

A few years ago we kept hearing the rumor that Elvis Presley was still alive. It was a strange time, some people were saying that God is dead, while others were saying that Elvis was still alive. There were sightings of Elvis here and there; at a gas station in Des Moines, Iowa, at a truck stop in San Diego, places like that. Well, I never believed it, but last week when I read the story of Paul and Silas in the 16th chapter of Acts, I thought about Elvis and tried to get in touch with him; I contacted his agent hoping that if he is still alive we might be able to persuade him to come to First Christian Church today to sing his famous rock-n-roll song as an anthem for today. Remember the *Jailhouse Rock* which stayed atop the charts for seven weeks in 1957?

The warden threw a party in the county jail.
The prison band was there and they began to wail.
The joint was jumping and the place began to swing.
You should have heard those knocked out jailbirds sing .

Let's rock, everybody let's rock,
Everybody on the whole cell block,
They was dancing to the jailhouse rock.

It would be perfect today, to put a little pizzaz in the service, for Elvis to show up with his long side-burns and old guitar and sing about the Jail House Rock in honor of Paul and Silas. When I reached his agent he told me not to hold my breath, but I keep thinking he will make it any minute. But until he arrives, let's rock with Paul and Silas in the jail house in Philippi.

Paul and Silas had come into Philippi and were still finding their way around. One day they were on their way to church when a young girl stopped them on the street and offered to read their palms. She was a psychic and she wanted to read their palms, and they said no. But she kept following them around, wanting to tell their fortunes. Paul and Silas kept saying no to her, but she wouldn't leave them alone, and so finally Paul stopped right in the middle of the street and cast a demon out of the girl. And he thought their troubles with here were over. But their trouble in Philippi was just beginning. When Paul cast the spirit out of the girl, her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, and they got more than a little upset. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place . . . and threw them into prison “

Now, most of the time people get into trouble for doing bad. We read about them in

the paper every day. We hear about them on the news every evening. But we have police to put them behind bars and we breathe a sigh of relief. Criminals belong behind bars, and if their crime is bad enough we say, "Lock 'em up and throw away the key!"

But Paul got into trouble for doing good. He helped a girl who had become the slave of some people who were making lots of money using her as a fortune-teller. He set the girl free from her masters, and gave her a chance to make a life for herself, to take charge of her own life. But the girl's masters threw him into jail and said to the judge, "We're not against a little religion – as long as it is kept in its place. But these men, Paul and Silas are disturbing our city, and we can't have that!"

It happens every time! Nothing is more powerful than the pocket book! Someone said, "In my business you don't get people's attention until they feel it in the pocket book." For some people, without principle, without moral compass, without Christian character, that is the bottom line. They cannot understand anything unless it is translated into how much money they can make, how much money they will lose, what it will do for their pocket book. And their souls are bankrupt no matter what the balance in their check books!

Money is always the problem. You remember it got Paul into trouble in Ephesus! We saw pictures of the ancient Ephesus in last Wednesday night's video on the life of Paul. Situated on the western end of modern day Turkey (We're going to take a field trip there one of these days!), Ephesus was the site of the temple of Artemis, the Greek goddess of love. One of the ancient wonders of the ancient world, the temple was as long as a football field. A man named Demetrius had developed a nice living making statues and idols and selling them to people on their way to the temple. He was a good business man and a member of the Chamber of Commerce. And these were good, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens, who had been raised going to church in the temple, buying their statues and dedicating them to the god of the temple. But along comes Paul and says, "Enough already! God doesn't need your statues. God doesn't want your idols. God wants your hearts and minds and your feet walking in the way of Jesus Christ." And before too long people stopped buying statues and Demetrius's business went down the drain, and he was more than a little upset. And he begins to spread the word that Paul is a trouble maker, that he has ruined the economy of the city, and a riot erupts, and Paul decides that it is a good time to leave town.

He was just trying to do good, he was just telling people about Jesus, but he got into trouble for it. Most of the time people get into trouble for doing bad things.

But did you ever get into trouble for doing something good? One of my friends in college lost a friend because he returned an umbrella which had been stolen from the geology professor in cafeteria. My friend saw what happened, he saw the guy who lived down the hall in the dormitory take the umbrella which the old geology professor left on the

coat rack in the cafeteria one rainy day. My friend went to the guy down the hall and said, “I saw what happened; that umbrella doesn’t belong to you. It belongs to Dr. Michael.” And he grabbed it and took it back to the old professor. And for his honesty my friend made an enemy of the guy down the hall. He and his buddies wouldn’t have anything to do with my friend after that.

Paul was thrown into prison for doing something good. And we should not be surprised if that ever happens to us. As a matter of fact, we should be surprised if it never happens to us. For if it never happens, maybe that is a sure sign that we are not trying to do anything worthwhile for the sake of Christ with our lives.

But notice what Paul and Silas were doing while they were in prison – they were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. And this is where I keep hoping that Elvis shows up, and leads us a rock-n-rolling good time.

They were having a regular revival. Remember the days of revivals? Our denomination was born in the days of the Second Great Awakening on the American frontier, when only about 10% of the people belonged to any church, and the times were ripe for preachers to ride into town on their horses, gather people together out under the trees and set their hearts afire with preaching.

