

### Lesson 8: Pulling It All Together

This is our last session together in the J-Curve course. I hope you've enjoyed your time, I know I have. I know that we've learned a variety of different ideas in the J-curve and nuances. In today's session. I was hoping that we would be able to pull them all together, primarily in a story in the book of Acts. In this session, as we look at, as we entered into the middle of Paul's second missionary journey, upon coming into Philippi, Paul and John Mark meet a God-fearing woman named Lydia. She and her household become believers, and then things get really difficult.

So, as we take a look at the passage in Acts 16, let me summarise for the sake of time. While in Philippi, Paul and Silas head to a place of prayer, and they're confronted by a slave girl who is possessed by an evil spirit. The poor girl is victimised, not only by the demon but also by her owners. They are making a ton of money off her fortune-telling. Verse 17 tells us that she follows Paul around, crying out loudly, "These men are servants of God who proclaim the way of salvation." Now, the demon was not being an evangelist; he was just trying to establish his authority over them. And this went on for three straight days, and then Paul got really annoyed. The word in the ESV might be somewhat misleading, that somehow Paul got really annoyed and just cast it out for his own sake. But the original word has more of a sense that Paul was disturbed, even grieved. In other words, his heart goes out to her. So, he frees her from her torment.

In the following verses, 19 through 24, we see the owners are obviously upset that the girl was healed because their business has been destroyed. They dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates of the city and tell absolute lies about what happened. The false narrative sets off a quick chain of painful events. Notice that the crowd attacks the magistrates, tore the garments off of them, they're beaten with rods, they're inflicted with many blows, they're thrown into prison, and then they're put into the inner prison with their feet in stocks.

So, notice the downward path of dying for Paul: slandered, falsely convicted, attacked, beaten, jailed, put into stocks. Remember what got him there in the first place. It was love. It was Paul's compassion for the girl that led him to pray for her freedom, that set off this chain of events, that led to this path.

Now, as we continue the story in verses 25 and following, we see that about midnight, Paul and Silas are praying and they're singing, and there was suddenly a great earthquake that shook the prison. The prison doors fly open. When the jailer wakes up, he's extremely in fear because he assumes that the prisoners have escaped. And therefore, being a good Roman soldier who was full of honour and failed, he is ready to take his own life. And in verse 29, we see that the jailer calls for the lights and then falls down before Paul and Silas. And he asks them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And like good missionaries, they say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Later that night, he takes them to his own house, him and his whole household get baptised, their wounds are washed, and they're fed, and returned to the jail the next morning.

So, the next day, the magistrates are flabbergasted to find out that they've tortured and incarcerated Roman citizens. They send word to let them go, but Paul says, "No, you've got to come down here and give me an apology on your own." And so, let's take a look at this broad story. Notice who and where the dying happens. So, here's Paul and Silas. They're slandered, they're falsely convicted, they're beaten, they're attacked, beaten, jailed, put in stocks. Notice where the resurrection happens. It happens as the prisoners listen. There's an earthquake out there, the prisoners stay. The jailer does not commit suicide; the jailer is saved, the family is saved. And there is a little bit of resurrection here for Paul and Silas as they're fed, they're released, and there's an apology.

Notice how Paul's dying in love sets off the chain of events. It is dying in love for the jailer by not running away that prevented the others from running away. As a result, the jailer's life was saved, and then, literally, his soul was saved. Paul's dying also led to the household being saved. In fact, the reason that Paul is there in the first place, again, is because of his love for the slave girl and to be helpful to her. That's gospel love. It's got the same shape as Jesus' love. Jesus suffered and sacrificed His life to free us from sin. Jesus died that we might live. As we follow Him, our lives will often follow the same pattern.

And so sometimes we need to consider and recognize that the reason we miss resurrection is because death is happening in us, but resurrection is happening in another's. The Apostle Paul says it clearly in chapter 4, verses 10 through 12. He says, at the very end of this passage, "Death is at work in us, but life in you." So when we die with Christ in love, look for His resurrection in other's.

And secondly, we need to hunt for the resurrection of a new community. In other words, when you die, you will not be alone. Notice that when Paul died for the sake of Lydia, she came to faith. When Paul died for the sake of the slave girl, she was freed. And most scholars also believe that she also came to faith. And as we just saw, when Paul died in love for the jailer and the household, they were saved. Look at that unique community: socioeconomic and gender boundaries were crossed with Lydia and the slave girl, ethnic boundaries were broken with the jailer. This was the birth of a new kind of community, not just a diverse one, but one that is reenacting the dying and rising of Christ continually. This, in essence, was the birth of the Philippian Church.

Paul is not passive in the resurrection. He's reaching out to the slave girl, to Lydia. He's calling out to the suicidal jailer, sharing the gospel, and baptising. He's actively following the lead of the Spirit. And so, while you cannot force resurrection, you can always choose to die. And as Paul chooses to die in love, the resurrection of a whole new community is happening.

So, three hidden resurrections: sometimes the resurrection is other's as we die, sometimes there's a resurrection of a new community, and finally, number three, the resurrection happens in our hearts. So, when you're dying and you hunt for resurrection, don't be surprised if your circumstances don't change, but the change happens in you. In other words, as we look at this entire story in the J curve, notice where the trigger of the beginnings of the resurrection were happening. It was not the earthquake; the beginning of the resurrection was happening in song, in worship. The resurrection

began before Paul and Silas were freed from the jail. They were filled with joy, not because their circumstances had changed, their feet were still shackled, but they sang freely because their hearts were full of the presence of God. A resurrection of the heart often precedes the resurrection of our circumstances. God changes you and your character and your perspective before He changes your situation. In fact, oftentimes He changes your situation by changing you, and you discover this thing called joy. It's not necessarily happiness; it's not based on circumstances. It's a disposition of the heart of the activity of the Spirit in you as He brings resurrection.

Let's get back finally to Alisha. Remember Alisha? We've been talking about him this whole time. Let me just finish off Alisha's story. So after Alisha has had a resurrection of his heart, he's forgiven those who had hurt him. He released anything unto them. I said to Alisha, "Alisha, what happened after that?" And he said, "Well, eventually the elders started bickering among themselves, and one by one, they returned back to the church and asked for my forgiveness." And he said, "All of them returned except one. And it took a long time, but eventually, he came." And he said, "You met him." I said, "I did?" He said, "Yeah, and here he is in the picture. He's right here in the middle. Look at his face. He always looked like that whenever I met him. Now, Alisha said, "Oh yeah, this is his house over here next to the church." And so, he was the one who donated this property that the church is now sitting on. So I was just imagining day after day when Alisha was in the deepest, darkest, lowest part of the J-Curve, he was going to work at the church, sitting next to the very man who would not come back. And so here's a picture of him at his business, and his face was continually like this. He was full of the joy of the Spirit.

And so, let's try to just chart this very quickly. Alisha was dying in love that the elders might somehow be resurrected. Eventually, the elders were dying and repenting, and that brought change and renewal to the church. And eventually, the church would go through continual dying and impact the community around them. And so, there's this chain reaction that happens of dying and rising for the sake of others that sets off a chain of transformation, not only for the individual but for all.

And so, I hope that whatever circumstances you're in, especially if you're at the bottom of the J, that you might have a resurrection lens. That resurrection might not be in places that you expect. So even as you continue to die, hunt for that resurrection. It may be happening in others and for others. Hunt for that resurrection. It may be happening in a new community that's being formed around you. Hunt for that resurrection. It might be happening eventually in your own heart and circumstances in ways that would surprise you.