Tim's Treasures

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The ceiling creaked as if it would collapse at any minute.

Someone yelled, "Earthquake." Er rolled out of his bunk, slapped on his sword, and sprinted for the innermost part of the fortress. Door after door of the dimly lit prison was swung open wide. His mind raced. "The two most important inmates would certainly be long gone – this was the end." Sure enough, as he reached the inner dungeon, still gasping for breath, there before him, the door of Paul and Silas' cell stood wide open. They were nowhere in sight.

Fearing the worse, there was nothing left to do.

Drawing his sword, Er prepared to end his life. He held the saber with both hands before him, the blade's tip against his chest, as he closed his eyes. The thought of all the countless battles he had survived flowed past like a river of blood, a life of meaningless struggle, his mother's death. Then the image of Martha and their children – he would never see them again. Gripping the hilt tighter, he was just about to thrust the sword deep into his heart when he heard the voice of Paul cry out, "Stop….Don't hurt yourself: we're all here."

Shocked to hear Paul's voice, Er yelled for a light. One of his men rushed to his side with a torch in hand. What he saw next made his heart stop. Grabbing the torch, he swung it wide, scanning around him in a full circle. In the cells opposite Paul and Silas were the other prisoners still seated, all in shock. He turned back to the cell before him and looked with the torchlight; there sat Paul and Silas, happy, smiling. Their chains and shackles lay strewn about as if they had been shards of clay.

Er slowly walked in before them, trembling. He fell to his knees and, in a voice of a man that had just seen his life pass before him, said, "What must I do to be saved?"

Paul and Silas answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." As Er thought about believing in Jesus, a vision appeared to him. He could see a dove in flight that landed in a beautiful flowering apple tree, like those he had shared with his mother on her last day. Suddenly, something inside him changed. There was a sense of peace in his soul, unlike anything he had ever felt before. Gone were the worries of death. Gone were the fears of never seeing his family again. Yes, there washed over him a warmth, a love unlike he had ever known. Something inside him wanted to believe.

"Then quickly, we must go…to my house."

Yelling orders to his men to secure the prison, Er retreated out a hidden back entrance to the jail, escaping, for now, he and his captives were both wanted men. Silently through Philippi's dark alleys, they made their way until they had quietly, unnoticed, slipped into Er's home. Once there, Er had his servants bring rags and bowls of hot water. Immediately, he began to cleanse and bandage their wounds himself. After providing them with new clothing, Er had the servants bring out platters of meat and fresh fruits, and then he begged Paul and Silas to continue to share the words that had immediately comforted him in the jail with the rest of his household.

So, as requested, Paul and Silas began to share the story of redemption through Christ Jesus, his persecution, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father. When they were through, not only was Er converted, but his entire household, family, and servants. What had seemed a tragedy became a cause for celebration.

But not before they settled with the Roman magistrates.

Soon, there came a knock at the outer gate of Er's home. Hesitant to answer, he moved forward, knowing that if he died now, he would be with Jesus in eternity. All fear was erased, and he still felt somewhat apprehensive as he opened the front gate. Facing him were several of the other sergeants of the prison whom he all knew personally.

"Men, you must know I'm not giving them up without a fight."

"Sir, we're not here to fight or take them back into custody. They told us to tell you just to let them go. They are free."

"What, how can this be?"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, they said to release them immediately!"

"Hold on a minute. I'll be right back."

From there, he left the soldiers outside the gate while he returned to share the good news with Paul and Silas.

"The authorities have sent word that you are to be released. You are free," Er shouted excitedly, hands in the air.

Paul's face became angry at the news, quite the opposite of what Er had expected. Er's countenance quickly fell, as did his arms by his side, seeing his new friend change so drastically.

"They have beaten us openly, not guilty of any crime, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out secretly as if nothing happened? No, not at all, but let them come themselves and take us out themselves."

Unbelieving, Er returned to his men and conveyed Paul's message. They left confused but sure of their orders.

"Come now, let us go back to the prison so what is done can be properly undone," Paul said to Er. They bid the family goodbye as they departed later that morning, heading back to the last place Er would have imagined going, to prison. As requested, the sergeants told the Jewish leaders and magistrates Paul's answer to their dismissal, and they quickly made haste back to the prison, where they immediately had Paul and Silas released. Their fear of what Rome would do to them if they discovered they had beaten and imprisoned one of their own surpassed their hatred for Paul.

But before Paul and Silas left Philippi, they went to the house of Lydia. There they spent time comforting others and letting it be known to them and all the other Christians of the city that they were safe and freed by the very hand of God. Later, Er and his family came by to say goodbye before they departed, thanking them for the precious gift of eternal life.

Through it all, Er had discovered there was more to life than living day-to-day. He now knew there was only one true God, and he was his child. Er would be eternally grateful to the two unexpected prisoners who showed up one dark night that changed his life forever. And for that, all he could say was, "Thanks be to God."

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