

# Joy and thanksgiving in any situation

Message for Sunday, October 7, 2018  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Acts 16:16-34

## Children's Message:

I've got this delicious dish of strawberry ice cream! If I give it to you, what will you say? "Thank-you," of course. And if I *won't* let you have it, because I know it is filled with poison that would kill you, what *should* you do? You should still thank me, right? Or if you're sick and I give you a spoonful of this horrible tasting medicine because I know it will make you better, you should thank me for that, too.

This is strange: you don't like horrible medicine. And you don't like it when I stop you from having delicious ice cream. But you know I am your friend, and you know that everything I do is for your good. So you thank me, even when you don't like the things I do for you.

Our relationship with God is like that. It's easy for us to be thankful when things are going well, when we get what we want. But we should give thanks to God even when things go wrong. We know that God is with us, that we are not alone, that God loves us.

Thanks to Charles Bauer for this idea, in his book *More Little Lessons to Live By*.

**Message:** Paul and Silas in jail — Acts 16:16-34  
This was a drama with audience participation. This was not a rehearsed drama. I had asked someone ahead of time to read the Bible passage, with pauses as indicated. That was the only advance notice. I just ask people in the congregation to volunteer for parts (double-underlined). They mime it while the narrator does the Bible reading.

The main theme is Paul's and Silas' praise and thanksgiving, even in the worst circumstances.

<sup>16</sup>One day as we [Paul and Silas] were going down to the place of prayer, we met a demon-possessed slave girl. She was a fortune-teller who earned a lot of money for her masters. <sup>17</sup>She followed along behind us shouting,

*(The slave girl motions people in the congregation to come and see these two)*

"These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved." <sup>18</sup>This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and spoke to the demon within her.

*(Paul shakes his finger at the slave girl, and jerks his thumb over his shoulder, telling the evil spirit where to go)*

"I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her," he said. And instantly it left her.

*The slave girl jumps for joy: she is free and truly alive!!*

<sup>19</sup>Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered,

*The expression on the faces of her owners is open-mouthed astonishment at first, then fury.*

so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace.

*The owners take Paul and Silas by force to the other side of the room, where the city authorities are (2-3 people). They point accusing fingers at the pair, then vigorously condemn them.*

<sup>20</sup>"The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted. <sup>21</sup>"They are teaching the people to do things that are against Roman customs." <sup>22</sup>A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas,

*Get a whole bunch of people for this. They boo Paul and Silas.*

and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods.

*The city authorities shake their heads, then point away, ordering them to be beaten and taken to prison. Give the mob pool noodles so they can really get into the beating!*

<sup>23</sup>They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison.

*The slave owners drag Paul and Silas to the prison.*

The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape.

*The slave owners warn the jailer to hold them tight... or else: finger-across-throat gesture!*

<sup>24</sup>So he took no chances but put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

*The jailer “unlocks” their cell, and throws them in. Then, just to make sure, he wraps chains around their feet.*

Pause for a moment here. Ask the Paul and Silas characters how they are feeling. (sore, sorry for themselves, sad, afraid... not very likely that they will answer “thankful”!) The whole point of this interruption is to emphasize what happens in the next verse.

<sup>25</sup>Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.

*Wave their fingers in the air and bob their heads, keeping time to the music; obviously joyful faces.*

<sup>26</sup>Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!

*Bounce around, like the floor is shaking. They easily get out of their chains.*

<sup>27</sup>The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself.

*Jailer pulls out an imaginary sword, and points it towards his stomach.*

<sup>28</sup>But Paul shouted to him, “Don’t do it! We are all here!”

*Paul jumps up, waving his arms.*

<sup>29</sup>Trembling with fear, the jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup>He brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

*Jailer brings them out of the jail, then kneels before them.*

<sup>31</sup>They replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with your entire household.”

<sup>32</sup>Then they shared the word of the Lord with him and all who lived in his household. <sup>33</sup>That same hour the

jailer washed their wounds, and he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. <sup>34</sup>Then he brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God. [Acts 16:16-34, New Living Translation]

Thank all the actors for their terrific performance! Tell them to take a bow, and prompt the congregation to give them a big round of applause. Then they can all go back to their places.

Talk with people about what happened in that passage:

- How did the slave girl feel? (before and after)
- How did her owners feel? Would they be interested in hearing about Jesus, do you think?
- Have you ever got in trouble because of Jesus? (Maybe you did something unpopular, because you thought Jesus would want you to do it? Or maybe getting picked on because you go to church?)
- Imagine you’re one of the other prisoners in the jail. What would you think about those two strangers, who just got beat up, and now are singing and praising God? (Are they nuts? Or maybe they’ve got something you’d like to have?)

The overwhelming message of this event is: knowing Jesus makes all the difference in life. Knowing Jesus is what gave Paul and Silas unshakeable joy, even in the very worst of circumstances. Even after being severely beaten, they were singing praises to God. They had a Thanksgiving service in prison.

### Next Steps:

- It isn’t that we thank God *for* our troubles, but rather than we thank God *in* our troubles.
- Take a moment right now to pray, and thank God for being with you during all the things you’re going through.
- Let God’s joy overflow in your life. The joy that Jesus gives is unshakeable; nothing can rob us of that joy.