

Christian Response to the Rage & Wrath of Man: Examples from the Book of Acts – Part 3

Scripture Reading: Acts 16:1-12

Chapter fifteen sets the stage for chapter sixteen. After an important meeting with the church in Jerusalem – concerning law, grace, and Gentile converts, Paul and Silas prepared for a missionary tour, taking Timothy with them. Paul reported to many churches about the discussions and conclusions of the Acts fifteen meeting. Churches were edified and evangelism was progressing (Acts 16:5). When it was time to move on, they had to wait on the Lord for leadership. It might seem that anywhere was a good place to preach the gospel and establish churches, but they were sensitive to specific leadership from the Lord (Acts 16:6-10 cp. II Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:2-4; Revelation 3:7-8). Note that it is here that Luke joins the group and changes the pronoun “they” to “we” (Acts 16:10).

Now that God has opened the door for Paul and his group, it should be clear sailing, right? God often has adversaries waiting for us at the threshold of open doors (I Corinthians 16:8-9). So far, this portion of Scripture has shown us how to respond to God, when doing His work. It is here, at Philippi that we will see further example of how to respond to the rage and wrath of man.

Persevering at Philippi – Acts 16:11-40

Acts 16:13-15 – Seeking those who seek the Lord, Lydia is converted.

Acts 16:16-24 – Spiritual warfare begins.

The testimony of a Demon-possessed woman was rejected. Paul was not flattered. He did not try to capitalize on this supernatural phenomenon. Don't think we can borrow help from the forces of darkness to promote the kingdom of light! Casting out this demon affected the livelihood and economy of others in town. So, they made unreasonable charges and tried to get them in trouble with the local government.

Acts 16:25 – First response to the wrath and rage of man.

The first response of Paul and Silas was to worship God! They did not rage. They did not make appeals to the court or start some protest campaign. Of course, they were unable to do much of anything. And so, we see them doing the only thing they could do, which is the best thing – they glorified and worshiped God. A testimony was being established. See John 16:33; Acts 5:41; Ephesians 5:18-20; James 1:2-4; I Peter 4:12-14.

Acts 16:26 – Divine Intervention

Don't expect this every time, but in a very dramatic way, God intervened! An earthquake shook the place, breaking the prison open. God can intervene many ways. Corrie ten Boom was delivered out of a German concentration camp by a simple clerical error. If God doesn't seem to be intervening, know that God is not done using you in the situation that He's given you. If God allows you to die for His name's sake, then the ultimate deliverance is about to take place... just let the Lord get the glory! See Philippians 1:20-21; II Timothy 4:6-8.

Acts 16:27-34 – Rescue the perishing!

If Roman guards lost their prisoners, it was a death penalty (Acts 12:18-19). Therefore, when the prison broke up, it was assumed that the prisoners had escaped, and the chief jailor was about to kill himself. Paul's first response to the earthquake was concern for the jailor! He called out immediately, telling him that all the prisoners were accounted for and that he should not do any harm to himself. See Matthew 5:44-45.

People usually don't just run in and fall down before you, asking how to be saved! But the stage had been set by the Lord and by the previous faithful response of Paul and Silas. A step from death, this man remembered the peace and joy of Paul and Silas. So, he knew that he wanted what they had. This leads to his conversion and the conversion of his entire family.

Acts 16:35-40 – A clarifying moment.

The magistrates and officers of the city wanted to down-play this embarrassing moment. They instructed the jailor to let Paul and Silas go – nice and quietly. Paul seized the moment to require a face-to-face meeting. He wanted to look them in the eye and let them understand the injustice that had been done. They were Roman citizens that had been beaten and jailed without due process of law. Paul wanted to be gracious to them and not press the issue. Nevertheless, it was a moment of a little self-respect, clarity and testimony that could help other Christians in the city, who would later share their faith.

Acts 12:1-25 – Another moment of clarity.

In Acts 12:1-17, James was executed by Herod. When it was met with approval by the Jews, Herod thought he would do the same thing to Peter. God intervened with a jail break that was without an earthquake – a totally supernatural deliverance.

In Acts 12: 18-25, Peter did not make the clarifying moment. He slipped away quietly. However, God made a very public clarifying moment for Herod. At the end of a speech, the crowd flattered Herod, calling him a god. Herod, in pride, accepted the flattery and God struck him dead almost instantly... and the work of the Lord went on. We don't threaten people with this story. We warn. God might extend more grace, or God might exercise righteous, severe judgement. See Proverbs 3:34; Romans 2:2-4; II Timothy 2:24-26.