



LESSON 36

The Philippian jailer is saved

ACTS 16:16-40



The good news of salvation turns trouble into joy.



“And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God” (Acts 16:34b).

Supporting Truths

1. Those who share the gospel will be persecuted.
2. The gospel cannot be stopped.
3. The gospel brings great joy even when life is hard.
4. The gospel is the good news of salvation by faith in Jesus.
5. The gospel brings believers together.

Objectives

1. Describe how Paul and Silas were treated after casting out a demon.
2. Explain how the jail was unlocked.
3. Describe what Paul and Silas were doing while locked in prison.
4. Restate Paul's gospel message (Acts 16:31).
5. Describe how the jailer treated Paul and Silas after being saved.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

The Philippian jailer is saved • Acts 16:16-40



Lesson Summary

Paul and Silas were preaching the gospel in Philippi on their very first journey to Europe. But after casting a demon out of a fortune-telling slave girl, Paul and Silas were unjustly thrown in prison. Still, they kept praying and singing, and God broke open the prison with an earthquake. This brought an opportunity to share the gospel with the distraught jailer, and he and his whole family believed. In the end, God used prison to produce great joy.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Peter's gospel message to the jailer was simple: believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Believe means to accept and trust. And the object of that belief is Jesus: trust who He is and accept what He has done for you. The result is salvation: rescue from sin, Satan, death, and despair. This gospel is very good news. It brings great joy, and nothing can stop it from spreading.



**The Gentiles are saved by
faith alone**
Acts 15:1-35

**The Philippian jailer is
saved**
Acts 16:16-40

Paul preaches in Athens
Acts 17:16-34

THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO THE REMOTEST PART OF THE EARTH

Lesson Commentary

The good news of salvation turns trouble into joy.

The Jerusalem Council had recently clarified that following the law is not required in order to be saved (Acts 15). Rather, salvation is a gracious gift, received by faith in Jesus alone. With confident support from believers back home, Paul set out with Silas to take this gospel to distant places—to modern-day Turkey, Macedonia, and Greece. When they came to Philippi in Macedonia, they had quick success as a woman named Lydia believed the gospel (16:11–15). But then trouble erupted. Did they get discouraged? Not at all. Paul and Silas rejoiced, because they knew that God does good even through bad circumstances (2:23–24; 8:4).

Paul and Silas were thrown in prison (16:16–24)

The trouble began when a demon-possessed slave girl began following Paul and Silas and saying, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation” (16:17). But how is that a bad thing? She was telling the truth. While her message was true at that moment, demons’ ultimate goal is to twist the truth and destroy. If Paul accepted her message at this time, he would have a hard time rejecting it when her message turned destructive. It is never wise to accept support from the wicked (Prov 25:5). Though they may speak approving words at first, they are a trap and destroy in the end (26:28; 29:5).

Paul cast the **demon** out in the name of Jesus (Acts 16:18). Casting out **unclean spirits** was one of the marks of a true apostle (Mark 3:15; 2 Cor 12:12). Since the apostles finished their task, Scripture never instructs believers today to confront or cast out demons like this. Demons are real, and spiritual warfare is all around us, but since we are not apostles, we are to respond by putting on the spiritual armor God has made available to every believer (Eph 6:10–18).

Although Paul had just set this slave girl free from demonic control, her owners were not happy. They were upset (Acts 16:19). They did not care about this girl as a person, only as property. She was a great way to make money since people paid for her to tell their fortunes. As it did to the Gerasenes (Mark 5:16–17) and the Ephesian craftsmen (Acts 19:26–27), love of money blinds the soul (1 Tim 6:9–10). The girl’s owners, blind with greed, falsely accused Paul and Silas of throwing the city into chaos (Acts 16:20–21). In reality, it was the girl’s owners who created the chaos (16:22). As at Jesus’ trial (Luke 23:22–23), anger left no room for justice, and Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned without any attempt to investigate the truth. They were locked up with extra security, and their feet were put in stocks designed to stretch their legs apart, causing painful cramping (Acts 16:23–24).

