

COURAGE WITHIN INJUSTICE

Acts 16:16-40

When US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts addressed his son's ninth-grade graduating class, he offered some unconventional wishes, including these:

From time to time in the years to come, I hope you will be treated unfairly, so that you will come to know the value of justice. I hope that you will suffer betrayal because that will teach you the importance of loyalty. . . . And when you lose, as you will from time to time, I hope every now and then, your opponent will gloat over your failure. It is a way for you to understand the importance of sportsmanship.*

The followers of Jesus Christ frequently meet and endure injustice and disloyalty. The apostle Paul and his companions often found themselves treated unfairly. And of course Jesus himself, innocent of any sin or crime, received the most unjust treatment of all.

Group Discussion. What makes something unjust?

Personal Reflection. How do you respond to injustice against others? Against yourself?

After the events related in study two, Paul and his companions sailed to Macedonia and began to share their message with a group of women in Philippi. A businesswoman named Lydia was converted to Christ and opened her home to the missionaries. Things soon turned troublesome.

As this and the following studies show, the Bible takes demons and demon possession seriously. *Read Acts 16:16-40.*

1. Up to this point, the work of Paul and his companions in Philippi had gone smoothly. How does the encounter in verses 16-18 reveal the spiritual conflict going on behind the scenes?
2. The spirit-possessed girl kept shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved" (v. 17). What she said was certainly true. Why then did Paul command the spirit to come out of her (v. 18)?
3. Once the girl was delivered of the evil spirit, a cascade of injustices followed one after another (vv. 19-24). Theologian N. T. Wright says of these events that "the combination of religion, money and politics is asking for trouble, and Paul and Silas got it."** How were the missionaries subjected to unfairness through each of those three forces?

| Religious

| Financial

| Political

4. Locked in prison at midnight, Paul and Silas could not know that the Lord would intervene on their behalf through an earthquake. How did their behavior in the prison demonstrate trust in the Lord both before and after the earthquake (vv. 25-28)?

5. In prison Paul and Silas did two things that have always helped Christians in bad circumstances: they prayed and sang hymns to God (v. 25). When have prayer and singing sustained you when life seemed unfair?

6. Earlier in the day, a cascade of injustices had followed the deliverance of the slave girl. What cascade of good now happened because Paul and Silas did not flee from prison and abandon the jailer (vv. 29-34)?

7. Paul and Silas had submitted to the injustices of the day before. How was their attitude different the next morning when they were told that they were free to go (vv. 35-37)?

8. What was the value of Paul's demand for fair treatment for the missionaries (a public apology and official stamp of approval) (vv. 38-40)?

9. How are you being unfairly treated right now?
10. How is someone you care about being unfairly treated right now?
11. What are some appropriate responses to both your situation and the situation of that person you care about?
12. This week, what will you do to put those responses into action?



Commit the injustices of your life to the Lord, trusting him to work justice for you in his own time. Pray for courage to seek justice for others who are being unfairly treated.

NOW OR LATER

Study 2 Peter 2:11-25 concerning Christlike behavior in the face of unfair treatment.

*John Roberts, commencement address, Cardigan Mountain School, Canaan, NH, June 3, 2017, quoted in Katie Reilly, "I Wish You Bad Luck," *Time*, July 5, 2017, <http://time.com/4845150/chief-justice-john-roberts-commencement-speech-transcript>.

**N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part Two: Chapters 13-18*, New Testament for Everyone (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 65.