

## WELCOME

- People here, people online

## We're midway through our Kingdom Come Series through Acts...

- The book of Acts reveals what it looks like for the kingdom of God to come in and through the people of God.
- It's the story of the earliest iteration of the Christian Church, documenting its meteoric rise and expansion throughout the first century.
- The stories of faith and courage and resilience found in Acts

## Each week the critical question that we are asking and answering is:

- What would Ventura County look like if Jesus were king?
- AND: What should the church look like since Jesus is king?

## This morning we will be addressing the question: What would our devotion look like if Jesus were king?

- We will be looking at an incredible story from Acts 16.
- Starting in verse 22...(NIV)

### ACTS 16:22-33(NIV)

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

<sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then

immediately he and all his household were baptized. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

## PRAY

**Author George Beale once said: "We resemble what we revere, either for restoration or for ruin. We become like what we worship."**

- That was written by a theologian...
- But even great advertising campaigns understand this!

**Back in the 90's, when Michael Jordan was at the height of his career, Gatorade released an ad campaign with a song that simply said, "I wanna be like Mike."**

- The premise: If you just drank this drink, you would in some way be a little bit closer to being like Michael Jordan.
- Of course this is preposterous! But it totally worked.

**Or how about cologne commercials?!**

- Some super-tan ripped guy standing on top of a mountain with lightning...
- If you just spray this weird liquid all over yourself...you can have chiseled abs too! (The new fragrance by Paco Rabonne)

**If you've ever had a friend who has fallen in love, you know exactly what this looks like.**

- Hypothetically, let's say you have a friend who is super into death metal...
- And then your friend meets a girl...
- And then after a few months you meet up for coffee...
- And they show up wearing some Native American print vest and a wide-brim hat...
- and they're like, "yeah I've really been enjoying progressive folk music lately..."

**Or, if you've ever been a fan of a sports team (or an athlete)...**

- As your affections for the team (or that athlete) begin to grow, what do you do?
- You buy a jersey! Why?

**Because we resemble what we revere. We become like what we worship.**

**What these examples reveal is that worship has tremendous transformational power.**

- Tim Keller defines worship simply as "An act of ascribing ultimate value to something or someone that engages your entire being".

- ▶ Whether you're a Christian or not, there is something that you worship.
- ▶ There is something in your life that you ascribe ultimate value to.
  - ▶ Your career, your family, your friendships, your intellect, a particular cause, a particular person.
  - ▶ Something has a claim on your affections.
  - ▶ Something has your worship.
- ▶ Whatever has your worship will ultimately transform you into its image.

### **When the Bible talks about worship it speaks in both very broad and specific terms.**

- ▶ On the one hand, the Bible reveals to us that worship is meant to encompass the entirety of our lives.
- ▶ **ROMANS 12:1**  
...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.
- ▶ What we do, what we say, our financial decisions, our relationships, all of these things are meant to be carried out as an act of worship unto the Lord.
  - ▶ Scripture shows us that worship is first and foremost a posture of the heart.
- ▶ But the Bible also reveals that within our lives there are very specific, acute, moments of worshipful expression to the Lord.
  - ▶ Throughout scripture, these moments often take place in the form of musical worship, or the "singing of hymns".
  - ▶ This is why we devote a large portion of our gathering to the practice of musical worship!
  - ▶ In these specific moments of devotion and affection, the presence of God meets the praise of His people in a very unique and special way.

### **In our text this morning, we have before us such a moment.**

- ▶ As we observe the transformational power of worship in this story, there are three things I want to highlight:
  - ▶ 1. Worship begins as a way of life.
  - ▶ 2. Worship becomes a witness to the world.
  - ▶ 3. Worship births an awakening of the heart.

### **1. Worship begins as a way of life.**

#### **How did Paul and Silas end up in prison in the first place?**

- ▶ Earlier in the chapter, there was a slave woman following Paul and Silas all over. She was demonized. And this particular demon had given her the ability to predict the future.
- ▶ It was a fortune-telling demon.

- And her masters saw this as a lucrative opportunity...and it was.
- It says that she made a great deal of money fortune-telling for her owners.
- And so this fortune-telling slave woman is following Paul and Silas around for days...
- And it says that Paul finally got so annoyed, that he turned and rebuked the spirit and it left.
- But at the same time that Paul exorcised the evil spirit of the slave woman, he also exorcised the revenue stream of her owners.
- Needless to say they are not happy.
- They seize Paul and Silas, drag them before the authorities, and accuse them of practicing an illegal religion and throwing the city into chaos.
- The authorities oblige the slave owners and order Paul and Silas to be beaten with rods and thrown into prison.

