“Sing At Midnight”

June 11, 2017

I Peter 4:12-19

Rights. Human rights. Personal space. Women’s rights. Gay rights. Equal rights. Gun rights. Does it seem to you as though making sure others know your rights is an inherent right today? And after all, isn’t the Bill of Rights part of our U.S. Constitution? By the way, could you name three or four rights listed in the Bill of Rights?

Here’s a list of the Bill of Rights. They, as you know, are sometimes called the “Amendments” to the Constitution which protect individuals from their government. And, under our U.S. Constitution we are guaranteed certain inalienable rights. Our Declaration of Independence says this *“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with* ***certain******unalienable Rights****, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness…”*

Well, suppose your rights are violated; what should you do? Today’s sermon includes a violation of legal rights. I’ve titled it “Sing at Midnight.” Shall we pray?

Please open your Bible to the violation of rights. It’s found in Acts chapter sixteen. 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. (25) And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.*

*(26) And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. (27) And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.*

*(28) But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. (29) Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, (30) and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

*(31) And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (32) And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*

*(33) And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. (34) And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”*

The one Book that always tells the whole truth is the Bible. So, when you read these words, you can whole-heartedly believe them. And, you can be sure that God will use them to teach you His ways.

Paul, here, as you are about to see, was simply doing what was good and right. And what had he and Silas done? They had helped free a demon-possessed woman. And they had done God’s will. Yet, as a result, things did not go very well for him. They were arrested and beaten.

Sometimes some of us think that doing God’s will means things will go well for us. And it’s true that God works every-thing together for good. But, when doing the right thing results in, let’s say, punishment and other negative conse-quences; that is not a reason to despair, to get angry, to retaliate, or even to give up.

You see, God is always doing His two-fold work in every circumstance. One, He’s reaching into the hearts of the unbelieving to bring them to Himself. And, two, He’s working in the heart of the Believer to teach him to trust.

Do you remember the great line in the hymn “I Will Trust”? It goes like this.

1. When I cannot understand God's leading,

When I do not know the reason why
He should choose the path that lies before me,
Still to Him in faith I can reply:

*I will trust when I cannot see,
When I'm faced with adversity,
And believe Your will is always best for me
I will trust when I cannot see.*

2. When I feel the sting of disappointment
And my dreams lie crumbled in the dust
When my best adds up to loss and failure
And the things that happen seem unjust:

3. When I face the furnace of affliction
And the pain seems more than I can bear,
When I think it strange this fiery trial
Still I'll tell my blessed Lord in prayer.

So, yes, you will have tribulation. You will have trouble. You will even have times when your rights are violated. But, are you willing to trust God when things don’t go as you’d like them to? The key that unlocks these kinds of trouble is trust. And you’ll see that in the life of Paul.

His clearly had his rights violated. So, when you, as a Christian, have your rights violated, you have Paul’s example of how you ought to respond to those who have done wrong to you.

Now, here’s what the authorities did to Paul and Silas that was a violation of Roman Law.

1. They arrested them even though they hadn’t broken any laws. They’d been arrested for doing something good. There was not a law against helping a person who had been demon-possessed to have those demons expelled from him or her.
2. They were beaten with a cat-o-nine tails.
3. They were beaten publicly.
4. They’d had no public trial.
5. They were put in prison; in the inner prison.
6. Their feet were locked into stocks.

Yet, the Roman Law had a provision in it just for the ordinary, individual citizen. Included in the Roman Law was something called “The Twelve Tables.” These “Twelve Tables” were a list of rights provided to genuine free citizens of Rome. One of those rights said this. *“None but the whole Roman people could pass sentence on the life of a Roman citizen. No magistrate could punish him by stripes or capitally.”*

And when you said these words, “I am a Roman citizen” you were invoking the highest Roman law applicable to an individual. And that’s exactly what Paul did when the magistrates had sent the sergeants to release them. Romans 16:37 *“But Paul said unto them, they have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans…”*

Paul and Silas were assumed to be guilty even though they’d had no public trial where they would have been charged and tried.

Here’s what’s on my heart today. When your rights are violated, what are you to do as a Christian? Has it happened to you? Well, what’s the right thing to do? What does the Bible teach when it comes to suffering at the hands of people, even authorities, who violate our rights?

Please turn with me to the words of the Apostle Peter. Peter explains how you are to handle such things. So, please go with me to I Peter chapter four.

First, a Christian should expect to be mistreated by the world.

I Peter 5:8 says this. *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour…”*

Does anyone think that the devil is out for your good? If he, as a roaring lion, is seeking to devour, isn’t there an implication here that he’s out to deceive and to cause you trouble? His goal is to devour you.

Jesus’s words imply the very same thing. John 16:33 *“In the world ye shall have tribulation:”*

So, when we say the Apostle Paul was our example as a genuine Christian, we need to be reminded that often Paul experienced trouble at the hands of those who rejected his message.

