

**The God who turns pain into joy,  
uncertainty into hope,  
confinement into opportunity**

May 17, 2020

Acts 16:19-40



Asaph was the human author of Psalm 77, where he described how God leads his people. The picture he uses in v.20 is that of **a shepherd leading his flock.**



Jesus said of himself to his disciples, John 10:14:

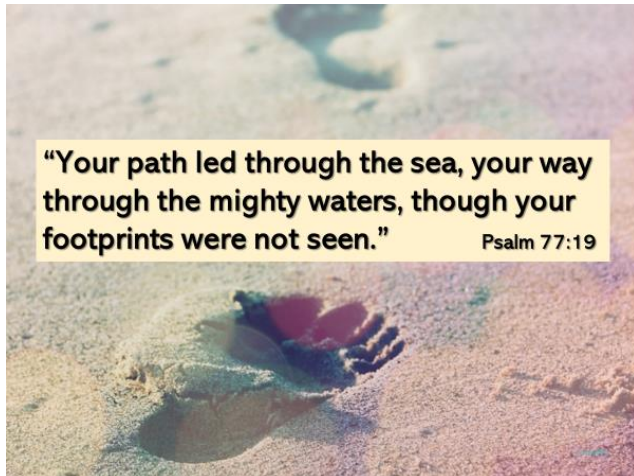


What that means... is that when we welcome Jesus into our lives... we give him the exclusive right to lead our lives.

To yield our lives to Jesus, is to express to him... our trust of him – not just for the life that follows death, but for the life we live right now.

Psalm 77:19 makes a remarkable statement.

The writer was referring to the nation of Israel's experience of being led through the Red Sea.



But this verse is not just applicable to the nation of Israel.

This is how Jesus leads all of his followers.

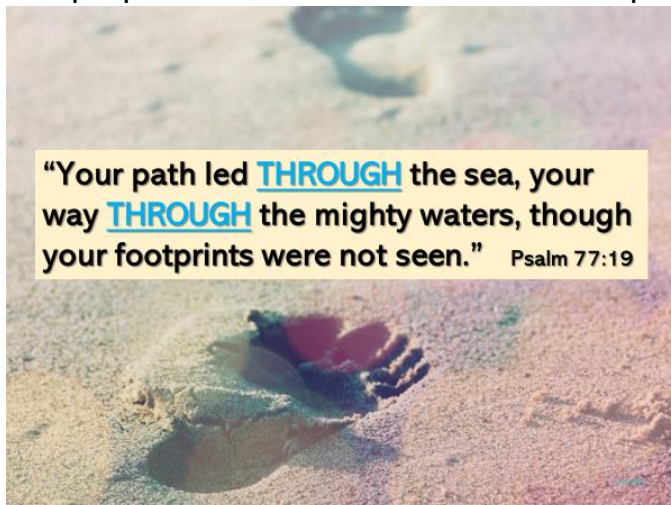
As we shall see in today's passage he will lead us... into situations where we cannot see the immediate outcome or understand why the things that are happening to us are being permitted.

But as v.19 says while we may not see the "footprints of God," that is, the tangible evidence by which we can conclude.... he is going ahead of us.

Jesus our good shepherd, leads us, not sometimes, but all the time.

He leads us when it makes sense to us, and he lead us even when it doesn't.

The preposition used in Psalm 77:19 is super important.



Our good shepherd Jesus, leads us, not just into, but **through** difficulty.

He always has a purpose for why he leads us where he is leading us.

And in our passage for today, we will see one of his key purposes.

Before we read today's passage let me remind you of the context of Acts 16. God's Spirit had directed Paul and team to Philippi where they preached the gospel.

Dr. Luke tells us the story of three people who became followers of Jesus – Lydia, a businesswoman; an unnamed, demon possessed slave girl, and the prison warden and his family.

To make sense of today's story and the things that happened to Paul and Silas, I remind you: **It is the glory of God to save sinners.**

## Acts 16:19-40

### The reaction of the owners

Though she was freed from the bondage to the spirit who had lived in her, the slave girl was still the property of those who owned her.

