

**Series: Paul's Second Missionary Journey**  
**Sermon: Jailhouse Rock**

**Acts 16:16-24** (NIV)

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.

**Sermon**

I came across something the other day that might be useful information for you to have -- so I'm going to pass it along for what it's worth. Someone sent me a list, called "THE TOP TEN WAYS TO KNOW YOU JOINED THE WRONG CHURCH." Now, just so you understand, here are 10 identifiers of a bad church. Ten things we will never do here at OCUMC.

**TOP TEN WAYS TO KNOW YOU JOINED THE WRONG CHURCH:**

10. The church bus has gun racks.

9. The ministerial staff includes a senior pastor, associate pastor, youth pastor, and a socio-pastor.

8. The Bible they use is the "Dr. Seuss Version."
7. There's an ATM machine in the lobby.
6. The Choir members wear leather robes.
5. The worship services are B.Y.O.S. -- "Bring your own snake."
4. There's no cover charge, but Communion is a two-drink minimum.
3. The pastor regularly attends meetings in Las Vegas & Atlantic City.
2. The ushers ask, "Smoking or Non-Smoking?"
1. The entire Women's Quartet is married to the Pastor.

I hope nobody here this morning feels that they've joined the wrong church . . . though an all church retreat to Vegas sounds appealing.

But I have to wonder if, at least on some occasions, the Apostle Paul himself didn't start to think, "Is it possible I've joined the wrong church?" Maybe Paul thought he joined the wrong church.

Because after all, what was just read to you today from the 16th chapter of Acts isn't really all that unusual for the Apostle Paul. Because of his faith in Christ Jesus, he gets beat up and thrown in jail. And Paul spent a LOT of his time in jail, because of his dedication to Christ. This man, this flesh and blood human being, suffered greatly for the Gospel -- and yet he kept pressin' on. It was in Philippi where Paul and Silas were thrown in jail. Once God gave him that humongous wake-up call on the Road to Damascus, he never veered from his passionate love of Jesus Christ.

So as we get into the 16th chapter of Acts, we find that Paul and Silas and some others believers are on the road again. After their first missionary journey, they had settled down in Antioch once again. After a while, Paul tells Barnabas, his partner in the last trip, lets go back and visit our new churches. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, who started out with them last time, but bailed on them half way through, and Paul didn't want John Mark to go. So Barnabas and John Mark go one way, and Paul picks another believer, Silas, and they go off to visit their old stomping grounds of Asia Minor. They pick up Timothy along the way. They had no intention of going anywhere else. On their trip, however, they receive a vision from God. Go to Macedonia. Go to Greece. Just a little farther than they have gone before. On that part of the trip, they pick up Luke - this was last week's sermon. They make their way into Greek territory. One of the towns they visit is Philippi, where we have today's scripture adventure. It was here, in the Roman colony of Philippi, that they won their first European convert, a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. The Bible says the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message, and then she and the others in her household were all baptized. Lydia then invited Paul and the others to stay at her house.

Apparently Paul and Silas were still enjoying Lydia's hospitality in Philippi when Paul got in trouble. It's not really surprising when you stop and think about it, because Paul was boldly proclaiming Christ in a place where the population was almost entirely made up of Gentiles. These people probably didn't have much use for the Jews in the first place, let alone Jews who were proclaiming something other than Judaism.

When Paul had the nerve to exorcize a demonic spirit from a fortune-telling slave girl, he seriously ruffled the feathers of some leading members of the Philippi Chamber of Commerce. After all, they were making some pretty good money off this girl -- kind of an early-day version of the Psychic Hotline. These "businessmen" responded by filing some trumped-up charges against Paul and Silas, and hauling them right over to the center of the marketplace. That's when things really began to get ugly.

According to the Book of Acts, the crowd in Philippi joined in the attack against Paul and Silas -- and then the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten . . . they were severely flogged, and then thrown into prison - and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving these orders, he put them in the inner cell, and fastened their feet in the stocks.

OK, I think we're getting to the heart of this passage, and I'd like you all to use your imaginations now, and picture yourself as that jailer, working the graveyard shift at the Philippi City Jail.

Maybe you're sitting back in your chair, reading a copy of Macedonia Today, and wondering what your wife will have cooked for you later when you get off work. (Hopefully, it's not sheepburgers again.) Out of one eye, you size up these peculiar foreigners in the jail -- and it becomes pretty clear to you: They must be religious fanatics.

I mean, really! Here it is, after midnight. After the beating these guys got, they should be suffering quietly, nursing their wounds, just trying to make it through the night. But what do you see? There's Paul and Silas -- praying and singing to God. And the other prisoners are listening to them!

This has got to be one of the strangest things you've ever seen. But you try your best to ignore it, and after a while you manage to doze off. You're dreaming a nice dream, and then all of a sudden -- all hell breaks loose! This isn't swearing. The earth is opening up!

An earthquake rocks the prison -- shaking it to its very foundations. On top of that, all the prison doors fly open, and everyone's chains come loose.

You are awakening to a total catastrophe! Thinking that all the prisoners must surely be gone, your gut reaction is to kill yourself, rather than face the consequences sure to come. Having failed disgracefully in your duty, you feel compelled to do "the honorable thing" and fall on your own sword.

But wait, what's this? It's that fellow, Paul, shouting, "Don't harm yourself. We are all here!"

All of them -- still in their cells, even with the doors wide open. Not just Paul and Silas, but all those being held in the jail, all those who had been listening to Paul and Silas.

Not one of them took the opportunity to flee.

It makes me want to ask a question. THE question I have for today. What was the purpose of the earthquake? Why have an earthquake? Most of the time, an earthquake is just an earthquake. They happen. But if God really did cause the ground to shake this time - to what end and purpose? Some divine rescue plan? Did God want to rescue Paul and Silas? A miraculous freedom? The doors are open! Leave? So why do Paul and Silas stick around? Are they foiling God's big rescue? No. They stuck around because of the jailor. In those days, if the jailor lost anyone, they took their place. If you lost a whole jail full, oh boy, you were a dead man walking. But that's when I understand the earthquake. God didn't want to free Paul and Silas. He wanted to free the jailor. The jailor, who had lived with no hope. Who did not know God. Who was a slave to the restlessness of man. Paul and Silas? They were free men. They were in chains, locked up! But free in Christ. That's why they kept on singing in prison! Bars cannot chain up love. And the jailor asked, What must I do to become saved? I can imagine that the jailor wanted to know how to get the joy and assurance that Paul and Silas had after the beatings that they took. Is there a test? What do I have to do? What do I have to know? Do I have to tithe? Do I have to be nice to people? Do I have to read the Bible every day even though it hasn't been written and finalized yet? What do I have to do? And Paul's words ring true to us today. Believe. That's all. Believe. Pastor Mike, what do I have to do to be a Christian? How do I get eternal life? All it takes is this: Believe.

This morning and this week, I want you to ask yourself the question: Do you believe? Are you free from chains, or are you burdened by doubt, by sin, by worry, by stress? Are you Free in Christ like Paul and Silas? We might show on the outside that we do believe. We might do and say all the right things. But do we truly believe? It is by our faith that we are saved. This morning's secret word is Believe. How do you know if you

belong to the right church? Because we believe. Because we believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Because we believe that he was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary - Because we believe that he suffered under Pontious Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. Because we believe that on the third day he rose again. Because we believe that he ascended into heaven and sittith at the right hand of the God the Father Almighty. Because we believe that he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. Because we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins and we believe in the Resurrection of the Body and the Life everlasting. Because we believe! Amen? And Amen.