refusal to leave when released

I. Magistrates freely release them

II. The *unnatural* response: to challenge them over their abuse of power upon Roman citizens

III. How many would have done that? Another demonstration of the level of trust Paul and Silas had in God.

3. Response of the unsaved to testimony

A. What must I do to be saved?

I. He had heard the basic gospel message already from their time in jail.

II. His response has two components

- a. Responding to their *unnatural* witness: joy, lack of fear, refusal to escape [their actions]
- b. Responding to their message: the need to be saved, to be reconciled to God [their words]

III. The answer: *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*

- a. Place your trust in what He has done, not what you can't do
- b. Too simple of an answer for many—they want part of the credit, acknowledgment as being “good”
- c. Thankfully, the jailer knew he had nothing to offer—he would be a dead man if not for Paul and Silas and the prisoner's *unnatural* choice to stay in jail

B. The transformation of the jailer

I. *And he took them the same hour of the night [to his house] and washed [their] stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. . . . [Then] he set food before them . . . (Acts 16:33-34)*

II. The change in the jailer's life, along with the Word of the Lord shared by Paul and Silas, brought the rest of the household to faith. [Father's take note!]

III. Testimony replicates

Perspective Amidst Persecution

1. A worldview extending beyond what can be seen

A. How could Paul and Silas behave as they did?

I. They actually believed what they read in their Bibles! :-) Especially what I would call “the BIG TWO”

1. Sovereignty of God
2. Eternal life

2. Perspective #1 — God is sovereign

- A. If He wore a cape, it would have a big “S” on it for “sovereign”
- B. What does it mean to be “sovereign?”
- I. “The exercise of, or right to exercise, supreme power; dominion; sway; supremacy; independence”
 - II. God exercises supreme power: none can withstand His power as He works out His will in history
 - III. God exercises independence: He need consult noone and depends upon nothing
 - IV. God is the ultimate free will Agent: *He does whatever He likes*
 - V. God exercises complete dominion: His power extends throughout creation, in both material and spiritual realms
 - a. His dominion extends over us
 - b. His dominion extends over those who would persecute us
 - c. All interaction between ourselves and those who would persecute us is, ultimately, according to His will—serves His purpose
 - d. Being independent, He need not share His will with us—although He has graciously given us the general outline of what He’s about in the Bible
- C. Not only is God sovereign, but He owns us
- I. In fact, He owns us twice over: 1) like the cattle on a thousand hills, He owns everything He has created; 2) as believers, He has also purchased us
 - II. We are part of “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts [20:28](#))
 - III. Paul knew first hand that truth he taught the church at Corinth, “you are not your own . . . you were bought with a price” (1Cor. [6:19-20](#); [7:23](#))
 - IV. God purchased us, He owns us, He gets to “spend us” however He sees fit!
- D. How *does* God spend us?
- I. Always as a *witness*
 - a. Sometimes with our mouths
 - b. Sometimes with our lives

- c. *But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.* (John 15:26)
- d. “Testify” is from the Greek verb **μαρτυρέω** [*martyreō*], related to **μαρτυρία** [*martyria*], from which we get the word *martyr*
- e. Martyrs are those whose ultimate witness involves giving up their lives in the cause of Christ
- i. At the opening of the fifth seal of Revelation
- *9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both [the number of] their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they [were], was completed.* (Rev. 6:9-11)
 - Testimony = martyr
- f. God is sovereign over where, when, and how we serve Him as witnesses

II. Stephen - a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit

- a. *55 . . . being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast [him] out of the city and stoned [him]. . . .* (Acts 7:55-58)
- b. A man with great spiritual qualities at a time he was greatly needed by the fledgling church
- c. Jesus saw exactly what was happening—as He always does—but did not intervene

III. James - the brother of John

- a. One of the Apostles, martyred early in the book of Acts when the Church most needed him
- b. *1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out [his] hand to harass some from the church. 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.* (Acts 12:1-2)

IV. Paul - writing to Timothy and soon to lose his head at the hands of Nero

- a. *6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2Ti. 4:6-7)*
- b. How important to the early church was Paul?!
- c. Previously, God had delivered Paul from
 - 1. beating by rods (three times) and imprisonment (as here)
 - 2. 39 lashes by the Jews administered five times
 - 3. stoning
 - 4. shipwreck
- d. Yet, *this time* it was not God's purpose to deliver Paul

E. God is the Shepherd, we are but His sheep

I. No matter what the Shepherd decides is our lot, we can rest knowing we cannot be separated from the love of God

II. It was Paul himself who wrote

a. *35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [Shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39)*

III. Nero would separate Paul's head from his body, but he could never separate Paul from Jesus

3. Perspective #2 - Believers have eternal life

A. The best known verse "minus 2" (John 3:14)

I. *14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)*

II. Do you believe in Him? Then you have eternal life. Period.

B. The importance of knowing with certainty

I. John wrote, *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may*

[continue to] believe in the name of the Son of God. (1Jn. 5:13)

II. A present possession

- a. Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has [present tense] everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed [perfect tense] from death into life. (John 5:24)*
 - i. The perfect tense is used for “indicating not the past action as such but the present state of affairs resulting from the past action.”³
- b. Because believers have already passed from death to life the moment we believed, therefore we are assured we will live forever and never come into judgment. It is a permanent, done deal.