Luke doesn't tell us how long it took for the girl's owners to realize that "her gift" was gone, or what they did to her... when it was discovered.... she could no longer foretell the future.

But when the owners traced the cause of their financial loss back to Paul and Silas, they forcibly compelled "**them into the marketplace to face the authorities.**" See v.19

Though Philippi was located in Greece, it was a Roman colony. Many townspeople including the owners of the girl, were Roman citizens. See v.21 – "**...us Romans...**"

The fact that the owners didn't hire an assassin or put together a lynch mob, but brought Paul and Silas to the magistrates, suggests they may have been people of respectability.

That said, what I find fascinating... is that the owners behaved like the spirit who possessed the slave girl. Let me explain what I mean.

In seizing Paul and Silas and bringing them before the authorities, they masqueraded as concerned Roman citizens... who were eager to defend the Roman way of life, when in truth, they were thugs who had enriched themselves through the misery of a young girl, and who simply wanted revenge for what had been taken from them.



The reaction of the owners  
The charges



- The fact that Paul and Silas’ ethnicity – see v.20b - was mentioned, confirms that the owners were attempting to frame their accusations in a context of “us” vs. “them.”

**“These men are Jews... and are throwing our city... into an uproar.”**

- The charge **“of throwing our city into an uproar”** – see v.20b - while serious would have been easy to confirm or disprove.
- The second part of their accusation.... **“advocating customs unlawful for Romans to accept or practice,”** – see v.21 - would have required a more thorough investigation. But again, it would **not** have been difficult to investigate to determine if it was true, or not.

The reaction of the owners  
 The charges  
 The reaction of the crowd

They were faceless and unnumbered.

But when the crowd heard the accusations against Paul and Silas framed as a **“us” vs. “them”** argument, they were quick to side with the owners.

The reaction of the owners  
 The charges  
 The reaction of the crowd  
 The reaction of the magistrates

Without any cross-examination, they ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped, severely beaten with rods and then thrown into prison.

The swiftness and the severity of the sentencing suggests some level of complicity between the magistrates and the owners of the slave girl, in spite of the fact, that as a Roman colony, they were to govern on the basis of Roman law.

The magistrates treated Paul and Silas as if they were dangerous enemies of the Roman empire, as evidenced by their command to the jailor - **“guard them carefully”** and the jailor’s interpretation of this order to mean that Paul and Silas should be placed in the most secure cell with their feet in stocks.

As puzzling as this was, the next morning, at first light, the magistrates did something equally puzzling - they sent word to the jailor to release Paul and Silas and send them on their way.

This was the moment when the Spirit of God impressed upon Paul and Silas to mention that they were Roman citizens.

Why they didn’t do this the day before, we are not told.

So here we go back to what we know is true for every believer in every situation – Jesus leads his people, and through the Holy Spirit who lives in us, he guides and prompts as to what we are to do and not do.

This knowledge that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens... “alarmed” the magistrates, and with good cause.

If Paul and Silas had chosen to press charges the magistrates would have found themselves on the receiving end of the punishment they had so vigorously and eagerly doled out on Paul and Silas.

This was why the magistrates came to the prison as Paul demanded. It was why they endeavored to appease Paul and Silas, taking ownership for the wrong they had done.

It was why they escorted Paul and Silas from the prison, in sharp contrast to the way they had been dragged into the marketplace and then thrown into prison, only the day before.

Paul and Silas did agree to their request to leave Philippi, but they did so, on their terms, after they had met with and encouraged the followers of Jesus who met at the home of Lydia.

### Why did Dr. Luke record this story?

Paul would later write this in his letter to the church at Philippi,

#### Philippians 1:29:

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him...

We all are familiar with what Paul wrote in **3:10:**

#### Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ –  
yes, to know the power of his  
resurrection...

But listen to the rest of that verse:



## Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ –  
yes, to know the power of his  
resurrection and participation in  
his sufferings....

