**Session Five: THE HOPELESS GAINS FAITH**

*Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel*

**The Story of the Jailer**

**Relating to the World’s Story**

All over the world you find suffering and distress. We can see ongoing injustice. It is more visible in some countries and felt more by some individuals, but it is everywhere. For many, it cuts off hope.

Where do you observe the appearance or feelings of hopelessness in our world today?

*“My Hope is Built on Nothing Less”*

**CW 382**

**Read Acts 16:23-39 *(The Jailer’s story)***

**Watch *“To the Ends of the Earth” –* segment 5**(22:10-33:33)

* *Discuss what most stood out for you about this part of Paul’s adventure in Philippi.*
* *What questions does it raise?*

**LEARNING FROM PAUL’S STORY**

1. **Enduring Unjust Suffering**

Paul did a compassionate thing for the young slave girl. He freed her from the spirit that controlled her. However, the young girl’s slave owners could no longer make money off the girl. So, they appealed to the loyalties, fears, and prejudices of the people to incite the crowd (just as Jewish leaders did to Jesus). They claimed these Jews were undermining local culture and customs and ruining their lifestyles.

1. How do different cultures or groups today depict Christian values and acts of kindness when it differs from or conflicts with local culture and customs?

**Want to know more?**

*Paul lists the sufferings he went through and the strength he found in weakness*

2 Corinthians 11:22-31

12:7-10

It didn’t take long for a mob to form against Paul and his mission crew. There was no trial, no time for fact-finding, just raw mob emotions. They were stripped of their clothes, beaten, and thrown in a maximum-security prison. There was no way for escape. No assurance if they would ever be released.

1. Evaluate Paul and Silas’ reaction in prison. What does it tell you about them?

About Paul God had said, “This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:15-16). The worldly powers that came against Paul were the same ones that had Jesus whipped and crucified on a shameful cross. Then Stephen was stoned to death for his faith (Acts 7:54-60), and James was put to death with the sword (Acts 12:1-2). Opposition to Christians continues today. Over 35 countries are labeled with extreme or very high persecution against Christians. Many have been marginalized, jailed, had their homes burned down, or even killed for standing strong in their faith in Jesus.

1. What can you learn from the words Paul wrote that help us endure with confidence and strength when we face suffering for Christ?

🕮 Romans 5:1-8

🕮 2 Timothy 2:8-13

🕮 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 4:6-18

**Want to know more?**

*Apostle Peter rejoices in suffering for the name of Christ*

Acts 5:29-33, 40-42

1 Peter 1:3-9; 2:19-25

4:12-16

Paul must have recalled how Jesus was shamed publicly – stripped naked of his dignity and honor and hung with criminals. But “he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23). How do you keep from growing weary and not losing heart? “Fix your eyes on Jesus … who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

The dungeon became a worship space for Paul and Silas. The songs they sang probably cried out to God for strength and expressed their praise and joy in their Lord. Their prayers gave words to their trust and confidence in Jesus and perhaps asked forgiveness for those who had wronged them and mercy for their fellow inmates.

1. What songs, verses or perspectives might help you through unjust suffering or difficult times?

**Want to know more?**

*Words of comfort & strength when suffering*

Psalms 23, 27, 42, 46, 61

Romans 8:18, 28, 35-39

1. **Suffering – Opening Doors to Witness about Christ’s Love**

It may have been dark where Paul and Silas sat in prison, but it was the jailer who was living in darkness. The jailer may have been a former Roman soldier who saw many harsh acts of cruelty that haunted him. He may have been a gruff, bitter man who despised his lowly job and felt he was trapped in it by fate. Perhaps you also know people like that. All they need to put them over the edge is a traumatic event and life comes crashing down. That event for the jailer was the earthquake. To his eyes, it seemed all was lost. Losing the prisoners would have made him and his whole family lose face. Suicide seemed the only way to escape the feeling of hopelessness. But the jailer was interrupted when Paul said they and all the other prisoners were still there. No escapes. No prison riots. Perhaps the jailer and the prisoners began to realize there was something special in this God that Paul and Silas worshipped. With God it is never hopeless. God sees the bigger picture and is the greater power.

1. Describe what you think went through the jailer’s head and heart when he cried out, “What must I do to be saved?”(See Acts 16:30.)

Here was another opportunity. Paul knew that Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). That was once Paul. He often told the story of how God had saved him. He was living proof. It shows that God’s word is not chained but works powerfully where it will.

**Want to know more?**

*God is merciful to the broken-hearted*

Psalm 51:14-17

Isaiah 57:14-15

Matthew 11:28-30

1. How was Paul’s answer a clear message of the gospel when he said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved—you and your household”(Acts 16:31).

Paul followed up by sharing the word of the Lord with the jailer and everyone else in his house showing them hope comes from Jesus (See Hebrews 11:1).

1. Picture the jailer as well acquainted with the legal system and capital punishment living in a culture of honor-shame. Identify key words and concepts in these Scripture passages that may be beneficial for sharing the gospel to someone like the jailer.

🕮 Isaiah 53:3-6

🕮 John 3:16-18

🕮 Romans 8:1-4, 31-34

**Want to know more?**

*Baptism’s promises*

Acts 2:32-39

Romans 6:3-5

1 Peter 3:18-22

🕮 Galatians 3:10-14, 22-25

🕮 Colossians 1:19-23

Jesus came to “bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1). Faith in Jesus becomes the antidote to hopelessness and his love drives out fears. How true are the words God spoke through Isaiah: “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me” (Romans 10:20). The jailer and his household’s next desire—baptism for them all. Filled with joy, the jailer brought them to his house for a meal.

**Motivation from Isaiah**

Isaiah 40:1-11, 25-31

Isaiah 42:1-12

Isaiah 57:14-19

Isaiah 60

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| Ultimately it is about **TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS**, who gives peace and rest for our souls. |

**MAKING IT YOUR STORY**

1. Discuss what causes people to be on the edge or over the edge. What makes them lose hope?
2. Hopelessness is a dark place. For some it is feeling trapped with no foreseeable escape from the unbearable feelings or situation. Imagine you had to talk with someone at their low point. What would you say to bring hope? Who is it who needs this right now? How?
3. If you were in Paul’s situation, what would fellow prisoners learn about you and God from your comments and reactions? Plan what you can do to prepare for unexpected suffering so that you too become a light that leads people to glorify God when Jesus returns.
4. Share how your hard times were an open door to showing and sharing Jesus.

**LIVING THE STORY – PROJECT**

1. Learn well another Bible Story to share: **Joseph in Egypt**(Genesis 37, 39-41, 45, 50).
2. Visit a prison or a recovery facility. Talk to the overseer. Talk to residents. Ask them what it is like being there. Tell them the jailer’s story and ask them to give you insights on what it must have felt like to be a prisoner or the jailer. Use it as a time to explain Paul’s faith.
3. Research where Christians are being most persecuted. Imagine yourself there. How would you fare? Pray for their strength and freedom. If possible, encourage them and their families.
4. Connect with the Commission on Evangelism - <https://wels.net/evangelism/> for ways you can reach out in your community.

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