

# RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Luke 22:64

## When Life Gives You Lemons...

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY  
Dean of North Portland Bible College

The text for the Sunday School lesson (International Series) for next Sunday is Acts 16:19b-34. May I again encourage you to take your whole family to Sunday School this week? Most of our churches have classes for all ages, including adults.

First, let me give you the bad news. If you really take a stand for Jesus Christ, and don't compromise when it's convenient, you're going to be a target for opposition. Maybe even persecution! Actually, the Lord promised us that (John 16:33). Today in America, we aren't forbidden to speak out for the Lord, except in public schools and in front of abortion centers. (I'll write more on those matters some other time). But all Christians will face ridicule, misunderstanding, and rejection just for trying to live out our lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

But there is good news to go with the bad. God has promised he would never leave us all alone with our adversaries (Matt 28:20), and told us we could have joy in the midst of trials (Rom 5:3; James 1:2; 1 Peter 5:6).

And that's what the apostles in Philippi needed, as we read in today's text. They had caused a problem for some powerful people in Philippi, by delivering a helpless slave girl from an oppressive evil spirit. But this destroyed her master's lucrative trade in sorcery and the like, and so they retaliated against Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16-19a). The charges they brought against the apostles had nothing to do with the deliverance of the young girl—I doubt her masters wanted the miracle to be publicized, for obvious reasons.

So Paul and Silas found themselves beaten, humiliated, and thrown into the maximum security block of the Philippi jail (16:24). They were too miserable to sleep, since they were awkwardly secured in leg stocks. They could have complained about their unfair treatment—beaten before anything was proven in court. But in spite of their circumstances, there was one thing they could do—they could pray and sing

praises to God (16:25). And that's what they did.

The rest of the story is familiar even to casual readers of the New Testament. At midnight, the town was rocked by a major earthquake, which shook the jailhouse, loosened the prisoners out of their stocks, and opened the doors of the house. The jailor, fearing the worst, was ready to kill himself. But Paul assured him that no-one had escaped, and he was in no danger from the authorities.

The jailor then asked that all-important question, "What must I do to be saved?" (16:30). The earthquake and his fear of losing his life brought him face to face with the spiritual realities of life and death, and he knew he was not ready. On the other hand, Paul and Silas displayed a confidence and joy which completely belied their circumstances. So, ironically, the jailor came to the prisoners, and asked them for the way of deliverance.

Their short answer is recorded in verse 31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." They went on to share a lot more with him (16:32) and with his family. They not only came to faith, but they were baptized even that night. Given the extraordinary circumstances, this should not be surprising. The jailor's fear was turned into joy, and Paul and Silas shared in that joy.

How can we today deal with the "lemons" which come out way? Just like Paul and Silas, we need to recognize that any uncomfortable experience can conceal a unique opportunity for service to the Lord—an opportunity which will bring with it joy and peace in the midst of suffering.

If we are unjustly accused of wrongdoing, let's remember that the Judge of all the earth knows the truth of the matter. We ought to seek just vindication under the law (look at Paul's reaction in 16:36-39), but that's not always possible. When people can see the Lord in us, keeping us from the natural responses of anger, depression or bitterness, (even if you aren't perfect) they may be interested in the God we serve.

If we are persecuted in any way for our faith, we can rejoice, just as Paul and Silas did (1 Peter 4:12-14). This demonstrates to the watching world that we have a new life in us, a life they desperately need. Notice the jailor brought up the subject of salvation, in the midst of a personal crisis. We won't always have to aggressively "preach" at people, if our lives speak for the Lord as well.

Sometimes the trials we go through are not really the result of persecution or opposition. We all have experienced certain limitations on our lives, our freedom or our comfort. The trouble is, we sometimes become negative, depressed, even blaming God for the problems we face. Few of us have experienced the tragedies and suffering of Job, but we would do well to hear his response to his situation. He asked, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10).

We have seen how the temporary limitations in Paul's and Silas' lives opened the door to witness and win an extended family into the faith. In a more recent example, baseball pitcher Dave Dravecky has gone through years of treatment, therapy and personal anguish with cancer, and despite a momentous comeback, he has finally lost his arm and his career. This was not persecution, nor was it some punishment from God. It was simply a major limitation on his life, received from the hand of his heavenly Father.

But Dave Dravecky has done a wonderful job of accepting his limitations, and sharing a glorious testimony of God's goodness and his own faith in Christ. Now he has hundreds of opportunities to witness for the Lord, to crowds of people in various settings. There is still pain, and limitations, but there is also an obvious joy of the Lord in his heart.

We also can have this joy, in spite of the obstacles and limitations that take up residence in our lives. When life gives us lemons, we can still make lemonade.

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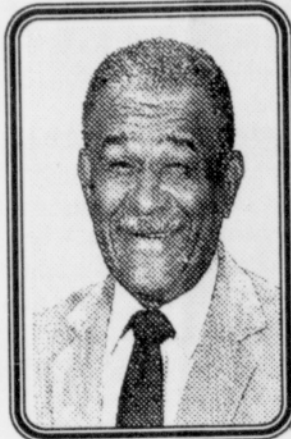
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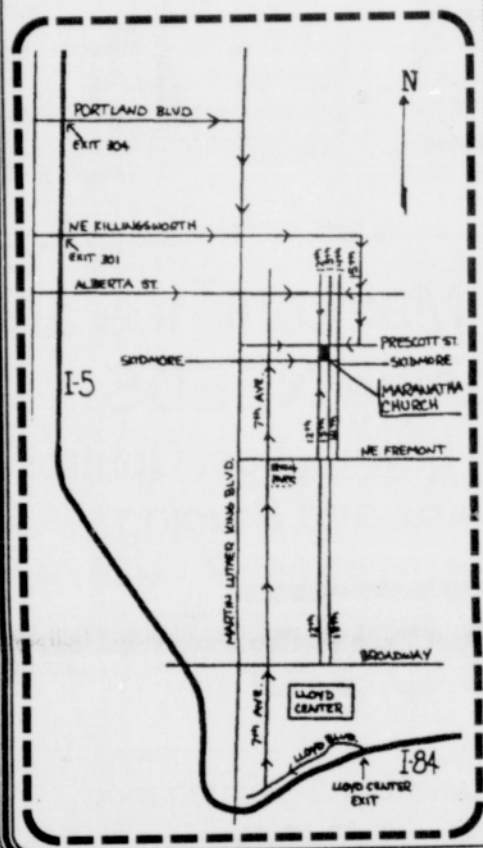
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1 Peter 4:11