Peter wrote in his first letter:

### 1 Peter 4:12-16:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the  
fiery ordeal when it comes upon you...  
But rejoice, inasmuch as you participate  
in the sufferings of Christ....

If you are insulted because of the name  
of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit  
of glory and of God rests on you.

We know from Ephesians 6 that the followers of Jesus will experience opposition from unseen dark spiritual forces.... who influence human beings still estranged from God.... to oppose Jesus.... by trying to harm his followers and his church.

When these things happen, and the message of the NT is that they will, how is the follower of Jesus to **respond** and not just **react**; to **thrive**, and not just **survive**?

**Through today's passage the Spirit of God teaches us to look to, to press into, to hold firmly to our God and Savior.**

We do not live in a world where evil is free to do as it pleases... when it pleases ... however it pleases.

Jesus rules and he is the highest authority...and he leads his followers...and wherever he takes us... his grace is always sufficient.

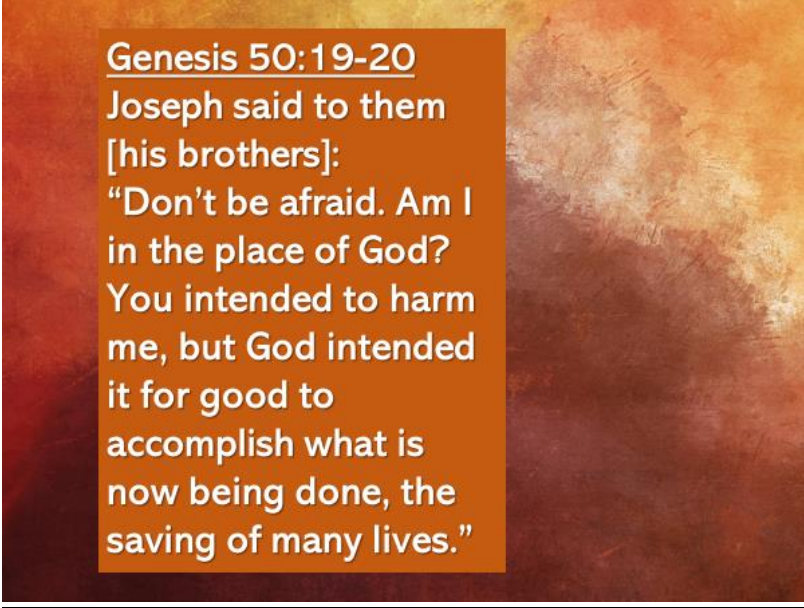
We do not live in a world ruled by chance.

Jesus is in charge.

The things that touch our lives... pass first through his hands...and always accomplish his will.

What OT Joseph learned about God and his ways, is applicable in every generation including ours.

What Joseph said to his brothers makes sense of the things that happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi when they were arrested and imprisoned.



Genesis 50:19-20  
Joseph said to them  
[his brothers]:  
“Don’t be afraid. Am I  
in the place of God?  
You intended to harm  
me, but God intended  
it for good to  
accomplish what is  
now being done, the  
saving of many lives.”

Some of you may not know the story of Joseph.

At seventeen years of age, his brothers sold him into slavery.