Paul and Silas worshiped and evangelized in prison (16:25–34)

What did they do? Lash out in anger? Grumble and complain? Demand their rights? Not at all! They sat there praying and singing hymns through the night (16:25). Imagine what it would have been like to hear their songs echo through the prison cells! In a place of misery and despair, their voices echoed with joy and hope. They responded not based on their circumstances, but based on what they knew to be true about God. He is always good and always does good (Ps 119:68). He brings good out of evil (Rom 8:28), and He turns our temporary suffering into glory that never ends (2 Cor 4:16–18). This joy does not make sense to the world, because it is given by the Spirit (Gal 5:22) to people who follow the Spirit’s lead (Eph

THINK ABOUT IT

Do not be surprised at persecution. If they persecuted Jesus, they will also persecute His followers (John 15:20–21).



THINK ABOUT IT

People who do evil are imprisoned by their sin even if they are physically free; but the righteous man sings and rejoices even if locked in a dungeon (Prov 29:6).



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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5:18–19). Paul and Silas kept singing and singing.

God wanted these men to spread their joy, so He sent a rather strange earthquake that not only burst the doors open but also caused the chains to fall off all the prisoners (Acts 16:26)! But instead of rejoicing, the jailer was so hopeless he drew his sword to kill himself (16:27). He could no longer see any reason to go on living, for he knew that he faced both shame and the death sentence for allowing his prisoners to escape (12:19). Just then, he was shocked to learn that no one had escaped (16:28). He was so astonished he trembled (16:29). Who were these two strange men? The jailer probably had heard about the message they had been preaching, so after seeing how hopeless his own life was, he turned to them for help: “What must I do to be saved?” (16:30). Someone had once asked Jesus this very same question, and Jesus had responded by confronting that man with the Law (Luke 18:18–23). But Paul did not, for this jailer’s heart was already prepared. He was already humbled. He had already stopped trusting in his own abilities.



THINK ABOUT IT

There are really only two religions in the world: trusting human work or trusting God’s work.

Then what did he need to do? All other religions give many different answers, but the true answer is simple: do not do anything. Simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ

(Acts 16:31). Believe in who He is (John 20:31) and in what He has done (1 Cor 15:3–4). That is it. No laws. No rituals. Just **believe**. **Trust** in who Jesus is. **Accept** what He has done for you. And you will be saved—from sin, from Satan, from death, from despair. You will be forever safe, held fast in the omnipotent hands of Jesus (John 10:28).

The jailer did believe, along with everyone in his household, including all his family members as well

as any family slaves (Acts 16:33–34). What a radical change happened that night! Instead of suicide, eternal life. Instead of hostility, love (John 13:35). Instead of despair, **joy**—the *deep and lasting pleasure* of having sins completely forgiven (Ps 32:1; Rom 4:7). Since the whole family believed, the whole family confirmed their faith by being baptized: they visibly identified themselves with Jesus their Lord (Rom 6:1–5) and put their trust in God for cleansing (1 Pet 3:21). It turns out God had good reason for putting Paul and Silas in prison!

Paul and Silas were released from prison (16:35–40)

Now that their prison ministry was accomplished, God set them free. The magistrates just wanted them to go away and not cause any more trouble (Acts 16:35–36). But Paul refused. The magistrates had violated Roman law. If this became known to those with greater authority, the magistrates could lose their positions and their honor. Even the city itself could lose its Roman privileges. So Paul demanded that they openly admit their mistake and show honor to Paul and Silas (16:37–39). Since Paul was not concerned about his own life or honor (Phil 1:20), he was acting on behalf of others. He was setting a precedent of justice by not allowing governing officials to think it was ok to condemn the innocent. He was loving others by demanding justice.

In the end, all the believers were encouraged, and Paul and Silas visited Lydia and the believers before leaving (Acts 16:40). The jailer was rejoicing, and Paul and Silas saw God’s power to save yet again. For those who boldly preach the gospel and praise Him no matter what the circumstances, God turns suffering into success.