**Consider for a moment the plight of Paul and Silas...**

- These men were falsely accused, unjustly beaten, and wrongfully imprisoned.
  - They had just freed this demon-possessed slave girl from being spiritually manipulated.
  - And now, instead of her oppressors being brought to justice, her liberators are being punished!
  - Paul and Silas are seized by the authorities, beaten within inches of their life, and then had their feet placed in the stocks (which was a kind of torture device).
- Not only that, but the whole thing was unlawful in the first place!
  - Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.
  - And if you had Roman Citizenship, you were supposed to be protected .
  - There was no legal ground for their imprisonment.

**This was a grave injustice! Paul and Silas were suffering for doing good!**

- It would have been completely justifiable for Paul and Silas to spend their time in jail plotting a way to draw attention to this gross violation of their civil liberties.
- It would have been reasonable for them to try and figure out a means of escape.
- It would have even been understandable for them to sit and sulk in the misery of their misfortune.
- But they don't any of that...

**Instead, they worship God.**

- In the middle of the prison-cell, in the middle of their suffering, in the middle of their injustice, Paul and Silas choose to give God praise.
- Luke (the author of Acts) uses the Greek word *hymneo*
  - Where we get the word hymn (obv)
  - But this word specifically refers to something called the "Paschal Hymns"

- ▶ A collection of Psalms (113-118, 136)
- ▶ The Jews referred to these Psalms as the *Great Hallel*, which means, "great praise".
- ▶ Here are just a few of the things that Paul and Silas might have been singing in that prison cell:
  - ▶ **PSALM 113:2-3**  
<sup>2</sup> Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and forevermore. <sup>3</sup> From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.
  - ▶ **PSALM 115:1**  
<sup>1</sup> Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.
  - ▶ **PSALM 117:1**  
<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. <sup>2</sup> For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

**Paul and Silas were able to praise God from a prison-cell because they had already developed a habit of delighting in Him. Seeking Him. Seeking His will. Seeking His Kingdom.**

- ▶ This was a mark of the early church (see: practices, Acts 2:42)
- ▶ Their very lives were an act worship to God.

**What we see is that their worship is not primarily a plea for deliverance but rather a practice of devotion born out of a regular rhythm of prayer and praise.**

- ▶ And so when the trials came, when the injustice came, when the accusations came, when the beatings came they responded by worshiping...
  - ▶ By rehearsing truth about God!
  - ▶ By recalling His promises!
  - ▶ By remembering His goodness!
- ▶ Not worshiping God to get out of their situation, but worshiping God in the middle of their situation!
- ▶ Reminding themselves through praise and prayer that even though their hands and feet were in chains, their hearts were completely free.
- ▶ Reminding themselves that even in the midst of violence and injustice and torture and pain—even in the lowest of the low places—God was with them. He had not abandoned them. Even in suffering God had a plan for them. He was still faithful.

**What this story shows us is that true worship is not controlled by our circumstances.**

- ▶ The outcome doesn't define our adoration.
- ▶ Our affliction doesn't dictate our affection.

- Our praise isn't decided by our predicament.
- And our situation doesn't determine our song.

**True worship is defined by the faithfulness and character of God.**

- God is the source and the object of our praise.
- Anything else is not true worship.
- Because if our worship is somehow contingent upon a circumstance or an outcome, then we are not worshipers. We're manipulators.
  - In essence, we're saying: "God I'm going to give you X, and I am expecting Y in return."
  - That's manipulation, not worship.
- That doesn't mean that we can't or shouldn't hope or believe for a specific outcome, but it can't be the basis for our worship. God alone is the basis for our worship.

**Paul and Silas understood this. They knew in the hearts that God was worthy of praise regardless of whether or not they got out of prison.**

- Even if they stayed in the stocks—even if they drew their last breath in detainment, God was still worthy to be praised. He was still worthy of their worship.
- And so they worshiped.
- And what happened because of it?

**2. Worship becomes a witness to the world.**

- Look at verse 25:
- (V25) About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.
- It's so easy to miss this detail...but it's so important!
- The word that Luke uses: *epakroamai* = To listen intently
- IOW: Paul and Silas had the ear of every prisoner in the jail!
- God had provided an audience to their praise.