**Did Joseph realize when this happened... that God was at work in his life to bring about great good?**

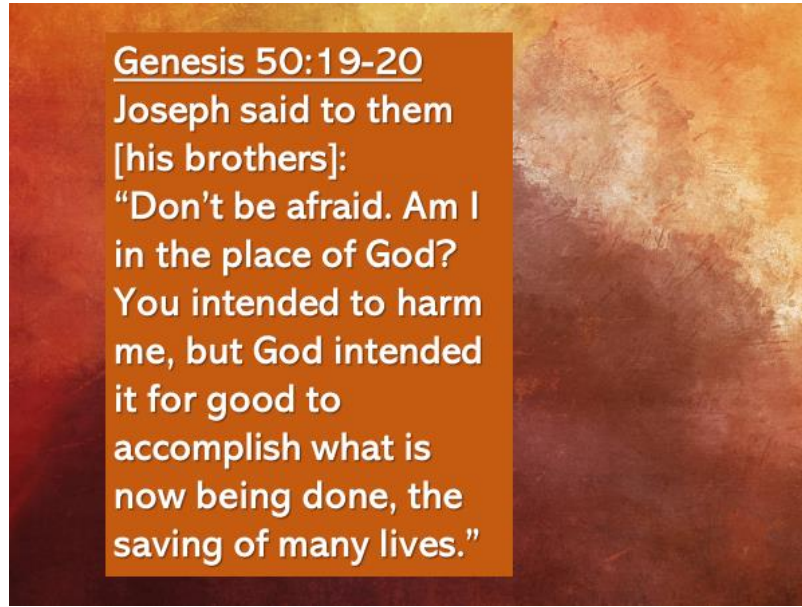
In Egypt, Joseph was bought by a man named Potiphar.

In his early twenties, Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him of rape, and Joseph was put in prison.

**Was it clear to Joseph as he languished in prison for almost a decade... that God was at work in his life for the good of saving many lives?**

Even when Joseph was released from prison at 30 years of age and made second in command of Egypt, **was it clear to him what God was doing?**

What we do know... is what Joseph said to his brothers many years later.



In the life of one who loves and follows God, God takes the things intended for harm and turns them in order to save lives.

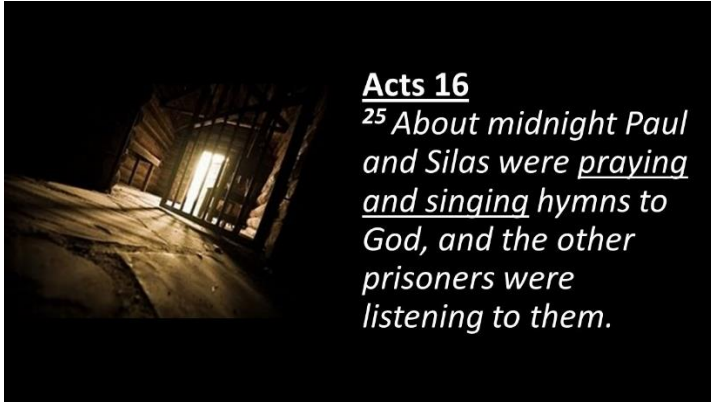
**This is who God is.**

We do not know why... the magistrates dealt unjustly with Paul and Silas, and why they gave the order to guard them carefully...which led to the jailor's decision to place them in the innermost cell.

But we do know.... that what was intended for harm... was intended by God... for the saving of many lives.

What was the frame of Paul and Silas' mind and the condition of their hearts as their feet were put in stocks and they were locked up in the prison?

Were they anxious, fearful? Look at what v.25 says.



The jailor thought by placing Paul and Silas in the innermost cell there could be no chance for them to escape.

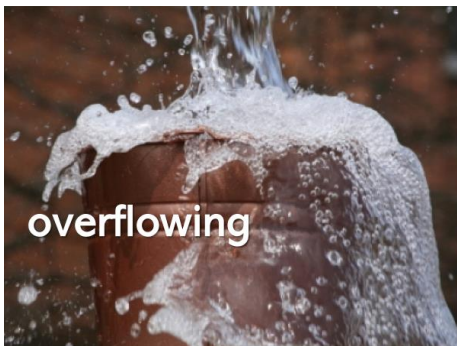
But Jesus intended that being there... Paul and Silas would be placed where the other prisoners could listen to their prayers and to their songs.

While the story of the other prisoners is not told, God still arranged to reveal himself to them through the testimony and the worship of Paul and Silas.

As Paul and Silas prayed and sang, the joy of the Lord filled their souls.

This is what Jesus had promised – his joy... in his followers.

Jesus spoke of his joy so filling his followers that it overflowed and spilled out of them.



