

Paul and Silas were on their way to prayer when they encountered a slave girl in distress. A serpent spirit possessed her body giving her supernatural powers. On top of this curse, she was enslaved by owners who forced her to be a fortune teller. The evil spirit that possessed the woman lashed out at Paul and Silas making it difficult for them to be discreet in their duties. Wherever they go, she follows and shouts “These people are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

Despite the annoyance, Paul responds in Christian charity. In the name of Jesus Christ, he commands the evil spirit to come out of the woman. Immediately, the woman is set free. Concerned only for their loss of income, the slave owners take legal retribution against Paul and Silas. Like a lynch mob that is easily stirred into a frenzy, the crowds join in the attack and Paul and Silas have no rights in a system rigged against outsiders. They are stripped, beaten with rods, and imprisoned.

Paul and Silas take everything in stride. Prison is just another place for proclaiming the Good News. They pray and sing hymns to God. They help the other prisoners to cope with their imprisonment. The Holy Spirit shakes the earth and moves mountains for Paul and Silas. “There was suddenly such a severe earthquake that the foundations of the jail shook; all the doors flew open, and the chains of all were pulled loose” (Acts 16:26).

The lot of a prison guard was not much better than that of a prisoner. The guard fears that he will be held accountable for a mass prison escape and he would rather end his life than face the authorities. What an unhealthy work environment when one fears their boss more than death. Paul is inspired to set the captives free. He sees an opportunity to liberate his jailer. In a loud voice, Paul shouts: “Do no harm to yourself; we are all here” (16:28). Paul offers salvation.

The guard is awed by the power of God and the fearlessness of Paul and Silas. He no longer responds in fear. He recognizes Paul and Silas hold the key to salvation and he is attracted by the freedom they possess even while being held captive. Paul and Silas invite him to believe in Jesus and they offer salvation through Christ to everyone in the man’s home.

No longer motivated by fear, the guard responds in compassion tending to their wounds. After a little teaching, all in the home are baptized and become new creations in Christ. They share a meal, and everyone rejoices.

Motivated by a genuine love for the jailer, Paul and Silas voluntarily return to prison so the guard will not suffer any consequences. They eagerly await the morning where they intend to protest the unfair treatment they endured.

Loving God help us to see as you see. When others annoy us, may we respond in love. When a person is oppressed by a wicked spirit, may we invoke your name to deliver them from evil. When we are treated unfairly for helping others, let us recall your mistreatment on the day of your passion and embrace the opportunity to carry our own cross. Despite any hardships, let us pray with joy and sing hymns of praise that others may know of your name. Help us to set the captives free and lead them to the lifegiving waters of baptism. It is so easy to worry about our own situation that we are blinded from seeing the pain and suffering of others. Help us to be at peace so that no obstacle will ever hold us back from proclaiming the Good News.