

Prison Break

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[0 : 0 0] Now like this morning for a little while to turn back to the passage that we read together in Acts, this story of the early church and when we come together and we preach we believe that God still speaks through His Word, that it's a word that's relevant and important so we spend a little time around God's Word and if you're not used to that I hope that you don't mind and that you'll survive the time that we do spend around God's Word today and I hope that you'll be challenged and excited or provoked at least to thought about the Word of God and about the reality of God and Jesus.

But by way of introduction I like prison films, I think prison films are good, especially prison films that I've got stories in them about escapes, they're excellent I really like them because they very often highlight unlikely heroes so you've got unlikely heroes that come out in prison film escape stories, someone like well actually this isn't really, this isn't an escape, I never thought of that, the guy actually dies in this film so it's not really an escape, it's John Coffey from The Green Mile but it's a great film about prisons, Andy Dufresne's from Shawshank Redemption and his escape and that story tremendous, Lincoln Burroughs from Prison Break which is the name that I've given to the sermon because this story about a sermon or for the older people here Hiltz, Steve McQueen from The Great Escape, great stories you know there's something about these stories that well they appeal to me, I don't know if they appeal to you but the same kind of themes are in this passage in the Bible I do think they inhabit the themes of these films as well, there's issues of injustice and there's issues of isolation and fear and freedom and life and death and in many ways when we come to church these are the kind of issues we deal with, we don't generally talk about flower arranging and stuff like that, it tends to be kind of big issues which I think is sometimes why people avoid it and don't want to come because we feel the need, the importance in our own lives and because of what Jesus Christ has done for us to recognise and deal with some of these big issues that are maybe bigger than just the day-to-day issues that sometimes fill our lives but these are our issues aren't they, to a greater or lesser extent however we articulate them in our lives but for us the unlikely hero in this story is the unlikely hero and every time that we come together and the word is preached and we worship is Jesus Christ, he's our unlikely hero,

I was listening to that sermon last night from Tim Keller in America and he was saying that you know you would never have the founder of a church, Jesus Christ, you never have this significant and important, not just person but God who's almost his last words were words of despair and forsakenness, my God, my God on the cross, he says my God, my God why have you forsaken me, he just wouldn't do it, he wouldn't make that up, he's an unlikely hero, this Jewish God-claiming man who dies in a cross and has transformed the lives of millions including our own and including Andy and Emma's today is the unlikely hero of the sermon and of our lives as Christians and so this story is one of the stories about the founding of the church in the New Testament and not only is there an unlikely hero but there's unlikely founding members,

I mentioned just at the beginning, it's the story of the first three people that become believers, followers of Jesus Christ whose lives are converted and changed and it's a slave girl whose name isn't given and a business woman whose name is Lydia, we didn't read about that just before and then this prison officer who would have been a kind of middle-class Roman citizen whose name also were not given here in the story, so there's three and the founding members of the church were kind of unlikely especially when you consider that when Paul and Silas went to Philippi as where they went everywhere else they would first go into the synagogue, they would first go to where the Jewish people worship because remember Jesus came from Israel and it was Jewish himself and they would go there with the gospel but in most cases the Jewish people had no interest in Jesus and in the message, they too thought he was unlikely, they too thought he was just an idiot, a kind of village idiot, simple man, no point we don't believe in that kind of Messiah, a Messiah who died on a cross, no thank you, we want a Messiah that's going to be on a throne and who's going to get rid of Roman occupation, that's a kind of Messiah we want, so they rejected Jesus and a respectable Jewish man of the day for example would make a very politically incorrect prayer every day and one that certainly wouldn't be sanctioned by Jesus or by the Bible but he would say I thank God today that I was not born a slave, a woman or a Gentile and here's Jesus Christ forming the church with a slave, a woman and a Gentile, a Roman, someone who wasn't a Jew, Roman and it's almost just to seal the fact that their rejection was not acceptable and their thinking was not acceptable and Jesus forms this church in Philippi that later letters in the New Testament reach out to, it was a Roman colony, I just want to say a few things about this story and I hope that they will apply to us in our own lives to a greater or lesser degree and the first is that it was an and they're all in the theme of everything being unlikely, so it's an unlikely imprisonment here, here's Paul and Silas, these early apostles, preachers, teachers, we're going about with the good news of Jesus Christ, that's the gospel message which we don't think has changed over 2,000 years is that Jesus is God's son and he has come to live the life we couldn't to die the death we deserve and has resurrected to show us power over death and that as we trust in him we can know forgiveness and hope and life and a future, it doesn't really change and it's what baptism symbolizes as we perform that later, so they were telling that good news that God can transform your life and they brought that good news to a slave girl who was possessed of some kind of spirit of divination which meant she could tell the future and she was used by her owners to make a lot of money because of that and when she was healed of that she could no longer tell the future in this kind of dark way and so not everyone was pleased with that, the people weren't pleased, her owners weren't pleased and the city magistrates weren't pleased, they were kind of a bit uneasy and horrified by what had happened and Paul and Silas were able to do in this girl's life or what Jesus was able to do in this girl's life and so they beat them up horribly and imprisoned them in the kind of deepest part of the prison, it's kind of unlikely imprisonment in many ways, in other words this good news and the message of Jesus Christ wasn't welcomed by all by any stretch of the imagination, they didn't recant and they didn't change the message, it was true and it was powerful in their lives and the reality for us I think as centuries have passed is that that same truth