**Think about that for a second. What a peculiar sound this worship must have been.**

- ...the other prisoners would have been accustomed to the groanings and curses of those who were dragged forcibly into containment....perhaps the occasional sea-shanty or drinking song.
- But the singing of hymns? Melodies of praise? Psalms of hope and freedom?
- This must have been completely shocking and utterly fascinating to hear reverberating off of the cold prison walls.
- Why on earth would these men, who had been beaten and tortured declare such things?

**It would appear that by worshiping in their physical bondage, Paul and Silas became an instrument of spiritual freedom.**

- ▶ Isn't it strange that at the end of the story none of the prisoners leave? I find that so fascinating.
- ▶ Even after every prison door is opened, and every chain has come off, none of the prisoners escape.
- ▶ These were convicts! These were hardened criminals, and this was the opportunity of opportunities for a jail break, or at the very least a riot.
- ▶ But none of that happens. They all stay! Why is that?
  - ▶ Was it fear of the earthquake? Maybe.
  - ▶ Did the Holy Spirit supernaturally pin each prisoner to the wall? Could have happened.
- ▶ The story doesn't give us an explicit answer, but the text does suggest that there was something in that worship moment that captured their attention. Something convinced them to stay.
  - ▶ Perhaps they realized that in the presence of God there was a greater freedom available.
  - ▶ ...that within the prison walls there was something (or someone) more valuable than their physical freedom.

**Look at this guitar for a moment.**

- ▶ This instrument has been carefully created and crafted to produce a beautiful sound.
- ▶ And that sound is produced by strings...
- ▶ Strings that have been designed and created to be tuned and tensioned in order to resonate at a specific frequency.
- ▶ Not only that...these strings were made to resonate in conjunction with other strings in order to produce a beautiful complex sound.

**And when the Church comes together in worship (whether it's in a sanctuary, or a parking lot, or a backyard, or even a prison cell), God shows up and in His love and grace and power, He strums His instrument.**

- ▶ And we, His people, His beautiful strings filled with His beautiful Spirit, resonate with a beautiful sound of freedom that testifies to the world of the life-changing, earth-shaking, chain-breaking power of the Gospel.

**A few Sundays ago, the worship team was practicing early in the morning...**

- ▶ ...we show up at 6am every week to set up and rehearse (praise God)
- ▶ And as we were practicing, I notice a man walking through the parking lot. I had never been him before.
- ▶ Not uncommon...usually people who are upset at us.

- In the middle of a song we lock eyes...and then he makes a beeline straight for me.
  - I'm thinking: "Oh no...here it comes..."
- He rushes right up to the front of the stage (intense look in his eye)
- I'm bracing for his complaint...
- He looks at me and says: "I was just walking by...and I heard your voices...and I just felt something...I felt something rise up inside of me...I felt freedom in my soul"

**Friends, our worship bears witness to the power of the Gospel. When we worship, the world listens.**

- That is especially important right now...
- In a season that has literally pushed the church outside of our comfortable four walls and into our community, the way that we worship matters. What we proclaim matters. *Why?*

**Because we live in a city full of spiritual prisoners.**

- Our friends, our neighbors, the people we work with have been captured by fear, confusion, hopelessness, despair, and isolation.
- A recent poll revealed that 41% of adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder over the past year.
- That's almost half of the population...
- Suicide rates are up, divorce rates are up, domestic abuse rates are rising...
- There are people all around us who are being held captive.
- People are groaning, both in their spirit and maybe even with their mouths, too.
- Listen to the news, look at your feed!
- People are frustrated, they're upset, they're looking for a way out.

**And what they desperately need to see (more than anything) is a King who can set people free.**

- Our world needs to see a King who can...
  - ...bring peace to their anxiety.
  - ...silence their fears.
  - ...revive their hope.
  - ...befriend them in isolation.
  - ...deliver them from despair.
- And how can we show them this King?
- By worshiping Him! (both with our lives and with our songs). By testifying (just like Paul and Silas) of a God who is stronger than our sufferings and more powerful than our pain.
- Our world needs to hear the instrument of freedom and hope that is the church full of worshipers.



- A world groaning with the pangs of a pandemic so desperately needs to hear the glorious praise of God's people.
- A world longing for freedom so desperately needs to hear the sound of a people who have been set free.

