

Acts 16:25 – Sing a Song to the Lord

When the chips are down what do you do? When life is grey and the way ahead is dark, what do you do?

Many people become introverted, fearful, and frightened.

But we are taught in the Bible:

When the chips are down...sing!

When the chips are down, a song can lift the spirits.

The Apostle Paul, and Silas, are in prison. They have been severely flogged. They are in stocks. Persecuted for their faith. Everyone in the town has turned against them and yet in prison they show an amazing spirit. What do they do?

V25: At about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. The other prisoners were listening to them.

They turned their attention away from themselves and they turned to God.

Why would they want to do this?

Well, Scripture commands that we sing...and in times of trouble what better thing to do than to praise the Lord.

I'm glad to share with you this week that my mum has fought back against the infection that was rapidly sapping her strength. A mixture of strong antibiotics, much care and love from staff at Oban hospital and her family and also a very strong will to hang on, meant that she has survived the week and is making good progress. So much to be thankful for this week. But her underlying health is not great and she struggles with Parkinsons, and one of the issues that she struggles with is that when she walks she freezes. There is not a lot she can do about this, the brain and the legs are not working as they should, but one way that she has found to combat this is for someone to sing with her – a favourite is step to the ceilidh - *Mairi's Wedding* – I've also introduced *Walking in the Light of God* and somehow this seems to free her, perhaps her focus is taken away from trying, and her brain relaxes - but singing is a positive thing for her walking.

We have a hymn book within the pages of the Bible, the longest book in the Bible with 150 psalms of praise. Psalms that have spoken in different ways and at different times to generations of people.

Psalm 149, and I could have quoted numerous psalms, *“Sing to the Lord a new song his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.”* Throughout the Bible, we are commanded to sing to the Lord. When we sing, we are doing what God wants us to do. One of the saddest things about the pandemic was that it robbed us of singing in church. What a miss for God's people.

In the NT we are encouraged to sing hymns, Colossians 3:16 *“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”*

When we sing, we are praising God from His Word. The great hymns are focused on Scripture. The hymns of Isaac Watt and Charles Wesley spring from God's word. Of course, the psalms are God's words and many of the choruses that we sing are based in Scripture and in the psalms.

In the Reformed Church we are proud to be people of the Word of God which is preached and also sung. Singing is one of the two chief ways that we glorify God in worship.

Paul wrote, *“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”*

So, as we sing to the Lord, we are promised that the Word of Christ will dwell in us richly. It stirs our souls, for the Word of Christ resonates with the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Some of the great hymns are sermons in miniature. If the sermon doesn't feed your soul, hymns will. Easily memorisable, deeply biblical. Take for example *“In Christ alone”*.

When we sing, we glorify God.

What is man's chief end? It is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. While this is not a phrase drawn directly from Scripture, the wisdom behind it surely is. The Bible tells us with great clarity that man was created in order to bring glory to God. Thus, the chief end of Christians and of the Church is to bring glory to God. That's why we praise God,

and that was what Paul and Silas were doing in the prison at midnight. Their wounds would have been seeping blood, their ankles and wrists shackled with chains and yet they found the strength to praise God at midnight.

Singing is a way to glorify our God.

Singing has such a unique way of bringing your heart, soul, mind, and strength together to focus entirely and completely on God. In an age of distraction, singing grabs the attention of all our senses and focuses us on God.

I was watching a football tribute the other evening to a great Celtic legend Tommy Burns and his family said when Tommy went into the church, it was as though he was in another world, his attention was absorbed in worshipping God. That's what we come to church for, to focus our attention on God, and singing is a great way to do it.

When we sing, we build each other up.

When you sing, you build up others.

Note specifically here in Ephesians 5:19 that it says: *“Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...”*

When we do what the Bible says and sing together as a church family, we are hearing confessions of faith all around! We are hearing testimonies of faith all around us!

Singing, praising and the Christian faith go hand in hand.

Also know that as you sing, you're helping unbelievers. In Psalm 105:1-2, the Lord is calling the Israelites to be a light unto the nations, and to do this he tells them: *“Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!”*

Weren't Paul and Silas witnessing to the prisoners as they sung together? They were certainly witnessing to the prison guards as one comes to faith through this miraculous event in prison. *What must I do to be saved?* he said. Yes, it must have seemed to him that he was in an evangelical crusade that night, singing, prayers, miraculous goings-on, and the guard has enough. *What must I do to be saved?* If only more had this spirit today. What must I do to be saved?

When we sing we are making war.

There is no doubt in my mind that Paul and Silas were rejoicing in the Lord because they knew that He had won the ultimate battle against sin and evil. Even in their weakest human condition, they rejoiced that God has won the ultimate battle. Praising God is a way of saying thank you Lord that you have won the war.

A singing heart is a heart at war with the work of the Evil One and the power of sin.

When you sing, you are spiritually strengthened for trial.

Often times we think only of singing when we're happy and times are good, but singing brings strength. Paul and Silas are unjustly imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel, and what do they do while they're in prison? Sing! (Acts 16:25)

And this truth is confirmed in the lives of persecuted believers throughout history. Hear the words of one pastor recently imprisoned for his faith:

...When we were in prison we sang almost every day because Christ was alive in us...they put chains on our hands and feet. They chained us to add to our grief. Yet we discovered that chains are splendid musical instruments! When we clanged them together in rhythm, we could sing, 'This is the day (clink, clank), this is the day (clink, clank), which the Lord has made (clink, clank), which the Lord has made (clink, clank).'

Our persecuted brothers and sisters are showing us the truth we see in Acts 16 with Paul and Silas. Singing strengthens you and helps you persevere in the face of trial. If it can strengthen them in the face of these trials, what can it do for you?

If you struggle for joy...sing! If you are joyful...sing! In God's perfect design and understanding of the human condition, he has bound joy and singing together for his people.

And finally, there will be singing in heaven – so we are as well to prepare now. On that day, will you be one of the great multitudes that no one can number, singing the song of the Lamb, singing his praises? I hope you'll be there – I hope that I'll be there, singing the song of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.