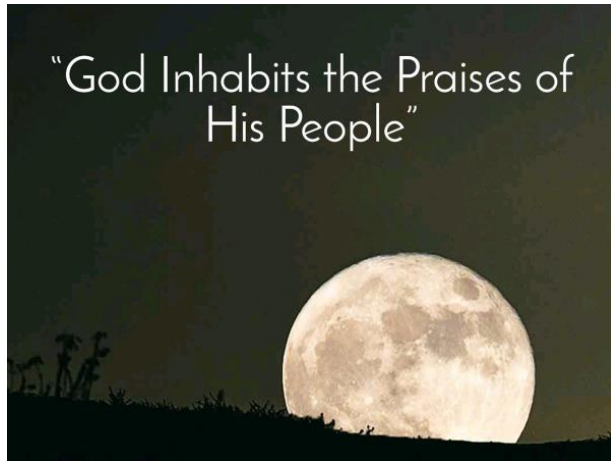
What is Jesus' joy?

It is joy in the Father....and in the doing of the Father's will.

Instead of growing weary... and losing heart, Paul and Silas found strength in the Lord and in his grace.

They took hope that they were where the Father wanted them to be.

As they prayed and sang they proved the truth of what the psalmist had written:



The dark fallen angels' traffic in accusation, in heaviness, and in despair. They attempt to smother a person with a sense of hopelessness. Have you experienced that? I have.

But when the follower of Jesus prays... and praises the living God.... their influence is dispelled. God comes near to those who draw near to him. He inhabits our praises.

The story is told in 2 Chronicles 20 of a time when a great army gathered to invade Judah in the days of King Jehosophat. Jehosophat called the people of Judah together to seek help from the LORD.

As they did, the Spirit of God spoke through a priest named Jahaziel, saying...

Do not be afraid or discouraged  
because of this vast army.  
For the battle is not yours, but God's.

2 Chronicles 20:15

This is who God is.

With his people he **turns the things intended for harm... into the means by which he saves many lives.**

What did God tell King Jehosaphat and the people to do?

They were to place men at the head of the army, who would sing to the LORD.

Do you know what they sang?

**“Give thanks to the LORD for  
his love endures forever.”**

**2 Chronicles 20:21**

When these men and the army began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the invaders...and rescued his people.

As Paul and Silas prayed and praised, at midnight God acted.

Read **v.26-28**.

- **The earthquake shook the foundations of the prison.**
- **The doors of the prison flew open.**
- **The chains of all the prisoners came loose.**

What is intriguing is that while the shaking of the earthquake was described as being violent.... it didn't cause the collapse of the prison.

There were no prisoners trapped in the rubble, for when the jailor was about to kill himself, thinking the prisoners had escaped, Paul shouted out to him, “We are all here!”



The earthquake seemed to only impact the prison.

When the jailor brought Paul and Silas into his home, he had a house to take them into, and a kitchen to cook in, and a place to set a meal for them.

When Paul and Silas left the prison, Lydia still had a home for them to go to.

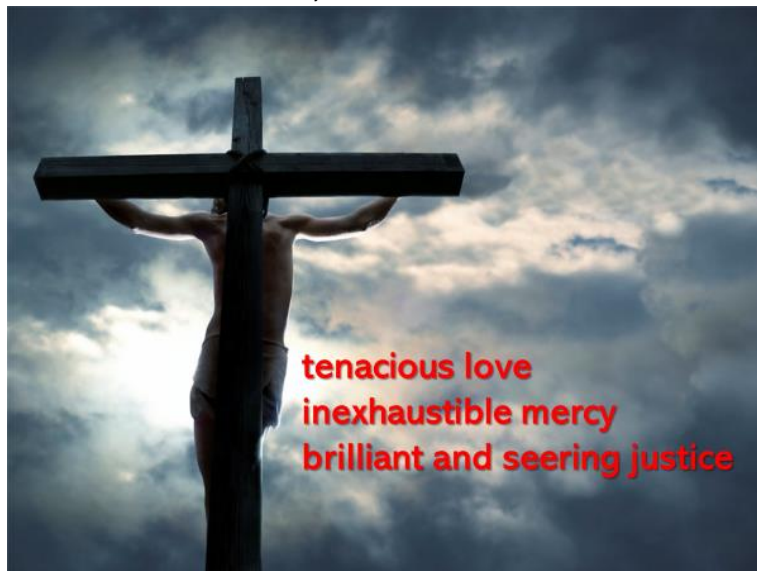
In the absence of any other detail, we can say this: God who had caused the earthquake also set the boundaries of its impact.