is applicable today, not everybody is interested in or welcomes the news of Jesus Christ, for the slave owners it was about competing priorities, they weren't able to make money quite as much and for the magistrates maybe it was just they were afraid of the unrest that was happening in the city because of these guys that were coming in with this message and so there was opposition, opposition personally and opposition kind of in the community and that's still the same, there's always a reaction to the message of Jesus Christ and there's always a reaction in our own hearts also we either accept that message or we're kind of, it ruffles our priorities and it ruffles our thinking and it ruffles our maybe our comforts and so the challenge is to consider what response we have to the message of Jesus Christ, there was an unlikely imprisonment here but even more so there was an unlikely response to that imprisonment from Paul and Silas in this passage because we picked up the story, we started reading the story where they were imprisoned at midnight and they were praying and singing hymns to God okay that's an unlikely by anyone's stretch of imagination even Shoshang redemption that is an unlikely response to being imprisoned that they had there

[9 : 33] Paul and Silas were no flash harries, they weren't going into prison as a kind of a symbolic protest about you know their freedoms had been denied them and they wanted freedom of speech and freedom of religion and we'll just go into prison and we'll stand up for our rights and you know bring it into the public eye, it wasn't anything like that, it wasn't that kind of culture and society, they had been beaten and whipped within an inch of their lives here, they were lacerated and broken and rather than maybe crying for mercy at this point or cursing their imprisoners, those who imprisoned them or weeping in rage or in anger or wishing beyond hope that they had never met this slave girl, they were worshiping, they were praising God, they weren't masochists, they weren't looking for this, they didn't long for it but they'd seen something very significant happen in the life of the slave girl, they'd seen her being transformed and given hope and they knew their own lives and they recalled the change that Jesus Christ had made in their own lives, remember who Paul had been, Paul was a bounty hunter for Christians, that's what he did, he went around the country bounty hunting this new Christian sect that was being formed as it were that they saw and he went to him prison and beat up and kill, he was a witness of the first

Christian martyr Stephen, the clothes of Stephen were laid at the feet of a man called Saul, so he was a bounty hunter, he was a killer previously and now here he is in prison himself, transformed and changed and having a relationship with this Jesus Christ who he met on that famous road to Damascus which we often talk about and who'd been touched and changed and forgiven and given love and grace in his life, so that was a reason why they could worship and praise even though the outward circumstances they were in were really bleak and that's significant, I think also for ourselves and for our own perspective, I think very often our perspective goes as Christians and we forget the unlikely saviour that we have who is this carpenter from Nazareth but is divine, who's died and has rose again, has changed our lives and changed our future and changed the trajectory of our lives, changed where we're going, changed what we can do, changed our hearts, forgiven our sins, taken us from death to life and all that goes with that both in this life and eternally and so we it's great for us to come together and worship as

Christians, it's significant and that's why we do it every Sunday morning, our first day of the week, resurrection morning, remembering our saviour, it's a living saviour and we do that because it gives us the right, it recalibrates our lives again to that perspective which is so important for us.

I thought the festival had ended. Okay, there's also an unlikely transformation, that's the third thing, unlikely transformation in verse 27, this chapter, we're told that the jailer woke up when he saw the prison doors were open, he drew a sword, was about to kill himself and Paul and Shauy don't harm yourself, we're all here. So there's an amazing transformation, this is the third story, remember the slave girl and there's the Lydia and now there's the prison officer here and there's this amazing transformation, it's triggered by the desperation of the situation, he's about to take his own life because you know again the society and the culture and everything else is very different, if he woke up in the morning or if he didn't wake up in the morning but even if he woke up with this amazing earthquake and all the prisoners who their chains had been loosed, if they'd all escaped and he had to face a magistrate in the morning, he would lose his life because they'd escaped because he was the one that was responsible ultimately. So rather than face the ignominy and the shame of that, he was going to take his own life, he was going to kill himself but there was a transformation that was accomplished by the grace of God because the prisoners, Paul and Silas and I said don't do that, don't, we're all still here. The singing prisoners were still there, they hadn't left, they hadn't escaped and almost obviously we've only got a little bit of the story here, the bones of the story but the prison officer obviously recognized something bigger was going on, something bigger was happening here, maybe he'd heard the message that they'd preached earlier on about Jesus, the good news, maybe he knew the slave girl, maybe he passed her every day on the way to his work and saw the amazing transformation in her life, we don't really know but he was certainly impressed with them, with their singing at midnight and with the consistency of their grace and love to him even in the prison and when he's in this condition he cries out Lord what must I do to be saved and I don't think it just means from this immediate situation there's a kind of spiritual undertone there what must I do to be saved knowing that they had this message from Jesus Christ of salvation and the answer then is the same as the answer now, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved you and your household so the the centrality of

