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3-1-1983

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Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "Breakfast in Jail and Some Wrongs Straightened Out" (1983). *Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts*. 67.

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BREAKFAST IN JAIL AND SOME WRONGS STRAIGHTENED OUT

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 69
ACTS 16:34-17:4

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ACTS 16:34-17:4 "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed. Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few."

In our last study we examined the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family. Now in verse 34 we have the story of a wonderful breakfast. Paul was one of the greatest travelers of the ancient world, and if he had had a 35 MM camera, he could have supplied National Geographic with enough beautiful color pictures to fill their magazine for a period of fifty years. But here is one of the most fantastic scenes in his whole life. The day before he had been beaten and imprisoned, but today we find him the guest of a converted jailer. God responded to the needs of Paul and Silas with two miracles, the suicide attempt of the jailer was thwarted, and now they are dining at his breakfast table.

ACTS 16:34 "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." I suppose that all of you had breakfast this morning. I suppose you ate about the usual breakfast, possibly glanced at the morning paper, and went through the usual breakfast ritual. So I suppose that breakfast this morning was not anything unusual for you. But in this story we are looking at a breakfast that Paul and Silas would remember for the rest of their lives. You remember that Paul and Silas didn't go to bed the night before after an eight-course dinner, and they didn't have someone tuck them in bed for a good night's rest. So I suppose this breakfast was one they would really enjoy. This verse indicates that the jail was a part of a complex and the jailer lived in the upper part of the jail. I am sure it was a happy meal for this is the first breakfast that jailer and his family ate together after their conversion. All of these people would live in eternity together forever, so I know they enjoyed this great breakfast fellowship. Just think of this--a whole family saved in one night and now they are all eating together. It says, "They rejoiced having believed in the God". In other words, every member of the family had accepted Christ. So everybody is relaxed and having a good time. Of course some are sorer than others and Paul and Silas still had some pain from the severe treatment they had received the night before. This word "rejoiced" means they rejoiced and celebrated.

ACTS 16:35 "And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go."

When day came some wrongs had to be made right. You see, Paul was a Roman citizen, a Roman citizen by birth. These magistrates had done a very terrible thing. A Roman citizen had been beaten, and this was a direct violation of Roman law. This could not only cost these magistrates their jobs but it could cost the city of Philippi their free status as a Roman colony. Philippi, being a Roman colony, had many great advantages and privileges. Most colonies like this were founded by retired Roman officers and they were strong for Roman law and customs. They could lose their status with Rome because of their mistreatment of Paul. The magistrates sent a message to the Roman Lictors and told them to go to the jail and set these men free. These Lictors carried a bundle of rods with which prisoners were beaten, and they carried an axe with which criminals were executed. We used to have a dime that had a picture of this Roman axe on it, and it represented the idea of "justice for all". In fact, some years later when Paul was executed outside of Rome, his head was cut from his body by an axe like this. So these Lictors were commanded to go and let these prisoners go free. Paul and Silas were still in the prison compound and were still the captives of Rome. Please remember that for a far lesser crime than this the city of Rhodes lost her freedom. The Romans were sticklers for law and justice. For 600 years the Romans had developed self-discipline and adherence to strict law. This gave great stability to the Roman system. So here we see that strict Roman law had been violated and this just was not tolerated in the Roman Empire. Claudius was about to come to the end of his reign as Caesar and in a few years Nero would replace him. But at this time in the Roman Empire, Roman law and justice was accepted by the whole Roman world.

ACTS 16:36 "And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace." Paul is here given information from the Roman officials that he is free to go and that the government has no case against him. Realizing that a great error has been perpetrated upon Paul and Silas, the Roman officials were very anxious to get the matter cleared up as quickly as possible so their Roman colony will not come under the indictment of the Roman officials.

ACTS 16:37 "But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out." But Paul realized that he had a civic responsibility. It might do us good as citizens to stop right here and think about our civic responsibility. Romans 13:1-7 tells us about our civic responsibility in obeying the law and paying taxes, and serving in the military, etc. So Paul here shows his civic responsibility. It means literally "But Paul said face to face with them". Paul is not only a Roman citizen but he is a patriot of the Roman system. Let us examine here the facts and see why Paul made an issue in his civic stand.

- I. PAUL, THE CITIZEN. As a Roman citizen and member of the Roman Empire, he has a personal responsibility to that Empire. Probably more than any citizen of that Empire, he had enjoyed the benefits that accrue from law and order. Very few people traveled as far as he did and wherever he went he was safe because of Roman law. So Paul made an issue out of this illegal act and this miscarriage of justice.
- II. PAUL'S CONCERN FOR OTHERS. Paul is concerned for the safety of others and especially these new believers in Philippi. He had organized a church there and he wanted these new believers to be protected. The civil government has the responsibility of its citizens. A local church is a private organization. It is not a public organization at all, but it is composed of citizens and they deserve to have protection. Remember that the church is a private institution, it is privately owned and the main business of the church is evangelism. But though the church is a private institution, it enjoys the protection of the state.

