

## I. I Love America

- A. I love my country. I'm proud to be an American. I think that the United States of America represents the absolute high point in all of history for a nation-state.
  - 1. No other nation in history has been so generous to either its own citizens or the world.
  - 2. No other nation has built hospitals and orphanages. No other country has healed diseases and dug wells; provided food, and clothing, and shelter around the globe like America.
  - 3. No other nation has had the guts and the sacrificial spirit to stand up to ruthless dictators and murderous regimes around the world.
  - 4. No other nation has sent out missionaries with the saving message of Jesus Christ like America. Heaven will be heavily populated because there is a nation on earth where the gospel flows freely.
  - 5. No other nation has melded together as one such a variety of nationalities, and races, and religions as America.
  - 6. No other nation stands as a beacon of freedom and opportunity, drawing millions to our shores, as America.
- B. We are not a perfect nation. But we are a great nation.
- C. And I love America. There is no place else I'd rather be. To dwell in this land is a great blessing.

## II. Scripture

- A. My talk today is part four of a series called Underdog. What does God say to us in the dark hour, when hope is hard to come by, and the odds seem impossible? What does God say to the underdog?
  - 1. On week one, we saw that He says; keep your eyes on God.
  - 2. On week two, God says; keep the faith. That's because in the spiritual realm; victory is not the victory. Faith is the victory.
  - 3. On week three, you have to know yourself in God. Find yourself in God.
- B. Today I want to add one more imperative to that list—a fourth bit of wisdom from the perfect word of God. Let's get into our underdog Bible story today and see how the key principle emerges.

III. *16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:16, 17, NKJV).*

- A. The time is shortly after the death and resurrection of Christ.
- B. The place is Philippi, which is in modern day Greece.
- C. A missionary team led by Paul and Silas is preaching the good news of Jesus. And a demon-possessed slave girl began following the team around, announcing that these guys were the real deal, the true representatives of God.
- D. It's weird at first, because you think, "Great!" She's pointing people to the Most High God and His way of salvation.
- E. But the more you think about it, the more you realize it's messed up. Every word the demon-possessed girl says is true: these men are the servants of the Most High God, and they do proclaim to us the way of salvation.
- F. But think what that would communicate, first to Jews and then to Gentiles.
- G. To Jews: Jews were totally against fortune telling, horoscopes, and divination. The Old Testament is completely clear. We do not look to spirits at all for our truth about God. And to have a slave girl, who works in the magical trades, advertising for Paul and Silas would completely discredit them in the eyes of the Jews. The devil is very sneaky.
- H. To Gentiles: Most Gentiles were very open to magic and divination. So when they see Paul and Silas speaking of Jesus Christ—and then hear a demon possessed fortune teller doing infomercials for them, to Gentiles it just seems like all the same thing. Jesus is just another spirit, just another angel, just another demon—just like the ones this girl has inhabiting her.
- I. So even though her words were true, her identity was false. Paul and Silas couldn't let her advertise for them.
- J. By the way, can I mention that this girl is not free? She is in great bondage. So is every person who looks to stars and fortune tellers, and Ouija boards, and séances, and drug induced experiences to find truth. You are not free. You are in bondage.
- K. So what happens?

IV. *18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour (Acts 16:18, NKJV).*

- A. How many of you know that we live in a spiritual universe?
- B. And how many of you know that the name of Jesus Christ is the strongest name in our spiritual universe?
- C. With one command of Paul, this girl is set free. The demon leaves her completely.
- D. This is this girl's spiritual independence day. It's good for her, but it's bad for her owners.

V. *19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 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 (Acts 16:19-24, NKJV).*

- A. One woman gets set free.
- B. And two men get thrown into prison.
- C. Underdogs.
- D. How would you feel? There you are serving Jesus. There you are proclaiming the good news of salvation to people who never heard. There you are setting captives free in the name and authority of Jesus Christ. There will be a slave girl in heaven because she heard the message of salvation from you.
- E. And what do you get for it?
- F. You get thrown into the inner prison with your feet fastened in the stocks.
- G. How would you feel about God then?
- H. It could be that you are sitting here today, and you've done everything right, and still you've paid the price.
  - 1. You lost your business.
  - 2. You lost your marriage.
  - 3. You lost your boyfriend, or girlfriend, or best friend.
  - 4. You lost your children.
  - 5. You lost your home.
  - 6. You lost your health.
  - 7. You lost your status with your group.
    - a) You did everything right and got punished for it.
- I. You are sitting in a prison with stocks fastened to your feet; even though you served God, even though you sought Him and loved Him, and even though you obeyed Him.
- J. And that is why we have to say it over and over again till it gets inside our heads: your job is faith. God's job is outcomes. Keep the faith.
- K. So here sit Paul and Silas, in prison for doing good.
- L. Underdogs.
- M. And what are they doing in prison?

VI. *25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25, NKJV).*

- A. What was prison but another place to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ?
- B. They are praying and singing hymns to God.
- C. They've just been falsely accused.
  - 1. They are praying and singing hymns to God.
- D. They've just been beaten with rods.
  - 1. They are praying and singing hymns to God.
- E. They've just been thrown into the inner prison.
  - 1. They are praying and singing hymns to God.
- F. They've just had their feet fastened to the stocks.
  - 1. They are praying and singing hymns to God.
- G. And this is exactly where I want to draw out our imperative for today. When you are an underdog, what do you do?
  - 1. Keep your eyes on God.
  - 2. Keep the faith.
  - 3. Find your self in God. AND—
  - 4. Never let them shackle your heart.
- H. They might throw you in prison and fasten your feet in stocks, but they can't touch your heart. They can't lock down your spirit.
  - 1. They can imprison your body, but no one can imprison your heart.
  - 2. They can foreclose your home, but no one can foreclose on your security with God.
  - 3. They can take away your reputation, but no one can erase your dignity.
  - 4. They can tempt you, but they can't make you sin.
- I. Don't let them shackle your heart.
- J. They went to this man Paul, and said; we'll take away your money.
  - 1. He said; you can't, because I have a treasure in heaven.
- K. They said; we'll take away your freedom.
  - 1. He said; you can't because Christ's truth has set me free.
- L. They said; we'll take away your joy.
  - 1. He said; you can't because the joy of the Lord is my strength.
- M. They said; we'll take away your life.
  - 1. He said; you can't, because my life is hidden with Christ in God—and I will see Him face to face.
- N. What can you do to a person like that?