Job 5:7 tells us *“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”* Trouble is never the real problem for the Christian. Instead, it’s our response that’s at the heart of it. Even, as in Paul’s case, when he and Silas had had baseless charges brought against them, they still had to respond as Christians.

First, then, a Christian should expect to be misused and mistreated by the world.

Second, your calling as a Christian is to trust your Creator, no matter what.

Every day you are on a learning curve. And what is it that God is teaching you? He’s teaching you that in each and every event of your life, the LORD of heaven and earth can be trusted. Whatever He allows to come your way; trouble, trial, persecution, violation of your rights, injustices; with everything He allows to come your way, you are called to trust Him.

Look with me at the words of I Peter 4:12 *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: (13) But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

*(14) If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. (15) But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.*

*(16) Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. (17) For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*

*(18) And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (19) Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”*

Sometimes, many times, you’ve chosen to do what’s right. Like Paul, you’ve done the right thing. And yet, the results turned out, from your perspective, to be “way wrong.” That’s what Peter explains for us here.

Your calling, as a Christian, isn’t a calling to ease and comfort and a trouble-less life. Instead, there’s a fiery trial in God’s plan for you. It’s His trying of your faith. It’s His allowing people and events to come your way that will put pressure on you that will be for your good. And it’s not something strange that has happened to you.

So, instead of criticizing and complaining and wishing things were different, the Holy Spirit, in Peter, says “rejoice.” And he gives the reason why you can rejoice. I Peter 4:13 “*But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”*

He goes on to add this. I Peter 4:14 *“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.”*

We’d all like to glory of the LORD to be upon our lives. We’d all like to be glad with exceeding joy. But that glory and that joy come by way of being a partaker of Christ’s sufferings. So, for those of you who want to trust the LORD when things don’t go as you’d like them to as you do the right things, do this one thing; commit yourself again to the LORD.

I Peter 4:19 *“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”*

This word “commit” is one of the largest words in the Christian’s language. It means “to deposit something of great value into someone else’s hands; someone you can completely trust.”

How many times during a challenging time have you asked “Does the LORD love me?” Folks, it’s never a loss of love from God’s heart when He allows you to suffer in this way. Rather, it’s His way of teaching you to the personal value of “committing” the keeping of your soul to Him.

That’s what so many injustices are all about.

So, the question you really ought to be asking is this. “Am I committing into the LORD’s care my soul in the midst of this ordeal?”

Both Paul and Silas had the experience of being arrested, beaten, and thrown into a prison cell with their feet in stocks. Yet, they sang. Why? They sang because they counted themselves worthy to have suffered in the LORD’s name. They’d done right. They’d helped a demon-possessed girl find freedom. And now they’d had to suffer unjustly.

So, what is it that the LORD is allowing in your life at this time? Have you been treated unfairly? Have you experienced an injustice this week?

Let the LORD have His way with you. Trust the keeping of your soul to Him. He’s watching over you. And He’s watching out for you. And yes, you suffer; but not without a good purpose.

So, as we close today, ask yourself this. Am I trusting the LORD with my life? Hasn’t He appointed this injustice for my benefit? Isn’t He constantly working all things together for good in my life?

Here’s the prayer for today. “LORD, I commit my entire life to you today. This hurts. But I know you are working it for my good. Thank you. In Jesus’s Name, Amen.”

Now, as we close, let me remind you of the main message of the Scriptures.

1. We are all sinners and the wages for sin is death.
2. God provided a Savior in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. He died for your sins.
3. When you repent of my sins and receive Jesus Christ as your LORD and Savior, you are completely forgiven and guaranteed a place in Heaven.
4. Will you trust His Son as your Savior?

This is certainly the greatest passage of Scripture Bible. It’s John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (17) For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”*

Will you put your trust in the One Who paid the penalty for all your sins 2000 years ago when He died on a Cross on the hill called Calvary?

Will you admit you are a sinner and not deserving of His Love? Will you admit you are a sinner and deserving of His Judgment? Then, tell God that you believe He sent His Son to die as your Substitute and that you want to be forgiven of all your sins. He will certainly receive you and grant you per-mission to enter into His Kingdom someday.

To “repent” means “to change your mind about God, Christ, your sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.”

To “believe” means “to simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for your sins.”

Today is the Day of Salvation. Today you can repent (change your mind) about God, Christ, Sin, and Salvation and find eternal life. Today is your day to trust Christ alone for His free salvation. Will you trust Him?

The sinner’s prayer is this. “LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and in need of your grace. I believe that You sent Your Son to the Cross to die for me. Please forgive me of all my sins and make me Your child. Thank you.”

Closing hymn: Hymn # \_\_\_\_\_. “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”