And in doing so...we see the lengths which God will go to... in order to save. God finds no delight in the death of a sinner.

God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. See John 3:17.

God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance and be saved. See 2 Peter 3:9

At the cross of Jesus, we see God's...



And this love and mercy and justice was acted out before the very eyes of the jailor and his family.

When the jailor saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword to kill himself.

He did so because he knew he was responsible for any prison break, regardless of how it happened.

But I say it again: God had not sent the earthquake to have the jailor kill himself. You and I... need to hear the heart of God expressed through Paul when he said, **“Do not harm yourself!”**

God had shaken the foundations of the prison.... in order to shake the foundation of the jailor’s life.

When he heard Paul’s voice he called for lights and rushed into the prison and knelt before Paul and Silas – v.29.

This was a posture that indicated, “I am in your hands.”

Luke writes that the jailor trembled.

He didn’t want to die.

He wanted to live.

But at that moment he was not certain how.

I don’t think his question of Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” was initially an inquiry of his soul.

The default of human nature is to look for short-term solutions.



**“What do I have to do to get out of...this mess, this difficulty, this challenge...so I can get back to living life as I had been???”**

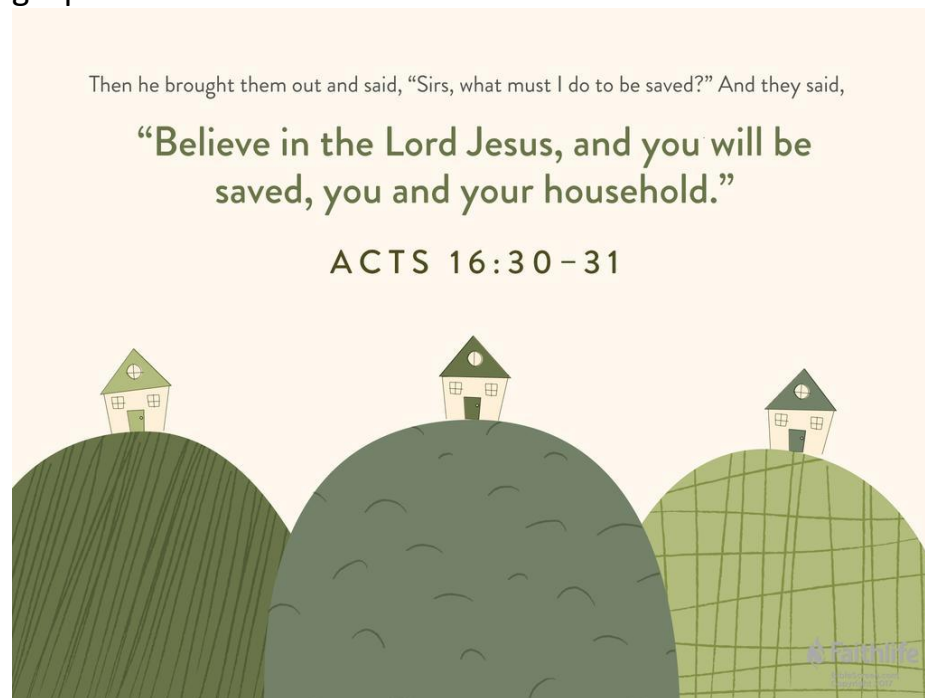
The jailor was only thinking of his life at that moment.  
“How do I save myself from this catastrophe?”  
“What demands will these men make of me?”

