

SERMON NOTES: AUG. 18TH
SCRIPTURE READINGS... John 15: 7-11, Acts 16: 16-34

NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED...Paul/Silas draw the attention of a slave girl who was odd, said crazy things, and disrupted his talks. She'd been labeled "possessed" She was so entertaining that her owners used her in a fortune-telling business and rented her out for conventions. Her magic show was booming but it so upset Paul that he evicted the demon. Instead of thanking them for setting her free, her owner drag them before magistrates, where they are forbidden a trail and tossed in jail. That's where the story gets very interesting.

FROM BEHIND THE BARS....lesser people might lay down/die. What would they do? Get cynical, give up, and become as dismal as their jail cell? Instead, they saw God's hand at work. They didn't curse their bad luck or throw a pity party. They found joy by singing to God. It is a sublime, bizarre scene: Paul/Silas singing in a jail at midnight. The night's darkest hour, midnight is symbolic in the bible for testing and danger. Have we ever sung at midnight: that point beyond our breaking point when we are down/almost out; when there is no money in the bank and we are taking chemo; when you feel cut off from our family/friends.

THE ATTITUDE OF JOY...Paul/Silas couldn't change their situation. The only thing that they could control: their attitude. They chose the attitude of joy. They didn't start singing at midnight; they'd been singing for days. The song was first in THEIR HEARTS before it moved to THEIR LIPS. Jesus didn't come to make us miserable. We do that to ourselves. If we lack joy, life turns to drudgery. We become accidents waiting to happen. If we are criticized, we get defensive. If we are wronged, we overreact. Can we be joyful in a scary/unjust world that drains the joy out of us? Why would we sing if we feel no song in our heart? The world didn't give us joy in Christ, and this world can't take it away. Joy comes by devoting ourselves to SOMETHING GREATER than personal happiness.

GOD WORKS THE NIGHT SHIFT...an earthquake shook the jail, dislodging the cell doors off their hinges. Startled by the quake, a jailer found the cell doors open. He'd be punished if prisoners escaped yet they were still behind bars. Was this a sign of God? Perhaps God heard their singing and approved. God works THE NIGHT SHIFT. It may be midnight in your world but let your joy be known. God still works the night shift. But if the song isn't in our hearts, it will never arrive on our lips.