

Worship & Word Sunday

Echo Church | Year 1 Week 2 | January 11, 2026 | Rich Saunders Jr. |
“Why Are You Afraid?” | Acts 16:23-34 NKJV

23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

26 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.

27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

30 And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31 So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Introduction: Why Are You So Afraid to Do It?

Let me ask you a question: Why are you so afraid to do it? I'm talking to the believer who knows they have an assignment from God but feels paralyzed by fear. Maybe your belief is shaken because of the unknown. You don't know how it's going to work out, and that uncertainty has you stuck. But let me flip the script—sometimes, we're not afraid because of the unknown; we're afraid because of the known.

Paul and Silas knew exactly what could happen to them. They knew the potential outcome of preaching the gospel in a hostile environment. They knew they could be beaten, imprisoned, or even killed. But here's the thing: they were more focused on advancing the Kingdom than they were on their own comfort. They understood that even in bondage, God can still move. Bondage doesn't restrict the power of God; it reveals your reason for wanting to be free.

Sometimes, we find ourselves in situations where we've done everything right, but we're still bound. And here's the kicker: even the thing that has you bound is under the hand of God. He can use it to show His power. In Acts 16, God caused an earthquake—something that didn't normally happen in that region. But God isn't restricted by what's normal in your mind, your location, or your culture. He broke up the foundation of the prison just to open the door.

Here's the problem: we often praise God for the open door but miss the fact that He disrupted the foundation. The foundation of your bondage had to be shaken so the door could open. So, why are you afraid? Let's dive into this text and see what God is saying to us today.

Point 1: When God Opens the Door... But You Stay

The Doors Were Open, But They Didn't Leave

When the earthquake hit, the prison doors flew open, and the chains fell off. But here's the part that messes with us: Paul and Silas didn't leave. Why? Because their assignment wasn't just about their freedom; it was about the freedom of others.

In today's time, we often see an open door as a sign to leave. We think, "God opened the door, so it's time for me to go." But sometimes, the open door isn't about your exit; it's about your obedience. Paul and Silas stayed because they understood that their obedience was tied to someone else's deliverance.

Think about this: the other prisoners were in the same place, experiencing the same earthquake, but they didn't move either. Why? Because Paul and Silas's faith and obedience created an atmosphere that held them in place. Your obedience doesn't just free you; it impacts everyone around you.

Supporting Scriptures:

Isaiah 61:1 – "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim liberty to the captives."

John 8:36 – "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

Thought-Provoking Quote:

"Sometimes, the door God opens isn't for your escape; it's for your example."

Point 2: The Unbeliever Freed the Believer and Became a Believer

Here's where it gets even more powerful. The jailer, the very person who locked Paul and Silas up, became the one who set them free. God used the one who restricted them to release them.

The jailer was about to take his own life because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul stopped him and said, "We're all here." That act of grace and obedience led the jailer to ask, "What must I do to be saved?"

Here's the lesson: God can use the very thing that had you bound to bring about your breakthrough. The jailer went from being the oppressor to being the one who washed their wounds and welcomed them into his home.

In today's time, we often hold grudges against the people or systems that have hurt us. But what if God wants to use those very people to bless you? What if your obedience in the face of adversity is the key to their salvation?

Supporting Scriptures:

Romans 8:28 – "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God."

Genesis 50:20 – "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

"God will use the thing that broke you to build you and the person who hurt you to heal you."

Bonus Point: What to Do Next

Fear can paralyze us, but it can also reveal what's possible. Here are three things fear prevents and three things it makes possible:

Fear Prevents:

Obedience – You can't follow God fully if you're stuck in fear.

Growth – Fear keeps you in your comfort zone.

Impact – Your fear can block someone else's breakthrough.

Fear Makes Possible:

Dependence on God – Fear forces you to rely on Him.

Faith Activation – Fear is the soil where faith can grow.

Testimony – Overcoming fear gives you a story to tell.

"Fear is not the absence of faith; it's the opportunity to prove it."

Conclusion: Why Were You Afraid?

Let me leave you with this: I don't want to get to heaven and have God ask me, "Why were you afraid?" What if He says, "Depart from me because you were too afraid to do what I said to do?"

Fear is real, but so is your faith. God has not given you a spirit of fear but of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Don't let fear rob you of your assignment. Don't let fear keep you bound when God has already opened the door.

Prayer:

"Father, we thank You for being a God who disrupts the foundations of our bondage. We thank You for open doors and for the courage to stay when You call us to stay. Help us to move past fear and into obedience. Use us to impact those around us, even in the midst of our trials. In Jesus' name, Amen."