Lesson Outline

The good news of salvation turns trouble into joy.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Rejoice in Jesus even when you suffer for Him (16:16–25).
2. Rejoice in Jesus by putting your faith in Him (16:26–34).
3. Rejoice in Jesus by encouraging one another about Him (16:35–40).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Paul and Silas were thrown in prison (16:16–24).
 - Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl (16:16–18).
 - The girl's owners falsely accused Paul and Silas (16:19–21).
 - Paul and Silas were illegally beaten and imprisoned (16:22–24).
2. Paul and Silas worshiped and evangelized in prison (16:25–34).
 - Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns (16:25).
 - An earthquake released all the prisoners (16:26–27).
 - The jailer and his family heard and believed the gospel (16:28–34).
3. Paul and Silas were released from prison (16:35–40).
 - The magistrates set Paul and Silas free (16:35–36).
 - Paul made the magistrates do the right thing (16:37–40).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **Where did the magistrates put Paul and Silas?**
In prison.
2. **What did Paul and Silas do while they were locked up?**
They kept on praying and singing hymns.
3. **What unlocked the doors and their chains?**
An earthquake.
4. **What did the Philippian jailer feel like when he believed?**
He rejoiced.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Why did Paul cast out the demon?**
Even though the demon was telling the truth, Paul knew that accepting praise from a wicked source was a trap.
2. **Why were the slave girl's owners so angry?**
They did not care about her. They just used her demonic fortune-telling to make money.
3. **Why could Paul and Silas sing even in prison?**
They knew God is good. They knew God does good, even in bad situations. They knew heaven was worth suffering in this world. They knew they had done nothing wrong.
4. **Why was the jailer so upset that he was going to kill himself?**
He thought all the prisoners had escaped and he would be sentenced to death for his negligence.
5. **Why did God allow Paul and Silas to get thrown into jail?**
To bring salvation to the jailer and his whole family.
6. **What did the jailer have to do to be saved?**
Believe on the Lord Jesus. Trust who He is and accept what He has done.
7. **What two things confirmed the jailer's faith?**
He was baptized and he showed love for the apostles by washing them and feeding them.
8. **Why did Paul make the magistrates apologize?**
To set a standard of justice to protect other Christians.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



EARTHQUAKE SIMULATION

Using a large cardboard box, scissors, and a marker, create your own "Philippian jail." All the children can take turns sitting in the cardboard prison, and gently shake the box to simulate an earthquake. In today's lesson, God sends an earthquake to open the doors of the prison and miraculously break the locks and chains of the prisoners! Use the cardboard prison during the lesson as a visual aid.

HAPPY OR SAD?

Ask the children if the following makes them happy or sad: a new pet, a skinned knee, a birthday or Christmas present, a shot at the doctor's office, staying up past their bedtime, candy, having a friend over, losing their favorite toy, etc. Point out that in each of these cases, it was something that happened that caused the child to be happy or sad. Explain that true joy (which comes from God) isn't like this. With true joy, it is possible to be happy even when we get a skinned knee or lose our favorite toy. And we will see this in today's lesson: Paul and Silas are beaten and put in jail, but they were still happy!



WHAT IS A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION?

Demons are bad angels. They used to live in heaven, but because they rebelled against God they were kicked out. Explain that demons can take control of people, affecting their minds and actions. A demon lived inside the slave girl and gave her some kind of ability to tell the future. People paid much money to listen to the demon-possessed girl. Illustrate this with a puppet (the slave girl) and your hand (the demon who filled the slave girl).

SMILE AND FROWN GAME

During the lesson, have the children smile or frown to indicate if the following groups had joy or sadness/anger: the owners of the slave girl, the crowd, the magistrates, Paul, Silas, the jailer, the jailer's family, the other Christians in Philippi. Point out that the jailer had a frown at first, but later had a smile when he received salvation. Ask what made the different people joyful or not.



SINGING IN PRISON

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, yarn, crayons, tape, scissors, hole punch.

Directions: Color the craft page. Color and cut the notes. Hole punch where indicated. Use the yarn to make the bars (be sure that the yarn can slide easily). Tape the notes on the yarn.

Singing in Prison
See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

WHAT IS TRUE JOY?

Do you know anyone who always seems to be happy? No matter what happens, this person is always in a good mood. Why do you think this is? Is it because nothing difficult or harmful ever happens to this person? What about someone who is always sad? Do you know anyone like this? Why do you think they're always sad? Is it because nothing good ever happens in their life? Is it possible to be happy in the midst of great difficulty, pain, or loss? It is, and we'll learn why in today's lesson.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Do you know what to do in an earthquake? Conduct an earthquake drill to introduce today's lesson: 1) Drop down where you are on your hands and knees. This protects you from being knocked over; 2) Cover your head and neck with one arm and hand. If possible, crawl under a sturdy table or desk. If there is nothing to shelter under, crawl next to bed or an interior wall but stay away from windows; 3) Hold on until the shaking stops with your other hand.