Jesus, the message of Jesus, the reality of what Jesus has done in our own lives still remains relevant and still remains the same and the message is still the same, it is this recognition that Jesus alone can defeat us our mortality and our death and our sin, our separation from him and can change our hearts and renew us, keep us from a lost eternity apart from him and they go on to explain the word of God a little bit more to him in verse 32 so that he understands Jesus more and although we might not in our own lives today we might not have such a desperate cry of cry of need as it were because it might not be so tangibly desperate for us but there are a lot of people today in the world who are in desperate need we are very comfortable things are great at least socially and culturally many places as I prayed earlier that need absolute help and desperate suicidal situations but still for us there needs to be that cry of desperation even in the sunshine even when things are going well even when we're young and at the just the peak of our life and our existence is that cry of desperation when we recognize spiritual realities and when we recognize our position before God and our guilt before him according to himself and our lostness spiritually and our death and that he alone can transform these things and make a fantastic change for us that message and that transformation is still the same so there's a transformation that's been

[17 : 20] Andy and Emma's lives and we hope in our lives and it's good sometimes just to remember that okay just about we're just about there we've got a couple more things to say just as we close and I bring it around a little bit more to the church and baptism because at the same time the fourth thing is that there was an unlikely community born that day there was slave woman there was Lydia and now there's this Roman prisoner guard and it starts in many ways as it does with the other starts with this Roman prisoner guard rather opening his home in verse 34 we're told the remarkable thing the jailer brought him into his house set a meal before him he was filled with joy because he'd come to believe in God he and his whole family and so there's an amazing amount of risk in that comment in that verse that we don't really pick up on but here's this guy who was about to take his own life because he thought the prisoners had escaped because he was in he was so afraid of the authorities and the brutality of the Roman regime at that time who would have held him accountable and here he is a few minutes later he's willing to take them out of the prison into his own house these are prisoners they were in the deepest part of the prison they were it was kind of highly public as it could be at that time even though there wasn't Twitter and all the rest of it but it was it was well known it was public it was in the public domain and here he is taking them to his own house I mean how risky was that how ridiculous what a change there was as he trusts them they've become brothers as it were Christian brothers and there's a great symbolism of the barriers being removed as he takes them to his own house and there's further symbolism in the story and it's a nice touch is that he this prisoner this might be a middle class kind of Roman citizen washes these Jewish prisoners wounds it doesn't happen it wouldn't happen we take that for granted which is really you kind of skim over that there's a remarkable change has taken place culturally and conventionally he is washing their wounds from the the beatings they received and they are washing him with water in baptism so there's that lovely kind of juxtaping a position of things going on where he washed their wounds and immediately he and all his family were baptized so he's baptized in obedience to what Jesus said you know go and make disciples of all nations every nation baptizing them name the father the son and the Holy Spirit I am with you till the end of the age and that badge of belonging it was that some symbolism of cleansing of being forgiven of new life of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the changing us it's a mark of that great covenant of grace that God enters in with us symbolic outward mark of that grace so this unlikely

