

Power for Praise

Series: "Living in the Power of God"

Sermon 3: "Power for Praise"

Scripture: Acts 16:16-34

Pastor J.J. James

There was a Pastor who was trying to sell his horse. A potential buyer came to meet the Pastor for a test ride on the horse. "Before you start" the Pastor said, "you should know that this horse only responds to church talk. If you want the horse to go then you have to say, "Praise the Lord." If you want the horse to stop then you have to say, "Amen".

So the man climbs on the horse and says, "Praise the Lord" and the horse starts to trot. The man says it again, "Praise the Lord", and the horse starts to gallop. Suddenly there is a cliff right in front of the horse and the man yells "Amen!!!" and the horse stops just at the edge of the cliff. The man in relief wipes the sweat from his brow and says, "Praise the Lord!"

I mentioned last week about one of the reasons why I appreciate the book of Acts. It's because Luke doesn't hide the fact that Christians will experience problems. Luke shows us that following Jesus was not always easy for the disciples. The good news is that God never withholds His presence and power. He is always with us and is able to provide.

Being a Christian doesn't necessarily mean that everything will be easy. But God doesn't call us to the easy life. He calls us to exemplify Christ in how we live it. Putting it plainly, He wants our lives to give Him praise.

Would you turn with me to [Acts 16:16-34](#)? We are going to read about the power that God releases when Christians decide to give Him their praise.

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

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

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

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

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ 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.

Think about what's going on here. Paul and Silas found themselves in one of the worst situations possible. An annoying fortune teller follows them around for several days. What she is saying to everyone is true but I'm certain it was very distracting. It would be like someone standing in our sanctuary shouting, "Your preacher is God's servant, who is telling you how to get saved." What they were saying would be true, but it would quickly become very distracting.

After several days of listening to the lady's shouting, Paul finally decides he's had enough so he commands the spirit to come out of her. So the slave has now been set free from her bondage, but Paul and Silas are sitting in jail. So let me ask you, "Is it possible to help someone only come out on the losing end?" Sure. But that didn't stop Paul and Silas from letting God use them to share His love with others.

What I find inspiring about this passage is that Paul and Silas didn't allow bitterness or anger to stir up in their hearts and lives. Yes, they were falsely accused, but they still leaned heavily on their faith in God. Their faith in God not only made a difference for them but it also became a testimony of God's hope and love to those who were near them.

In verse 25 Luke shows us the faith of Paul and Silas. It's midnight. They are sitting in jail and the next thing we know is they've started the most incredible worship service that you've ever seen. They are singing and praising God. I don't believe for one minute that they were praising God because they were happy about their situation. I believe that they chose to praise God in spite of it.

*Paul and Silas were in a terrible situation
yet they chose to keep praising God.*

They were praising their deliverer. Now get a hold of this! They were praising their deliverer -- while they were still shackled in chains. If you allow that to sink deep into your heart then it will change the way you look at how God helps you through challenges. It's one thing to praise God after he has done something miraculous in your life. It's another thing to praise God even when he has not yet done the miraculous thing. In this situation, they were praising God for who He is and what He was doing, not for what he had done.

I really believe that they would have continued to praise Him even if He had not released them from their chains. They would have chosen to praise God anyway. They would have known that He has already done amazing things and He is worthy of all our praise. They would have also known that His power is released when we are willing to live a life of praise. Praise takes our focus off our problems and places our focus on where it belongs.

Praise places our focus on the presence and power of God.

Paul and Silas had a very bad day and they probably didn't feel like doing a lot of singing. They sang and praised God anyway. There is power in that. God is good in times of blessing but He is also good when things are going bad.

King David knew this truth when he sang Psalm 28:7. I wonder if this is one of the psalms that Paul and Silas sung.

*"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him."
(Psalm 28:7)*

Why do we trust Him? Because he is our strength and shield and he helps us in times of trouble. Praise takes our focus off of us and our problems and it puts our focus on God and His power to overcome.

*It is good to praise God in the good times
but it also good to praise God in the bad.*

Here is one of my favorite Psalms. It's Psalm 34:1-3,

"I will extol the Lord at ALL times; his praise will ALWAYS be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together." (Psalm 34:1-3)

This psalm doesn't say, "I'll praise Him some of the time." It says, "I'll praise him at all times." Then it says, "Let the afflicted hear and rejoice."

When we praise God in the hard times it becomes a witness to others. Two things happened as a result to Paul and Silas' commitment to praise. First, the other prisoners saw the power of God, and then many (if not all) were saved. The reason I believe that the prisoners had been saved is because none of the tried to break free from the jail. None of

them tried to take advantage of God's power. The other thing that happened is that the jailer and his entire house all got saved. When you live a life of praise it becomes a testimony of God's hope and love to others.

There once was a king who went hunting large game with his friend. As the king shot the arrow his thumb came off. His friend said, "Praise God because He's in control." The king was furious and threw his friend in jail. Sometime later, the king was hunting when he ventured into a distant land where he'd never been before. Suddenly he was surrounded by cannibals. They tied him up and were ready to cook him when they saw the hand with no thumb. "No perfect, no cookie," said the chief, and they let him go. He went back to his friend and apologized. "You were right. Not having a thumb saved my life." His friend said, "Praise God that I have been in jail for so long." "How can you praise God?" "If I hadn't been in jail, I would have been hunting with you and look: two thumbs."

Everyone has terrible weeks and it may be a little counterintuitive to have a bad day and decide that the best thing to do is give praise to God. Most of the time, when it comes to bad day we often default to Murphy's Law, "If anything can go wrong then it will." Can I give you some good news this morning?

The power of God is always released through praise.

That's what Luke showed us in our passage this morning. When the praise goes up, the power comes down. What happens to my concern for the future? It's in God's hands now. My doubt? My disappointment? My despair? I've given it Him. I want to invite you this morning to claim the power of God through praise. Can we read Psalm 28:7 together in closing? Allow these words to be your words to Him. Then, as we pray, I invite you to allow the power of God to be released in your life. May the worship that flows from our lives be our testimony of faith in Him? Would you read this Psalm aloud and with me?

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.

My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him."

(Psalm 28:7)