20261004 Sing Because You're Free – Ps Bijoy

Acts 16:16 - 38

Acts tells how the early church spread through the Greco Roman world 2,000 years ago, and today we land on one of the most legendary stories in the Bible: Paul and Silas locked in a Philippian jail, the door shut tight, arms and legs in chains, and a song at midnight rising up to heaven. They were praying and praising God. Here is why it matters. No matter how much freedom you claim in Christ, there will be a gap between the freedom you claim and the freedom you experience as long as your prayer life and praise life stay limited. You can quote Galatians 5:1, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. You can say the old you is gone and the new you has come. But those truths are not tasted and lived out until you are willing to speak them and sing them. You can be free on paper and enslaved in actuality. If you could see what happens every time you pray and every time you sing out loud to God, you would never stop. So, watch how this story begins. Acts 16:16 says “they were going to the place of prayer”- mark that. Many of the miracles in Acts happen while the apostles are on their way to pray. How many miracles do we leave in the theoretical part of our lives because we have no regular rhythm of prayer? The supernormal act of going to meet with God leads to the supernatural stories where God meets you on your path.

A slave girl with a spirit of divination, who made her owners a fortune, follows Paul shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." All true. But when demons speak truth, it is always with sinful ambition, to drown out the message and wreck any bridge with real people. After many days, annoyed, Paul commands the spirit out in the name of Jesus Christ so the gospel can be heard. Her owners lose their income, they drag Paul and Silas before the authorities and make the charge about ethnicity, and a mob forms. Paul and Silas are beaten within an inch of their lives, thrown into the inner cell. Then, about midnight, the darkest hour, they are praying and singing hymns while the other prisoners listen. Suddenly a violent earthquake. Every door flies open and every chain falls off. The jailer draws his sword to take his own life, but Paul shouts, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!", "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." That same night he washes their wounds, he and his household are baptized, and he is filled with joy.

Now the church in Philippi includes Lydia the businesswoman, the freed slave girl, and a jailer's family. Only God turns oppression into salvation this fast.

The Order Matters

For years I believed this story as a formula: praise is the pathway to your breakthrough, lift a praise and chains will break. Then I read it again and realized that is not the order of what happened. If you were beaten and thrown into prison, of course you would pray. You would have no one else to talk to. The surprising part is the singing. Singing expresses pain, joy and gratitude in the form of worship. And we sing after God moves, in response to what He has done. So why sing before?

Because Paul and Silas did not pray and praise so that they would be set free. They prayed and praised because they were free. Many scholars believe the hymn was Psalm 113. Their joy in God was no longer dictated by how things went. The beating was unfair, the prison was unfair, the accusation was a lie driven by racism, and none of it could decide whether they could stir up joy for God. On the darkest night they could still sing that God is faithful. This is not about treating God like a genie who produces miracles when you sing the right thing.

Prayer and praise are not pathways into freedom in Christ. Prayer and praise are declarations of freedom in Christ.

They are declarations that activate the promises of God into tangible effect. Why pray and sing to a God who does not need it? He knows what we need before we ask, and a hundred million angels never stop singing of His holiness. Our praying and singing gives God nothing He lacks and does not change His promises. The miracle in that jail was a manifestation of what was already true inside Paul and Silas. They were so free on the inside that the freedom, by the Spirit of God, started spreading. That is how God still wants to spread His kingdom. Freedom spreads to your row, to the room, to a city. And a praying, praising church can walk in freedom and impact a generation.

But the enemy has a strategy: attach a burden to prayer and to praise. When we think of praying, we want to close our eyes and hang our heads. We think of how little we have prayed, we feel we let God down. That is not the voice of our Father. So every time you say, heavenly Father, shut down the lie and say, I am not praying to get free. I am praying from a position that is already free.

I am already forgiven, already loved, already washed clean by the blood of Jesus. I am declaring the freedom that is already mine and activating the promises of God, not just in my life but in the lives of those around me. Praise gets the same treatment. Really, you are going to lift your hands again after the week you had? Yes, because we praise Him irrespective of our feelings.

And that is bigger than you think. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:10 to 12 that God's intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. You did not come to watch a worship team, hear a message, and move on with your week. But we are called to sing so that Gods glory can be manifested through us to the world. I do not care that I cannot sing and I do not care what you think, because I know what He did. I have a reason to sing.

What Freedom Is For

First, freedom in Christ is for engaging God's mission, not escaping to our comfort. Think about how strange this is. Chains fall off, doors fly open, no prisoner escapes, and Paul does not walk out. His eyes were never on getting out of the most uncomfortable place. They were on how to take part in God's mission. He cast out the demon to free the girl and free the message, and while they sang, people were listening. That is why you must be willing to sing in the night, when you are in the most pain, because that is when God puts a megaphone to your life. A song in the night speaks to a lost world louder than all the open doors and prosperity Jesus may or may not give your life.

Look at the next morning. The magistrates decide to release them quietly, but Paul, a Roman citizen who should never have been beaten without a trial, refuses and demands a public release. It looks petty, but he is protecting the young church, which would have been shunned if its leaders were let go in secret. His motive from beginning to end was mission, not comfort, and his joy was never dictated by whether things got better or worse. It was dictated by how God could use him right where his feet were. So, check the pursuit of your prayer and praise. Deep prayer and loud worship with no focus on mission makes an unhealthy Christian. Mission with no private prayer and worship pours from an empty cup. Worship is the fuel of the mission flame. We do not celebrate broken chains and then ignore our neighbours on the way out. We carry the freedom in us, so it spreads.

Second, freedom in Christ is for pursuing Jesus, not pursuing open doors. God is not a vending machine that spits out a prize when you insert prayer and praise. Many of us pursue Jesus exactly that way, obsessed with the open door rather than the One who opens doors. Paul and Silas were not singing to be set free. They sang because they knew Jesus intimately, the way desperate people call out to the lover of their soul. The prize of prayer and praise is not the answer God might give, the job He might open, or the relationship that might be on your path. Those are good, but they are not the object of your pursuit. The prize is more of Jesus. Some of the best hours of my week are spent walking and talking out loud to Jesus, and I come away feeling I just hung out with a friend. Do you know Jesus like that? Do you sing to Him as someone worthy of all your affection? I do not want to invite you to Jesus just to get you to heaven one day. Knowing Him is the reason you have breath. John 17:3 says, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

A song in the night is not pretty. It is hard and tear filled, but it is not absent of joy. The question is not how to get the door open. The question is how to stay engaged with God when you are hurt, disappointed, and everything is unknown.

Come to the cross, where this freedom was bought. It rests on what Jesus did, not on your behaviour. Sing, not to get anywhere with God, but in response to the finished work of the cross. If you do not yet know Jesus, call on His name and receive Him, as the jailer did. Do not do life alone. Even Paul had Silas. Find someone to pray with and get into community.

Free to pray, free to praise. Sing because you are free, not so that you will be. Freedom is for mission, not comfort. Pursue the One who opens doors, not the open door. A song in the night is the loudest witness to a watching world.