- O. Paul, in prison, felt more freedom than most people out of prison ever imagine.
- P. Why?
- Q. Because he had anchored his heart to God in heaven, and nobody could touch him there. Never let them shackle your heart.

## VII. Freedom

- A. The Declaration of Independence hardwired into our national DNA; a conviction that no other nation has ever stated before:
  - 1. 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.
- B. We believe that our rights come from our Creator. We are endowed by our **CREATOR** with our unalienable rights. Our rights do not come from our government—they come from God himself, from the Government above every government.
- C. The freedom of speech. The freedom of worship. The freedom of assembly. The freedom of travel and mobility. Under the American theory of government, the government does not give us our rights. The Constitution does not give us our rights. God gives us our rights, and the government is formed to protect them and then get out of the way of those rights.
- D. And because God gave us these rights, no one can take them away, not even the government. They are **UNALIENABLE** rights—they can't be taken away. That conviction, this belief, is what makes America the greatest nation that has ever existed.
- E. I am all for patriotism. I am an unashamed, flag-waving American.
- F. And I believe the founders of our country were exactly right. Liberty is a fundamental unalienable right.
- G. When God created mankind, He gave us free will. He gave us the freedom to choose.
- H. How we exercise that freedom is up to us.
  - 1. Remember the story in the Bible where God set the Jews free from slavery in Egypt? He parted the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptian army? He redeemed them and set them free, right? Remember that?
  - 2. Not even a month later what were they doing with their freedom?
  - 3. They were worshipping a golden calf.
  - 4. And shortly after that, what were they doing with their freedom?
  - 5. They were begging to go back to slavery.
  - 6. They were free to choose another Pharaoh.
  - 7. They were messed up; just like we are every time we choose slavery and addiction and victimhood over the freedom Christ died to bring us.
    - a) This is redemption: you are free from sin, free from condemnation, from hell, free from the wrath of God, free from the power of the devil, free from the fear of death, free from every addiction, every bondage, and every fear.
    - b) And that freedom is bought and paid for by the blood of Christ who died to set us free.
- I. Freedom has very little to do with financial status or marital status or health status or political status.
- J. It is your spiritual status above all that makes you free or not free.
  - 1. Question 1: Do you have Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?
  - 2. Question 2: Are you walking with Him and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord? (2 Cor. 7:1)
- K. If you can't answer yes to both those questions; you can't be free no matter what.
- L. But, if you can answer yes to both those questions; nobody can shackle your heart.
- M. Like Paul and Silas, you'll be singing in prison.
- N. You'll be free. Free to define yourself. Free to choose you path. Free to enjoy your life, no matter what curve balls you get thrown.
- O. Look what happens:

VIII. *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." (Acts 16:25-28, NKJV).*

- A. The prison fell apart and the prisoners stayed.
- B. Why?
- C. Because it didn't make a difference.
- D. Being an underdog doesn't make you a victim or a loser or a failure or a slave.
- E. Nobody can enslave you but you.
- F. And though God blew the prison doors off their hinges, and shattered the stocks that held their feet, Paul and Silas saw no reason to flee—because they had all the freedom they needed down deep in their souls.
- G. They found themselves in God, and never let anyone shackle their hearts.
- H. This story begins with a slave girl set free.

I. And it ends with a jailer set free.

IX. *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 (Acts 16:29-34, NKJV).*

- A. Somebody pays a price for everybody's independence.
- B. John Kennedy said, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty."
- C. Somebody pays a price for everybody's freedom.
  - 1. The founders of our nation paid the price, and for over two hundred years, we have enjoyed the blessings of liberty.
  - 2. Paul and Silas paid the price and the jailer got set free, spiritually, and met Jesus Christ.
  - 3. What price will you pay for your neighbors to be set free?
- D. The world needs you to quit being a martyr.
- E. The world needs you to quit being a victim.
- F. The world needs you to quit being a coward.
- G. The world needs you to quit keeping a low spiritual profile, worried what will happen if you stand up for Christ.
- H. Don't let anybody shackle your heart. Take it back. Take back ownership of your life. Take back responsibility. Take back your freedom.
- I. Our city of Redding, with tens of thousands of people who don't know their spiritual right hand from the spiritual left—need to see a tribe of people so free they sing praise to God in the darkest night.
- J. God has positioned underdogs like you and I in every corner of this city, that spiritually lost people, groping in the dark after God, would see the light of God's grace shining through you, no matter what your situation.
- K. You are in your apartment, you are in your subdivision, you are in your workplace, you are in your family circle, you are in your neighborhood, you are in your classroom, you are in your hospital room—you are in whatever place you are in because there is a Philippian jailer desperately asking what must I do to be saved.
- L. And he or she will never know who to ask if you let your hardships shackle your heart.
- M. People need Jesus Christ to be set free.
- N. He paid the price to save us. We can pay the price to point others to Him.