After David’s seminary graduation on May 14 in Lexington, Kentucky, a couple of our friends who had driven over from Kansas City for the big event, took an extra day and drove about thirty miles further east in to Bourbon County, Kentucky to see the Cane Ridge Meeting House. Some of you have been to Cane Ridge with Ken and me; we are going to take another field trip to Cane Ridge one of these days; maybe next year. Cane Ridge is an historic site for the Christian Church; it is one of the cradles of our movement. It was at Cane Ridge that a great revival was held in the summer of 1801, where as many as 10 to 20,000 people gathered for praying and singing and preaching; where people got so filled with the spirit that they started shaking and barking, singing and laughing and running in the woods. One of the scholars says that probably as many souls were conceived as were saved in the great revivals.

Not all the members of the Christian Church, by the way, were caught up in the revival spirit; Alexander Campbell was no fan of such events; too many excesses and emotionalism, he was interested in thinking woman’s religion.

When they were locked in prison Paul and Silas had a captive audience and they started to pray and to sing. One of the commentators of the Bible said that should always be the posture of Christian people, praying and singing – praying without ceasing and rejoicing in the Lord always. But have you noticed that is not always the case with us?

Some years ago I saw a cartoon in the newspaper, one frame, a car was speeding along a narrow, winding mountain road, at the point of a sharp curve there was a road sign, "Start praying!"

That's what we do, when times get tough, we fall down on our knees and lift our voice to God. "O God, you've got to help me now! You can't let me down now!" Like George Bailey, after Uncle Billy has lost the \$8,000 and the bank examiners are about to throw him into jail on Christmas Eve, he runs onto the bridge over the icy river, and before he throws himself in, he bows his head and prays, "O God, if you are real, you've got to help me. I don't know what to do now."

Sometimes our prayers are exactly like that, an S.O.S. in the middle of the night. But isn't it a shame? Isn't it a shame that such times are the only times many of us talk to the good Lord: when we've messed things up, when we've got ourselves in deep trouble and have exhausted every possibility and cannot find a way out; or when the winds of fate knock down the walls of our comfort and security and the sickness or sadness blows right into our living room. Isn't it a shame that is the only time we bother with God? Harry Emerson Fosdick, great Protestant preacher of a former generation once said that the reality of God is like water, it is never appreciated by those who are not thirsty. Isn't it a shame that we are never thirsty for God until we find ourselves in the middle of some terrible troubling desert?

Isn't it a shame that we think of prayer as nothing more than begging God for things. Some time back one of my friends asked me to read the popular *Prayer of Jabez* and offer my comments. I read it and told her to put it on the shelf to collect dust. Have you read it? It is an example of the kind of stuff which fills the religious book stores, people begging God to give them this or that. One of the TV preachers came right out and boldly proclaimed that the problem with our religion is that we have not learned how to let God give us things, wealth and better jobs and bigger houses and faster cars. Isn't it a shame. Let me recommend the little book, *Praying Like Jesus: The Lord's Prayer in a Culture of Prosperity*, by Jim Mulholland. It will help you understand the meaning and joy of praying like Jesus, not Jabez. It is not about begging God for things, but about putting our lives in order as God would have them in order.

When Paul and Silas landed in jail they started praying and singing and before too long the jail house began to rock. Suddenly there was an earthquake which rattled the windows and opened the prison doors, and woke up the jailer who realized that his prisoners were now free to escape and he was in big trouble. But instead of running off when their cell was opened, Paul and Silas stayed and talked with the jailer, and he was converted to the Christian religion and he and his household were baptized.

And this is, of course, the climax and the point which Luke, the story-teller, wants to

make. When he arrives in Philippi Paul meets a wealthy woman named Lydia who is converted to the faith, is baptized with her whole household, and becomes the leader of the church in that city. Then, when he is thrown in prison, Paul meets the jailer who is also converted and baptized with his whole household.

Here is the universal scope of God's saving work, a wealthy woman and a city jailer both are won to the faith and incorporated into the church. Everyone is invited and included in God's community of faith.

Even in the midst of trouble, the house can begin to rock and roll with good things!

Even when we are bound in chains, even when we are held prisoner by the things which capture our minds and hearts and seduce us to worship and bow down to them, wealth, power, status, the saving power of God can shake the foundations to set us free.

Even when we are asleep to its power and presence, the spirit of God can wake us up call us to new life. Especially when we are asleep to its power and presence, the spirit of God calls us to wake up the presence and power of life revealed and embodied in Jesus Christ.

Several years ago a Greek cruise ship that sank off the coast of South Africa. According to the story, soon after the ship ran aground in a severe storm the crew deserted with a few passengers in life boats. The remaining passengers were brought into the main dining room to await the rescue helicopters. There the ship's entertainers tried to help keep panic and gloom at bay with magic tricks, jokes and sing-a-longs. One passenger later recalled, "There we were sitting in the dark, singing songs to keep our minds off the cold and fright. We began with 'We are Sailing,' but decided it wasn't true. We got into 'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean' and 'Goodbye Love, Good-bye Happiness,' but this did nothing for morale."

I don't know what they sang to lift their spirits on that sinking ship. And I don't what Paul and Silas were singing in the Philippian jail. May it was "Shall We Gather at the River?" or, "Come Share the Lord," or "There Is a Balm in Gilead." But whatever it was, I am sure that it was a celebration of the ever-present goodness and grace of God which made their jail house rock. And it's a song that we can sing.