

There's much confusion today about worship. Should we sing w/ the lights on or off? Do we sing w/ a choir/orchestra or w/ a band? Do we sing hymns or contemporary songs?

But what if worship had nothing to do w/ music – or w/ our venues/technology? What if worship was an issue of the heart instead of a preference of style and content?

In Jn. 4, in His meeting w/ the Samaritan woman Jesus said:

A time is coming... when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they're the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. Jn. 4:23-4

What does it mean to worship in the Spirit and in Truth?

In **Acts 16**, we find one of my favorite passages in the Bible regarding true Spirit-inspired worship – Paul/Silas in jail.

We're waist deep in Acts learning about the unstoppable power of the H.S. and how the Christian life is not a matter of human ability/ingenuity but surrender/submission to the H.S. This means the gift of salvation and the ministry of the church have never been, nor will ever be, a work of human skill, effort, or ability, but solely the work of the H.S.

The same is true of authentic God-honoring worship – it doesn't begin w/ us, it begins w/ God abiding w/in us. Listen to Jesus' words again in John 4:24 – *God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*

In the Spirit means true worship is inspired/authored by the H.S. abiding w/us – and our role is the surrender of our mind's ATTENTION, our heart's AFFECTION, our will's AMBITION, and our body's ACTION to the H.S.

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true/proper worship. Romans 12:1-2

offer (*paristemi*) to release. It's a technical term used by priests in the temple when they placed an animal on the altar for sacrifice as an act of worship. So when the priest offered the *whole burnt offering* it meant the entire animal was placed on the altar to be sacrificed and nothing was w/held.

Paul's saying a Christ-follower is to voluntarily “*release*” his or her life completely into God's hands w/out reservations. The verb tense means we make this offering on a continual basis to remain in the sacred position of surrender.

Paul is saying that any human attempt at worship that's offered independent of the H.S. in flesh is idolatry b/c you can't worship in the Spirit if you don't walk in the Spirit.

Talk about a scary proposition? This means any attempt at worship authored in the flesh isn't a fragrant offering to God but a self-centered, self-gratifying slap in God's face.

It reminds me of a worship video spoof that sang songs like – Lord I lift My Name on High and I Exalt Me.

Jesus described worship as loving God *w/ all your heart, mind, soul, and strength...* what He was saying wasn't love God w/ all of your human ability – but love God out of the love He has poured into you thru the Spirit.

love (*agape*) refers to God's unconditional, sacrificial love

We know from Galatians 5 that *agape* love is a fruit of the Spirit bearing evidence of a surrendered, spirit-led life. So we're to love God out of the love He's imputed/invested in us thru the H.S – we worship b/c God first loved us.

So w/ this in mind, let's look at **Acts 16** and Paul/Silas.

Situation – Paul/Silas were in the city of Philippi sharing about truth of Jesus and the love of God. After several days of being harassed by a demon-possessed fortune-teller, they command the demon come out – and it did! Only the men abusing this woman's skills aren't too happy about it and they have Paul/Silas illegally arrested, beaten, and put in stocks in the local Roman jail.

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. 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.” She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At once the spirit left her. When her owners realized their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul/Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attack against them, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped/beaten w/ rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Needless to say, under the circumstances, no one would've blamed Paul/Silas if they were unhappy w/ their conditions. As Roman citizens, the injustice alone would've been enough to send most of us over the edge. But they'd been mistreated and abused too. And now bloodied/battered, they're in stocks in the depths of a Roman jail unable to sleep even if they wanted.

About midnight Paul/Silas were praying/singing hymns to God

I Worship is a CHOICE

There's often a great misunderstanding in the Christian life that bad things can't happen to God's people; but nothing could be farther from the truth. Sometimes it's just the opposite. For when we stand w/ Christ in a Christ-less world, many times, the world desires to silence the faithful.

This might be hard to fathom, but sometimes God allows difficult earthly circumstances for Divine, eternal outcomes. Sometimes He puts us in challenging situations to show Himself to others b/c He wants to show Himself as God.

So the question isn't whether bad things can happen to God's people, but instead, as God's people, how will we respond when non-preferred things happen in our lives?

In this story, Paul/Silas show us that authentic, God honoring worship is a choice even in the midst of the worst of human conditions b/c true worship is a choice of the heart and not a result of one's circumstances.

II Worship is CAPTIVATING

...and the other prisoners were listening to them.

This phrase gets me. Its midnight in a jail filled w/ hardened criminals, and they're so overcome they tune in and listen.

Here's what I've learned about worship – it can capture the attention of the hardest of hearts. I can't tell you how many times I've entered into worship when my heart wasn't right only to be overwhelmed/drawn into the moment by God.

I think that's what happened here. I can't imagine this duet of Paul/Silas was very good; yet God moved and the other men were captivated by His presence b/c when God shows up – He has this uncanny way of drawing people to Himself.

III Worship is not **CONSTRAINED**

Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.

In the midst of an earthquake there was a faith-quake – and people's lives were transformed into real freedom. The demon-possessed girl was set free from abuse/misuse, Paul and Silas were set free from injustice, and the jailer and his family was set free from lostness.

IV Worship can **CHANGE** Lives

This is the best part. When God shows up, people are physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually rescued. Lives are retrieved from death to life. The **FAITHLESS** find **FORGIVENESS**.

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself b/c he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized.

Notice the jailer's response. He was so overwhelmed by God's presence he seeks out what is required to be saved. He says to Paul/Silas, what must I do to have what you have?

Make no mistake – it was b/c of their Spirit-infused worship and passionate pursuit of Christ that this jailer fell at their feet. He knew there was something different about these men that caused him to desire whatever it was that they had.