III. Cannot perish, cannot be snatched

- a. Jesus also said, *27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:27-28)*
- b. Our possession of eternal life is enforced by Jesus Himself—we will never perish, nor can anyone take eternal life away from us

IV. The importance of assurance

- a. It was important to John and Jesus that believers know — the Scriptures anticipate our tendency to be uncertain or to worry
- b. This is extremely important: *we will not experience victory over the fear of death if we are unsure on this!*
- c. Without assurance, we will remain in bondage to the fear of death
 - i. *14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14-15)*
 - ii. Jesus died to release us from bondage to the fear of death
 - iii. He has done the work to set us free from this fear—our job is to accept and to believe what God has said.

C. Subsequent imprisonment in Rome⁵

- I. *19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so*

now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live [is] Christ, and to die [is] gain. (Php. 1:19-21)

D. Assurance of eternal life empowers us as witnesses

I. Jesus to the church at Smyrna

- a. 8 *“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: . . . 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw [some] of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.’ ” (Rev. 2:8-10)*
- b. “He who was dead and came to life” — Jesus demonstrated the reality of resurrection
- c. Therefore, they can be certain they will be preserved through death
- d. “Be faithful unto death” — sometimes God’s will means we won’t be rescued — he may intend that we testify as martyrs

II. Martyrs in the book of Revelation — who are also overcomers

- a. *And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)*
- b. A dichotomy in the eyes of the world: how could being killed be a triumph of any sort?
- c. How is it that they did not “love their lives to the death?”
- d. They are absolutely certain they possess eternal life
- e. They overcame, in part, by knowing death was not the end—and being willing to walk steadfastly even if it was God’s will *not* to rescue them
- f. They are like Shadrach, Mesach, and Abed-Nego who refuse to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s gods
 - i. 17 . . . *our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver [us] from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.* (Dan. 3:17-18)
 - ii. God might rescue, God might not
 - iii. Our job is to walk as He has instructed us . . . leaving the results to Him

III. As Christians, the worst our persecutors can do is kill us

a. *4 And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!* (Luke [12:4-5](#))

i. The unbelieving world has this backwards: they're petrified of death, but give little thought to the reality of hell—a destiny far worse than death, referred to as the “lake of fire” and the “second death” (Rev. [2:11](#); [20:6, 14](#); [21:8](#)).

b. For those who have eternal life, death is not the end, but a transition—a passageway from this side to that side

i. *For we know that if our earthly house, [this] tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. . . . 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.* (2Cor. [5:1,8](#))

ii. Paul was confident!

iii. *O Death, where [is] your sting? O Hades, where [is] your victory?* (1Cor. [15:55](#))

E. I AM the resurrection (John [11](#))

I. In John [11](#), Jesus is informed that Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus is deathly ill

II. Jesus waits an additional two days before responding — it was God's express purpose to let Lazarus die

III. By the time Jesus arrives on the scene, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days

IV. The gospel records a conversation between Jesus and Martha wherein Jesus asks a question—a question I believe is addressed to each of us

V. [PLAY AUDIO RECORDING]

VI. Do YOU believe this?

a. Those who do not know Christ — will you believe Jesus has the words of eternal life (John [6:68](#) cf. Acts [3:15](#))?

b. Those who already know Christ — will you believe you have already passed from death to life and live as if death has no power over you?

c. How each of us answers this question affects the rest of our lives.

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Endnotes:

1. [Acts 16:25-40](#), NKJV
2. [Ref-0038](#), p 2:349b
3. [Ref-0129](#), 572
4. [Ref-0038](#), 646-647
5. "Paul was in bondage when he wrote Philippians. But all do not agree which imprisonment he was experiencing when he wrote the book. Most believe he was in Rome at the time; some suggest he was in Caesarea; and a few argue for Ephesus. . . . His reference to the palace guard (Phil. [1:13](#)) as well as his concern about facing possible death (vv. 20–26) argue for his writing from Rome. The date of the writing would then be a.d. 61 or 62."⁴

Sources:

- Acts 16:25-40** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0129** Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996).

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/56_Acts_16_25-40/index.htm.
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.