Remember – it is the glory of God to save sinners.

God was not shaking the foundations of the jailor’s life in order that he might be persuaded to be nicer... to the prisoners entrusted to his oversight - to feed them better food; or provide blankets for them when it was cold.

God was shaking his life in order to... reveal Jesus to him.

Having prayed... and praised for hours, Paul and Silas, filled with the Spirit and with boldness, turned the jailor’s question into an opportunity to share the gospel.



This statement was followed by, look again at v.32, Paul and Silas speaking to the jailor and all the others who were in his household:

**“the word of the Lord.”**

This is why they had been arrested....and why they had been imprisoned.  
How else would they have met the jailor and been able to preach Christ to him?  
How else would the jailor have made time for them?

The Father knew this is how his heart would be opened to the gospel!

**Follower of Jesus, in order to save sinners, God puts you where he does... in the particular circumstance you are in... for you to meet people he is searching after... in order that you might speak the word of the Lord to them.**

Do you see how that radically changes our outlook on life?

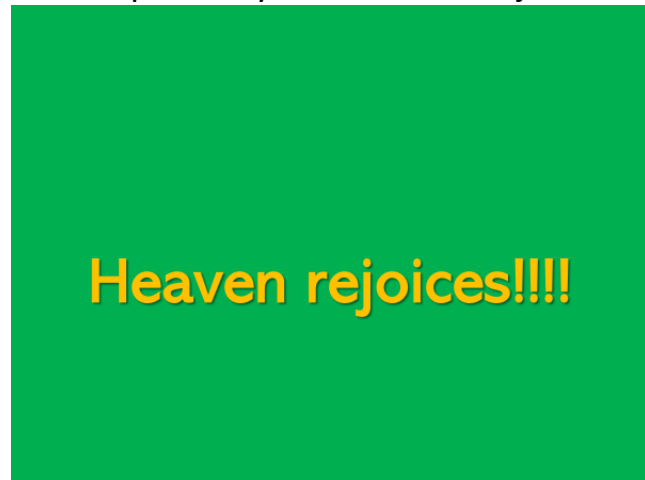
Even when things are intended for harm... these things are intended by God...and overturned...for the saving of many lives.

Nothing is wasted with God.

**Dear friend... who has not yet put your trust and hope in Jesus... God has brought into your life.... those particular followers of Jesus that you've met, because he wants you... to be saved... from your sin... and from your current way of life that excludes him.**

His intent is that you would hear the news of his salvation through them... and in hearing... that you would believe in him.

The Scripture says that heaven rejoices when a person comes home to God.



Think of it – heaven rejoices.

This puts weight to how important to God his rescue of sinners is.

Along with heaven rejoicing... everyone who is found by God and puts their trust in Jesus Christ, also experiences this inexpressible and glorious joy that the jailor and his family experienced...

...when God rescued them,  
when the weight of their guilt was lifted, and their sin forgiven,  
when by the power of God, they were made into a new person on the inside,  
when God's Spirit made his home in them,  
when they discovered in Jesus a purpose for life that was truly soul satisfying,  
when they began to enjoy being a friend of God.

**See again v.34.**

But it is not just at the moment when one believes in Jesus that this joy is experienced.

This is the lifelong reality of the follower of Jesus.

- It is the glory of God to save sinners, by the preaching of the gospel.
- The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.
- And when one believes the gospel, it is the command of Jesus that they be baptized.

This is what the jailor and his family did that very night – look again at v.33.

This was their first step as followers of Jesus.

Having believed, they were baptized.

I am certain that as Paul and Silas walked out of the prison that morning, in spite of their lack of sleep, in spite of the soreness they felt in their body... they were in awe of the wisdom and the mercy of God who had turned their pain into joy, their confinement into opportunity...and who had made family of the jailor and his household.

How good and how great is God!!

## **The Blessing**

Philippians 4:4-9