

Series: Acts

Lesson #64

Title: A Song of the Flesh and of the Spirit

Scripture: Acts 16: 19-25

Date: April 16, 2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

In the damsel possessed of a demon we saw an illustration of how God frees a sinner one way--through the declaration of the name of Christ Jesus. We will see it again when we come to the jailor. But in between those two wonderful passages, we see the motive and method of the flesh--the song of the flesh. And we get a glimpse of what grace does in the heart--the song of the Spirit.

Acts 16: 19: And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone,

Last time we saw that all sinners who walk after the flesh operate from the same principle, the same selfish motive--which is self-gain. **Verse 19: And when her masters saw that the hope of *their* gains was gone...**

Acts 16: 19: And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the marketplace unto the rulers, 20: And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21: And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

I. First, the method of all sinful flesh rejoices in the power and restraint of the flesh.

A. they caught Paul and Silas

1. The flesh likes to feel like we have "caught" someone.

B. and [they] drew *them*

1. Not that Paul and Silas were fighting against them, but they would not give Paul and Silas space to walk on their own. Instead, they dragged them.

2. Christ's church is not ruled in the power and restraint of the flesh but by the Holy Spirit.

Zechariah 4: 6: Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, *This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. 7: Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.*

II. Secondly, the flesh lusts to be seen of men.

A. They caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the marketplace...for two reasons:

1) in order to persuade the public that Paul and Silas were guilty

2) in order to make themselves appear righteous before the public.

III. Thirdly, the flesh hates the gospel of Christ and seeks to find refuge in the law.

A. This was their accusation and what they were truly troubled with--

1. "They teach customs"--Paul and Silas taught the doctrine of Christ.
2. "Which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans"--what they teach goes against our law, it is unlawful for us, because we are Romans and not Jews.
3. Yet, by going to the law to justify themselves, they condemned themselves before God. Paul and Silas had troubled no one...these men had troubled the city by bringing this accusation. Paul and Silas taught the doctrine of Christ...these men were guilty of soothsaying.

B. The Jews used the law of Moses to justify their rejection of Christ saying almost the exact thing.

1. Toward Stephen: **Acts 6:14: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.**
2. Toward Paul: **Acts 18:13: Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.**
3. The Pharisees rejected Christ in person using the law of Moses against him. And I want you to see how they condemned themselves by doing so.

John 8: 12: Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. 13: The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.

They went to the law of Moses because the law required two or more witnesses. Because they judged only by what they could see with their natural eyes, and because all they could see was a man standing alone, they concluded of the Lord Jesus, "Thy record is not true."

John 8: 14: Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. 15: Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. 16: And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.

The Lord Jesus says that he forms no estimates of men by looking at the flesh, but he judges according to spiritual reality, according to the heart. In other words, if you were spiritual you would understand who I am and not accuse me before the law of Moses.

Next, he shows them how their unlawful use of the law merely serves to condemn them

John 8: 17: It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. 18: I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.

He says, "Your law" to condemn them. But listen to the poor, blind, arrogancy of the flesh. They proved that they had no spiritual understanding.

John 8: 19: Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.

The law was not made for a righteous man. Do you see the folly in using the law of Moses to accuse Christ the Righteous? It is the same folly for any man to use the law to accuse those who are righteous by faith in Christ. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? God justifieth. Christ died, is risen and is seated at God's right hand ever living to make intercession for his saints (Ro 8: 33, 34.)

In each case the accusers used the law but the accusers condemned themselves in doing so. That is what the apostle Paul was saying to any man who uses the law to form an estimate of another (Ro 2: 1.)

C. Here is the question: Do you want to be judged by the law? Or do you desire to be judged in the righteousness of Christ?

Matthew 7: 2: For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. 3: And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 4: Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? 5: Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

1. When we see a brother in a fault, the first thing we have to do is get the beam of fleshly, self-righteousness out of our own eye.

