

Pastor Roy's sermon from May 8, 2016

"It's just a normal day for me as a jailer. Just this evening I received some freshly beaten rabble rousers delivered for safe keeping. What a mess. This is a terrible line of work, keeping jail, but it pays ok, as long as you don't lose anyone. Heaven help you if someone gets away. And you just barely have to keep these freaks alive. Nobody cares about the criminals. In this Roman Empire, if you step outside of the system, the system steps on you. It's not a popular job, being the low life that keeps the low life barely alive. The criminals would gladly use your sword on you. The people just want them out of sight—off the streets and out of their shops. It keeps the family together—oh, my wife'd rather I were a respectable shop keeper or tradesman, but hey, this is what I do...and I do it pretty well.

And do you hear that sound? It's not the moaning of someone who is beaten and dying...I'm used to that sound. It sounds. . .kind of like a happy sound. Singing. Those new trouble makers. They're singing. Here's a new one! happy, beaten prisoners. Something about a Jesus? Mercy? Love? What language these fools speak! Yeah, that's. . .a new one.

Who am I kidding, I've never really been content or known anything like joy. What is mercy? What is compassion? O, I'd give a lot to have something to sing about without being drunk. I've seen so much, *done* so much. My only bright spot is my tight ship and that nobody's beating me. Sometimes I do think about the prisoners, some of them might not have even done anything wrong. Who can blame a poor, hungry person for stealing a loaf of stale, moldy bread? But we gotta keep order in this city, or it won't work for anyone—especially not for me.

Well, I guess I'll just let those miserable fools sing themselves to sleep. Maybe they'll wake up in a better world—it wouldn't take much. Eh, I only have a couple prisoners right now and they don't seem to care about the bad singing. Maybe I'll go next door to the family, everyone's shackled pretty tight, nobody's going anywhere...

Later that night, the ground shakes and I'm pretty sure the prisoners are either dead from the stone walls collapsing or they've escaped. I go over in the dark and they aren't where they *should* be. This is my worst nightmare. Magistrates don't appreciate misplaced criminals. Zero tolerance for error. I'm easy enough to replace. No sense in looking for the criminals, surely they're long gone, *I* would be if I were them. Why would they care about me, or my family—I certainly don't care about them.

Huh? A voice calling out? "We're all here?" Oookaaay. . .now they have my attention. Sirs, you are very different and you seem to even care about your enemies. It's like you're living *above* all *this* craziness and you're not afraid of anything. You actually care. I want this life that you have. Please tell me more.

And you have my story in the Acts of the Apostles. They told me about Jesus and that he loved and that we can love as he loved, and we can all be here for each other. Somebody cares! *Their* God cares. Surely this is *truly* God. They baptized me and my family, we cleaned their wounds, and fed them. Yes, I had to turn them over to the magistrates in the morning, but they were going to be ok, and I learned that these men are Roman citizens. Now the tables are turned and *somebody's* in trouble at city hall."

How does the jailer come to believe in the mercy and love of Jesus? The singing, the compassion for even enemies, their freedom to live and love freely. And why were they in jail? The slave girl who knew things about people she had no reason to know? Whose gift was a great source of profit for some business men? Whom these apostles set free? Whose owners became very angry because of lost revenue? They claim Paul and Silas are stirring up trouble and taking the city in a new, undesirable direction. A new direction of love and compassion? Yes, that is a very troubling direction indeed. And

costly should enough people decide it is the right direction to pursue. There are costs involved in following Christ. Caring for the poor, and those who are regularly victims of injustice and greed?

Paul and Silas call with Jesus for change. For compassion and mercy. This is the living water of Revelation 22. It is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with the saints.

As in the story of the jailer, the early church grew by relationships—time invested, love offered/love received. It was not fear of God's punishment that brought people into the church, but compassion for the needs of neighbors. People got a taste of God's mercy through relationships with God's people like Paul and Silas, like a jailer and his family who learned to practice love.

As we see God at work in the silence and noise of our lives, we can share it like Paul and Silas, naturally, not contrived. As we take the time to listen to God in the moments of our lives, then others will experience God directly through us. Each moment an opportunity to know and show God's mercy. How is God at work in the stuff of your life? Let us be patient. Let us pause to consider.

Thanks be to God. Amen.