ILLUSTRATE

JOY THAT LASTS

Blow up several balloons. Ask the children to name things that make them happy and write those answers on the balloons. Write "salvation" on the last balloon. Have the children bring the balloons to you one at a time. Ask if they think what is written on the balloon will bring lasting joy. Before the object lesson starts, put a tack through the inside of a Band-Aid and put the Band-Aid on a finger on your left hand. When the child hands you the balloon, hold it with both hands and covertly pop it with the concealed tack. When you get the "salvation" balloon, be sure to hold it carefully so that it does not pop. Explain that only salvation brings joy that lasts.

UNLAWFUL TRIAL

Paul was a Roman citizen. Rome had laws that gave rules for how to have a trial and how to punish Roman citizens. None of those rules were followed for Paul. It was against the law to beat a Roman citizen without a trial. Have the children imagine being punished by a teacher at school without ever doing anything wrong.



APPLY

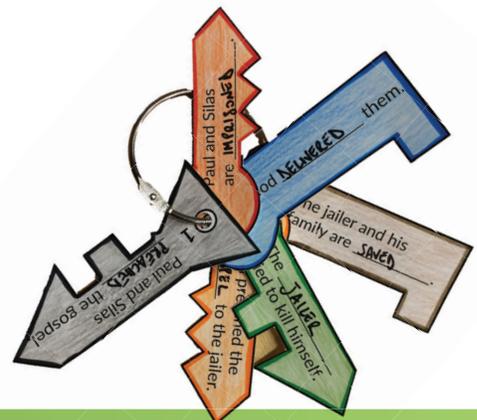
KEYS OF THE STORY

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, crayons, scissors, hole punch, ring.

Directions: Color the six keys and cut them. hole punch where indicated. Fill in the blanks. put the keys in the right order in the ring

*Keys of the Story
See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2*



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

REASON TO BE JOYFUL

When's the last time you had a bad attitude or were ungrateful? Did you have good reason to be? Today we're going to meet someone who, of all people, had some good reasons to have a bad attitude or be ungrateful, yet he was not. His name is Paul, and he experienced many difficult trials in his life (2 Cor 11:23–28). Yet in spite of his many hardships, Paul never lost his joy. Today we will learn how we might have true, lasting joy as we consider an event from the life of Paul: his imprisonment and release in Philippi.

THE REAL DEAL

Show some brief internet videos of people shouting, singing, and jumping up and down in joy. Ask the children what all these videos have in common: the individuals were all responding to some event or circumstance in their life. Their joy was not inward. It was a product of what was going on around them. Explain that this is not true joy. True joy is not dependent on what is happening to us. It's internal, being a product of what God has done for us—rescued us from our sin.



ILLUSTRATE

DOG FOOD DINNER?

Prison guards were responsible to make sure their prisoners did not escape. If a prisoner did escape, the guard would receive the same punishment the escaped prisoner was receiving. If any of the prisoners were to be executed, the guard would be killed. Because the prison guard saw the doors were open, he assumed all the prisoners had escaped. Rather than facing shame and possible execution, he was going to kill himself. Ask the children if any of them have pets. Have them imagine being responsible for their pet like the prison guard in today's lesson. If the pet is lost, the child would have to take its place. They would have to live in the dog house or eat the fish flakes or run on the hamster wheel.

Q&A

Before revealing Paul's answer to the Philippian jailer's question, ask the children the same question: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Explain that this is the most important question they could ever be asked, for it concerns the eternal destiny of our souls. As the children answer, write their responses on the board. See how the children's answers compare to Paul's response in Acts 16:31.



APPLY

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Make a list of reasons why someone who knows Jesus can rejoice, no matter the circumstances. For example: 1) believers have their sins forgiven (Rom 8:1); 2) Believers will spend eternity with Jesus in heaven (John 14:3; Luke 23:43); 3) Believers have been given the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor 5:21); 4) Jesus is always with believers (Matt 28:20); 5) Persecution produces great eternal reward (Matt 5:11–12); 6) God has given believers the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13); 7) nothing can separate believers from God (Rom 8:35–39); etc.