

BE READY!

Paul and Silas found strength in God and had put on his ‘armour’. They had the belt of truth buckled around their waists, the breastplate of righteousness in place, and their feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, they had taken up the shield of faith, with which they could extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. So how can we see the different pieces of ‘armour’ at work in the story from Acts we read earlier?

ARE YOU READY...

...WITH TRUTH AND JUSTICE?

Paul and Silas knew they had acted and spoken rightly – in the name of Jesus he had commanded the clairvoyant spirit to get out of the girl and it was gone, just like that, and in the name of Jesus he had set her free from slavery. They also knew that their treatment was unjust – without convicting them of anything the authorities had them flogged and banged up in the local jail for the night – and they were both Roman citizens. God looked after them and justice was done – the officials grovelled appropriately and personally escorted Paul and Silas from prison. We may never have to face anything like Paul and Silas did, but unjust things can be said about us and unjust things done to us. For our part, let us think, speak and act, looking to Jesus who will help us to think, speak and act rightly– and let us put out trust in God who really does care for us and will look after us.

ARE YOU READY...

...TO WITNESS?

If we’d been in Paul’s place after the earthquake, what would our first thought have been? His immediate concern was for his jailer (Acts 16:27-31), who had jumped to the conclusion that all the prisoners must have escaped and who was now so terrified of the certain punishment that awaited him that he was on the point of killing himself, when Paul shouted: “Hey, give yourself a break – everybody’s still here.” Paul and Silas also tell the jailer the good news about Jesus. When we put others first and don’t simply think of ourselves, opportunities to witness are there to be seized.

ARE YOU READY...

...WITH FAITH?

Paul and Silas had been thrown into the maximum security cell in the jail and had leg irons clamped on them, but at midnight, instead of feeling sorry for themselves,

they prayed and burst into songs of praise, an expression of their total trust in God. God responded to their faith, intervening with events that set them free – an earthquake shook the prison to its very foundations, doors flew open and all the prisoners’ chains and leg irons fell off. How does our faith stand up when tested? The jailer’s faith in Jesus resulted in action – he saw to the apostles’ wounds from the flogging they had had earlier and gave them a meal in his own home, celebrating that he and his household had become Christians. Have we put out entire trust in Jesus and committed our lives to him? Does our faith then show in our actions?

ARE YOU READY...

...WITH GOD’S SALVATION?

Paul and Silas knew they were saved and protected by God. God’s protection was at work in the way they were freed, the apology from the officials, and the support of other believers. Perhaps the jailer’s question meant how could he be saved physically. Paul turned it into a bigger question and the jailer accepted God’s salvation through Jesus. So let us be ready to seize opportunities that will lead others to connect with Jesus and accept God’s saving love and power in their lives.

Are You Ready...

...With God’s Message?

Strengthened by God, Paul and Silas spoke words that encouraged others – in the maximum security cell at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and praised, with all the other prisoners listening; and after their release, Paul and Silas went straight to Lydia’s house, saw their friends again, encouraged them in the faith, and only then went on their way – let’s take every opportunity to lift others’ spirits and to build up one another. They brought others to faith – they explained the Gospel to the jailer, and all his household too, who became Christians and were baptised – let’s be ready to share the Good News of Jesus with others and to lead them to faith. And they spoke words which ensured things were put right – it’s all too easy just to walk quietly away and keep things quiet, but this doesn’t resolve conflict, this doesn’t solve problems and negative feelings can fester away – so let’s us always speak the truth, remembering to do so in love.

BE READY!

So how can we be ready for whatever happens to us? Like Paul and Silas, let us draw on ‘the mighty strength of the Lord’.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Today, many Christians around the world are in prison for their faith. Open Doors estimates there are at least 1,750 Christians in prison in Eritrea in Africa.

Gideon, a former army tank driver, was imprisoned when caught reading a Bible: ‘When they discovered that I was evangelising, they threatened to punish me and send me back to the isolation cell. At this, Paul’s words came to mind: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. “What I witnessed and experienced strengthened me more than it discouraged me.’ (Source: www.opendoorsuk.org)