

Walking Through the New Testament with Paul the Apostle by His Life and Pen

LESSON NO. 13 - Please read again Acts 16. **Theme:** Those who can sing in prison are not really imprisoned!

- Acts 16:25-26. But **at midnight** Paul and Silas **were praying and singing hymns to God**, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.
- Acts 16:30-31 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved**, you and your household."

Let's pause our study of Acts 16 about Paul and his companions laboring intensely for the Kingdom, to take a deep breath of fresh air. We will turn our attention now to the story of a canary to help us establish an eternal truth about true Joy.

Likely, I cannot tell this story as well as it should be told, but it is worth all my efforts to try.

What do you know about the canary bird? It is a domesticated form of the wild canary, a small songbird from the finch family originating from the Canary Islands.

You surely have many lovely songbirds in your countries. Birds are such a lovely gift to humanity from our Creator.

A canary was mentioned in a book, The South Pole, by Roald Amundsen, the first man to reach the South Pole.

- "From Bergen we went to Christiansand, where the Fram was docked, and, as already mentioned, the remaining outfit, with the dogs and dog-food, was taken on board. The number of living creatures on board when we left Norway was nineteen men, ninety-seven dogs, four pigs, six carrier pigeons, and one canary."

Can you imagine a tropical bird from a constant even temperate warm climate being taken on a ship which had high probability of spending a very long time fighting the frigid temperatures and extreme darkness and storms of the ice-encased South Pole? A penguin is designed to exist in that frozen climate, but not canaries!

Why did the explorers take one canary? Because that canary would sing! (Did you know that only male canary birds sing?)

Yes, those explorers took one male canary with them for one single reason, they knew they would be desperate for even the slightest hint of encouragement in their extreme circumstances and seemingly hopeless conditions.

What does this story have to do with us?

For our answer, look at how the Christian is commanded by the Holy Spirit to go about our daily lives, regardless of our external circumstances.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

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The Christian is given supernatural ability to “sing God’s praise” in every circumstance in life, whether facing extreme pain or when enjoying the sweetest of life’s blessings.

God never, ever gives a command for which He does not FIRST give the power to obey!

This passage commands us to avail ourselves of the Holy Spirit’s unlimited power to be able to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything.

When we do this, we can be assured we are in the very center of the will of God.

We do need to remember, though, that most truths are like birds which need both wings to fly. This truth has two wings which gives it proper perspective and keeps it aloft. One wing is the 1 Thes 5:16-18 command mentioned at the beginning, and the other wing is given to us in Eccl 3:4 In life there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

- Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;

Yes, there is a time and season for everything including mourning. Yet, even though pain fills our eyes with tears, **we can still sing God’s praise . . . because we are created to be able to do just that!**

What shall we take with us as we think of our wonderful illustration of this single little canary in the midst of the totally foreign, ice-bound, sun-less, no greenery, no vegetation world and surrounded by dogs who would eat him, if given the opportunity?

Yes, **the canary did exactly as God equipped him to do.** The canary sang **because God created him to sing.** He sang and encouraged desperate men, who were made in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), and possessed eternal souls.

God also created the grateful Christian to sing! We need look no farther than our passage tonight for confirmation of our purpose for living and for the right notes to sing our life song.

- Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks

What do we sing? Just like the canary, we can sing praise to our Creator by telling people every day, at every opportunity and in every way about **the love of Jesus Christ for them!**

We sing God’s praise in this lifetime without ceasing, knowing that our time on earth is simply our “practice - audition time”. This audition time will prepare us for the eternity in which we will continue singing praises to God!

*When we’ve been here ten thousand years, Bright, shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days **to sing God’s praise**, Than when we first begun”.*
Amazing Grace, John Newton (1779)

Can you imagine a God so great that He would create a tiny, seemingly insignificant, bird to give His human creation pleasure and encouragement, simply by singing to them? Truly, is that not just an incredible example of God’s overwhelming amazing grace!

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Did Jesus stop with the canary as the only evidence of His love for us? No, of course not! Jesus went all the way to death on the cross, as our substitute, paying the just penalty due for our sins so that we may enjoy eternal life and joy with Him in heaven.

The love of Jesus Christ is so precious, it simply cannot be contained within a single heart. It must be shared. You will meet so many people in the remainder of this year that are so weary and about to collapse from the weight of sin and hopelessness.

The people to whom you and I tell this love story, need to bring nothing else except a single-minded desire to give all of themselves to Jesus . . . and then fall exhausted into His outstretched hands.

- Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

As we look into the future all we see is . . . nothing! It is dark. In some ways, the future always tends to look very foreboding and discouraging.

Oh, in our remaining time on our own journey, let us remember our canary. Think of it, our future days look much like the unknown, uncharted, frozen, lifeless, dark place named the South Pole. But, on the ship, Fram, which carried Roald Amundsen and his crew, was also a little gift from God, one single canary **who was created to do one thing so well . . . sing - and sing he did!**

Just like the little canary, we seem so insignificant in this world, but not so in God's eyes. Why? Because He created us as a unique [one-of-a-kind] creature. There is no one like us on earth now, nor ever has been, nor will be. God created us to sing a special song which only we alone are able to sing with our unique personality.

I do not think “singing praise” to God with our unique personalities and loving our neighbor can be accomplished any better than by telling them about the love of Jesus Christ for them personally, individually and for the world.

Joining together, we can take this story of the insignificant, yet magnificent, little canary and Psalm 17:7-8 (another sweet bird illustration) as starting notes of our songs of praises to God and as foundation for love we pour out to others.

- Psalm 17:7-8 Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You. From those who rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of Your eye; **Hide me under the shadow of Your wings.**

We love all of you very much and are very glad for the privilege to pray for you.

Please remember to pray for us, also, and “pray that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you” (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

We join with you in being overwhelmed by the,

Unimaginable / Unlimited / Unfathomable

Love of Jesus Christ for us and all people -

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