

The Key to Unlocking Your Chains

By

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"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Psalm 150

Last week, one of our Journey brothers, Gornie, led us in a devotional at our weekly men's gathering. He had just gone through a difficult week at work, so when I asked him to lead us in a devotional, he, at first, was not too excited about it. He felt defeated and discouraged and unqualified to lead anything spiritual. In his moment of inadequacy, the Holy Spirit interceded with a burning theme for his devotional, and he obediently agreed to bring the message.

As Nick, our tremendous Worship leader, led us in the typical 3 songs to start out, we learned that Gornie had something unique in mind for our time together. His entire focus was on PRAISE. He read many scriptures about praising our Lord, then sat down and allowed Nick to continue ushering us into the presence of the Lord with Praise. Then, he read more scriptures and we had more worship and prayer. I, for one, had entered that time with a heavy heart. One of the worship songs, "All Who Are Thirsty," talked about dipping your heart into the stream of life. I pictured a cold bubbling stream and the Lord taking my heart and cleansing it in the cool water, rinsing it clean.

It was a refreshing time with the Lord, and one of the passages struck me in particular. It was in Acts 16:22-34. Paul and Silas had been falsely accused as they were ministering in Philippi. It says they were "stripped and beaten, severely flogged." I didn't really understand "flogging" until I saw the Passion of the Christ, as it portrayed Jesus' flogging before His crucifixion. It was a brutal, painful punishment, whipping someone repeatedly on the back with whips, cords and sticks. After Paul and Silas received this punishment, even as undeserved as it was, it says:

"About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose." Acts 16:25-26

Isn't that amazing? Despite being severely beaten, Paul and Silas mustered up enough faith to sing Praise to the Lord. What was the result of this? God intervened in a miraculous way and broke them loose from their chains and opened their cell doors. Not only that, but God blessed those around them by setting them free as well. The story goes on to talk about how God furthermore used this situation to lead the jailer and his whole family to the Lord. Paul and Silas were officially released the next morning, but they knew that their time in prison was indeed profitable for the Kingdom.

I think we can all learn something from this story. Many of us may not be literally imprisoned, but we feel like the world has us in chains. We may be chained to Debt, chained to Addictions, chained to Unforgiveness, chained to Depression, chained to Fear. We may feel defeated and without hope. God is telling us to lift up our heads and our voices to Him in Praise, and He will set us free! This thought flows throughout Scripture. James must have known this when he wrote these words:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4

Paul also wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 12 7-10, when he was faced with a painful thorn. The Lord spoke to him about it:

“But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Yes, God is trying to teach us something in the midst of our struggles. He doesn't want us to focus on our chains, as we try to figure out how to release ourselves. He wants us to look to Him and TRUST HIM. Yes, as we Praise Him in the midst of our storms, we demonstrate extreme Trust, for we know He will deliver us. As we do this, we bear witness to those around us, just like Paul and Silas set those other prisoners free by their faith.

God alone has the unique ability to set us free, even from the chains of sin. Oswald Chambers writes:

When we are born again, the Holy Spirit begins to work His new creation in us, and there will come a time when there is not a bit of the old order left, the old solemnity goes, the old attitude to things goes, and "all things are of God." How are we going to get the life that has no lust, no self-interest, no sensitiveness to pokes, the love that is not provoked, that thinketh no evil, that is always kind? The only way is by allowing not a bit of the old life to be left; but only simple perfect trust in God, such trust that we no longer want God's blessings, but only want Himself. Have we come to the place where God can withdraw His blessings and it does not affect our trust in Him? When once we see God at work, we will never bother our heads about things that happen, because we are actually trusting in our Father in Heaven Whom the world cannot see.

Brothers, be encouraged this day. The Lord loves you and He sees you and He is with you. Praise Him today, no matter what life may look like, and He will set you free. He has good plans for you:

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity."

AMEN