The state assumes the responsibility of protecting private citizens and private property. Paul wanted to be sure that this was done here in Philippi. Paul realized that a very sloppy city government has allowed innocent men to be beaten, and Paul wanted to be sure that this miscarriage of justice would not occur again and would not be the pattern of conduct toward these new church members.

III. PAUL'S CONCERN FOR EVANGELISM. The breakdown of law and order and justice will hinder missions and evangelism, and Paul realized that for evangelism and missions to exist the state must be strong and fair. The freedom of citizens and institutions were at stake here. Paul knew that the state was a divine institution, and Paul wanted to be sure that the high principles of justice and law and order were preserved so the Christian movement could have stability. This is why God divided the world into national entities. He wants a balance of power so people can live in freedom. This means a free church in a free state. So here we see Paul acting as a responsible citizen. No Roman citizen could be scourged. This has been settled by a law passed by the Roman Senate back in 248 B.C. So for more than 300 years this issue had been settled. It was a crime to scourge a Roman citizen. Roman citizens were protected by Roman law--they couldn't be scourged or crucified. Cicero said, "To fetter a Roman citizen is a crime. To scourge a Roman citizen is a scandal. To slay him is a miscarriage of justice." Rhodes had crucified some Roman citizens and Claudius took away their Roman citizenship. So we realize that Philippi was in grave danger.

So Paul makes this point--They were scourged without having a fair trial, being Romans. He doesn't use the Greek word "Eimi" which means citizens of the status quo, or the Greek word "ginomai" which means that they had become Roman citizens. He used the Greek word "huparcho" which means that he was a Roman citizen from a long line of Roman citizens. His family had been Roman citizens for generations. He was born a Roman citizen.

Paul said, "We have been cast into prison, having been beaten, and now they want to thrust us out secretly. No indeed, on the basis of truth, let them come and fetch us out of the prison themselves".

ACTS 16:38 "And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans." No wonder there was cause for fear. They all at once realized that they had committed a crime that no Roman should ever commit.

ACTS 16:39 "And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city." So we have quite a different condition facing us here. They are now begging Paul and Silas to leave Philippi.

ACTS 16:40 "And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed." They left the prison with the assurance that the law would be observed and they went to the house of Lydia where the church met. The words "comforting and brethren" meant that Paul and Silas gave them Bible doctrine. Timothy and Luke remained there. We know this from other scripture. Timothy did not rejoin them until later in Berea. Luke did not rejoin them until later in the third missionary journey.

ACTS 17:1 "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews"

Now they come to Thessalonica. They traveled over that great Roman super highway. This highway was 500 miles long, and went all the way to Constantinople. Paul and Silas pushed on to Thessalonica, which was 100 miles from Philippi. Here they found positive volition. They had been led there by the Holy Spirit. They passed by Amphipolis (which was the gold mining center) and they passed by Apollonia (which was the farming center) and came to Thessalonica. This is the great Macedonian seaport.

ACTS 17:2 "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures" So for three sabbaths Paul and Silas preached doctrine to them. Please notice--he preached the scripture to them. Evidently he had some robe he wore or some little kind of hat or cap which showed the Jews that he was a graduate of the great Hebrew school in Jerusalem, and they were glad to welcome Paul and Silas to their synagogue. This word "reasoned with them" means that he discussed the scripture with them. This is the method Socrates used when he would meet people in the market place of Athens and discuss various subjects with the people of Greece.

ACTS 17:3 "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Please notice that his main message centered in Jesus Christ. In verse two we read that Paul "reasoned" with them. It is from the Greek word "Dialegomai" and it is the word from which we get dialogue. This is the way Paul told them about Christ. He would ask them questions and then would explain the answers to them.

It says that Paul spoke "Out from the ultimate source of the scriptures".

"Opening" means that he opened their minds and explained Christ.

"Alleging" means that he deposited truth in their minds.

So it means he opened their minds and he poured in doctrine. His theme was Christ. He taught Christ to them from the Old Testament. His message was this--It was necessary for Jesus Christ to suffer. In other words, Jesus Christ was obligated to suffer and no one could stop him from doing so. Jesus Christ was obligated to go to the cross and God the Father guaranteed that this would happen. In other words, Paul said to them, "I guarantee to you that this was God's plan--for Jesus to come and suffer for your sins. So you can believe in him with assurance".

Next time in our study we will see the result of this kind of preaching.