Roman convert becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ and everything changes so there's a community there and it's marked by celebration and by joy and he was filled with joy and we're told that about the other accounts as well there was a lot of joy and you do that you open your home he owns his home it's a great risk to do so he owns his home and what they do they have a meal together and it's a joyful happy occasion there's a celebration and joy and I hope that today will be a joyful day it's a great day it's a day of celebrations today of happiness today of new life and marking of that new life and of eating together and of the symbolism of baptism as we come together and it was there was that whole exhilaration of the freedom you know this prison officer who ultimate again in terms of the symbolism was enslaved and was imprisoned in his own heart because the sin is set free and he's released as it were spiritually and there's great joy and there's great sense of him being rescued and of what that means I watched Shoshang redemption the other night for about the 36th time and that great moment is it when Andy Dufres comes out of the the sewage pipe and he walks along the water to get clean and then he stands up with a big smile on his face and with the rain pouring down in the middle of the night because he's set free and there's sort of this great moment of tense joy and freedom as he's no longer in the prison cell and he's the only one the narrator says who has crawled through 500 yards of sewage and come out clean on the other side and you know that's a great picture of that story and of the joy that he had but it's nothing you know obviously nothing it's only a story it's nothing compared with this joy that marked this celebration that marked this Philippian jailer who had come to faith and we remember it's not just when it was a lovely happy occasion but remember the guys remember Paul and Silas they were singing and and joyful in the prison in the darkness when they were beaten raw and there was that sent a deep sense of joy that transcended their circumstances in other words it wasn't just about having a good time it transcended their circumstances and we find that as Christians that we have the ability or God gives us very often we don't take it but we have the ability to be serene God gifts the ability to be serene and joyful even in difficult circumstances because we can he's graciously showed us a bigger picture about life and about our position with him as believers so I think that even in the dark times of our lives we are counter we ought to be counter-cultural and I confess and I'm sure we all confess it's unbelievable how much we mourn as Christians how much we grumble and complain and find fault and criticize and are embittered and don't apply this grace of God to our lives it's somewhere up there it's an insurance policy for the future somewhere but it isn't something that's transforming us from the inside so often and the truth of the passage here reminds us that that shouldn't be the case baptism and worship is a reminder to that so this community is marked by joy it's the opening of its home and very very lastly with the grace of God in this man's life comes influence and there's a lot of influence sort of running around in this story in each of the cases of people that become Christians there's cost there's worship there's transformation and there's influence some some of it's negative

the authorities that's very negative they don't like what they see it's negative and the owners of the slave grats negative influence but also there's a lot of positive influence the Lydia's friends the prisoners not just Paul and Silas but the other prisoners who took note of the singing the jailer himself and their households it's mentioned twice in this passage so the gospel changes us as individuals but the promise is that that change will influence other people too sometimes negatively sometimes positively and that's a challenge to our testimony as believers as Christians here today you know it is our testimony of Jesus is it is it challenging is it influencing anybody do does anybody know or is it absolutely secret but that influence is formalized in the Bible in promise where this promise of grace is to you and your children from Acts 239 that's covenantal language right from the the Old Testament where the covenant was formed between

God and His people and it's a kind of formal recognition in a sense of that family is that most foundational of all community and of all society and so as a special place in God's economy right through the Old Testament this covenant of grace as it was being outworked through Abraham and through his seed was to Abraham and his children that sign of belonging that sign of promise was to give unto believers and also to the children of believers and that is in circumstances and that's broadened in the New Testament to baptism and so there's a great responsibility and a great privilege on us today to influence our families for Christ through this recognition of baptism and its important place in our lives points us to our ongoing need of Jesus in our lives as parents you'll need Jesus a lot to be good parents and you'll need to be forgiven a lot as parents and your children will need to forgive you and as they need to forgive us and we'll need to forgive them and they will grow up with that knowledge that your parents aren't perfect significant but certainly not perfect who need a savior and they will grow up seeing that same need and it's a great privilege to be able to baptize Joshua today and to kind of formally and publicly and visually bring them into that place of privilege and we as a congregation also take vows today to care for to pray for and to be involved in his spiritual development here in church so we have the children and you know I just say again before I close we've done it a lot here we've had a lot of baptisms and you've all vowed as I vowed that we would be remembering them praying for them involving them in our prayers and in our lives and so we remind ourselves of that again today and we hope that Joshua will come up grow up to know and to love Jesus Christ for himself which he must do because baptism doesn't save anyone it's only sprinkling or pouring with water it's symbolic as it is even for grown-ups who are baptized when they come to faith in Jesus it doesn't the act itself doesn't save anybody it points to the savior who's the one who saves so we look forward in just a moment to that baptism and we hope and pray that God will be with us as we do so I'm going to pray very briefly and we're going to sing another Sam again which was chosen by Andy and Emma and if during the singing of that Sam buzz is going to go down get the children so they'll just come back up so they can watch and be part of this as well and we'll then go on with the baptism so just bow our heads briefly in prayer Father God we ask and pray that you would help us today help us to know you through Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and bring us to that place if we are not Christians of crying out like the jailer also cried out what must I do to be saved we pray that you would give us that perspective of being spiritually lost until we find our way in relationship with Christ through repentance and faith and help us we ask pray to go on that search if we haven't yet and find out more about Jesus in the way that the word of God was opened by Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer as he learned more about Jesus so may we focus on you on your grace and on

your goodness we thank you that you transformed our lives and we ask for forgiveness for the times we forget that or that we're rubbish Christians or that we feel or act very untransformed and act in a bitter or a graceless or unkind or selfish or proud or judgmental way forgive us for these things and always take us back to the foot of the cross and to the amazing grace that is ours in Jesus for we ask it in his name Amen