**And what happens when they hear it? What happens when our worship becomes a witness?**

### **3. Worship births an awakening of the heart.**

- As we conclude this story, I want to shift our perspective to that of the jailer.
- [As they were worshiping] <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up...
- ...but this was so much more than a physical awakening...
- It would appear that God was using this worship moment to wake up the jailer's soul.
- In two ways:

**First, he is awakened to the reality of his state.**

- (v27)...and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.
- IMP: If you were a Roman jailer and a prisoner escaped from under *your* watch, *you* took their punishment. If even one prisoner escaped, it meant almost certain death.
- If you're the jailer: "I'm done. There is no way out. There is nothing I can do. That's it."
- Just as he is about to take his life in the name of honor, he hears the voice of Paul.
- ... (v28) "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

**In this moment, the jailer is awakened to the reality of His salvation.**

- The very same man who he had brutally beaten and tortured and imprisoned, is now assuring Him that his life has been spared.
- Can you imagine that for a second?
- The prisoner declaring the freedom of the jailer?
- The abused proclaiming the salvation of the abuser?
- How can that be?

**The only logical answer is the Gospel.**

- You see, It would have actually been relatively easy for Paul and Silas to get out of prison, even before the earthquake happened.
- In order to be let go, all Paul and Silas had to do was prove their Roman Citizenship.

- They literally had a get out of jail free card. And if that didn't work, they certainly could have bolted as soon as the doors flung open and the chains fell off.
- And yet they stayed. *Why?*

**Because Jesus stayed for them.**

- Jesus, who though he was God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather...He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
- Jesus stayed for Paul and Silas, and Jesus stayed for you too.
- When your sin and shame put stripes in to the back of Jesus...
- When your pride spat upon his face and mocked Him...
- When your guilt and shame nailed his hands and feet to the Cross...
- Jesus stayed on that Cross.
- He had the authority and the ability to leave, but he stayed.
- Jesus stayed and bled, so that you can be forgiven.
- Jesus stayed and gave up His freedom, so that you could be released from the prison of your brokenness.
- Jesus stayed and died, so that your soul could be brought back to life.

**The real miracle of this story was not the opening of the prison doors, but rather the opening of the jailer's heart.**

- It wasn't the shaking of walls but the shaking of the jailer's soul.
- It wasn't the breaking of the bondage of chains but the breaking of the bondage of sin.
- 

**Paul and Silas were motivated by a greater love.**

- They knew what Jesus had done for them.
- They knew what Jesus had sacrificed for them.
- And so they were willing to do for the jailer what Jesus Christ had done for them.

**What would it look like for the Kingdom of God to come in Ventura County? It would look like a lot more of that.**

- It would look like people being moved and motivated by the Gospel.
- It would look like people being so radically transformed by grace that they were compelled to for others what Jesus Christ had done for them.
- And where does that begin? It begins with worship. *Why?*

**Because we become like the one that we worship. We resemble the one that we revere.**

- ▶ Paul would later write to the church in Corinth...
- ▶ **2 CORINTHIANS 3:16,18 (NIV)**  
<sup>16</sup> ...whenever [we turn] to the Lord (worship), the veil is taken away... <sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory (worship), are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
- ▶ It is in worship when we behold the beautiful reality of the Gospel that our hearts become transformed.
- ▶ So let's allow our hearts to be transformed.

## PRAY

**If you're not a Christian, I want to invite you this morning to give Jesus the ultimate value in your life.**

- ▶ Whatever the thing is that has a claim on the affections of your heart...
- ▶ Whatever it is that has your worship, I promise that at some point, it will fail you.
- ▶ That relationship will fail you...Your career will fail you...Your health will fail you.
- ▶ Jesus won't fail you. Because Jesus didn't fail you.
- ▶ When the fate of your soul was on the line...when the weight of your sin was on His shoulders...when your eternity was hanging in the balance...Jesus didn't fail. He stayed on the Cross in your place. He died the death that you deserved. He paid the price.
- ▶ Nothing else in your life can make that claim. Not even the best things in your life can make that claim.

**Believing in Jesus (faith) is the simple act of turning to Him and saying "Lord, I want You to be the most valuable thing in my life. I want you to be the ultimate thing. Nothing else matters more than you."**

**And if you are a Christian, I want to invite you to give Jesus the ultimate value in your life.**

- ▶ Because whether you've been a Christian for one day or ten-thousand days, Jesus is worthy of being the ultimate thing in your life.

**And the means by which we do that (Jesus as the ultimate thing) is through worship.**

- ▶ Right now we have an opportunity to put this into practice.
- ▶ We have an opportunity to remember the Gospel, sing of his wonderful sacrifice, and declare his praise this morning.
- ▶ So if you've been set free by the power of the Cross, then worship!
- ▶ If the chains of your sin and shame have been broken by His blood, then worship!
- ▶ If your heart has been awakened to His glory, then worship!