2. Seeing clearly is to see with the eye of God-given faith. Faith sees that in Christ Jesus my sin is gone and so is the sin of my brother; faith sees that I have been made the righteousness of God in Christ; faith sees that Romans 8:1: ***There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.***

Yet, faith sees that, still, in my flesh dwells nothing good, and the same as true in my brother. But faith desires to be judged in the spiritual reality that in Jesus Christ the Righteous, I am Righteous. Therefore if any brother be at fault, I take him to Christ our Righteousness. Now by which do you desire to be judged? **For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.**

James 2:13: For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

IV. FOURTHLY, THE FLESH LUSTS AFTER THAT WHICH IS NO MERCY AND NO JUSTICE AT ALL.

A. The multitude and the magistrates exhibit this

Acts 16: 22: And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*. 23: And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

1. This was a kangaroo court
2. Those who pretended to be zealous for the law executed unrighteous judgment upon Paul and Silas.

Revelation 18:6: Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.

VI. SIXTHLY, THE SONG PRODUCED BY THE SPIRIT OF GRACE IS A SONG OF REJOICING IN SPIRIT IN CHRIST ALONE.

Acts 16: 25: And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

A. I made the comment a few weeks ago that when the scriptures speak of "singing aloud" the translation does not quite convey the true meaning. It means an "involuntary overflowing."

Example: In Psalm 51, notice how David ascribes his praise to God as being produced by God. He speaks as if his tongue, his lips and his mouth are not controlled by him, but by God: **Psalm 51: 14: Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. 15: O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.** Our prayer and our song is the effectual fruit of the Spirit of grace as he sheds the good news of grace into our hearts. It causes our hearts to overflow with God's love and mercy toward us. Now connect this with: **Romans 5: 3: And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4: And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.**

B. Here we see it in our text. Here lie two men:

They have been charged falsely; they have been publicly humiliated, stripped naked before an angry mob. They lay in this dark, damp, dungeon. Their backs still oozing thick clots of blood from their whipping. Their legs are fastened so that they are held in a tormenting position. Yet they pray and sing praises unto God?

C. By the Spirit of grace, Paul knew, not very long ago, he was the one dragging Christ's messengers into the crooked courts of men to unlawfully accuse and oppress them.

1. That is how grace makes every note in the song to be in perfect pitch, in perfect harmony with the heavenly choir. It takes the sinner who crucified Christ and who killed his saints and makes him to behold that he is washed in the blood of Christ. Grace sets him at Christ's

feet right beside the very saint he killed, with no remembrance of his sin—not from God and not from the saint he killed.

D. I can't imagine that Paul and Silas sounded all that beautiful as they lay there in that condition.

1. But it's not the volume of our song, or even our ability to carry a tune, whether we can't or whether we sing better than God's most melodious song-birds on the morning window-seal—

2. I don't have the ability to make the noise joyful—I can't make it joyful by adding one musician or a thousand. If I even think I can it is as much chaotic distortion as imagining we have made ourselves holy by something we have done or something we forced others to do. But the song is joyful by Christ, by his grace, by the love of God shed abroad in the heart

E. The noise is joyful when our hands, our feet, our bodies lie bound in the depravity of this flesh and yet our hearts rise up with uninhibited freedom to praise the God of all grace because it is his grace that makes the noise joyful.

- Paul is not in prison; his captors are in prison;
- Paul is not bound; his captors are bound;
- Paul is not wounded; his captors are wounded.
- This what Paul means when he says:

Ephesians 5:20: Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Philippians 2: 9: For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake

I don't know if I could sing in that situation--you can if grace puts the song on your lips

Job 35:10: *He giveth songs in the night*

Illustration: When that dying sister in Christ is a few moments from taking her last breath. And those of us in the room notice she is attempting to make a sound. As we draw near in anticipation of hearing her final words in this life and all that the shipwrecked body produces are a few, indistinguishable notes of “Amazing Grace” or “Only a Sinner Saved by Grace”—that noise is more joyful than all the worlds most acclaimed noise makers combined!

There is a vast difference between the song of the flesh and the song of the Spirit.

I. The flesh rejoices in the power and restraint of the flesh. II. The flesh lusts to be seen of men. III. The flesh lusts to accuse men before the law. V. The flesh lusts after that which is truly no mercy and no true judgment. VI. BUT GRACE BRINGS FORTH THANKSGIVING AND JOYFUL PRAISE UNTO OUR GOD NO MATTER THE OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES.

