

STORY 147

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

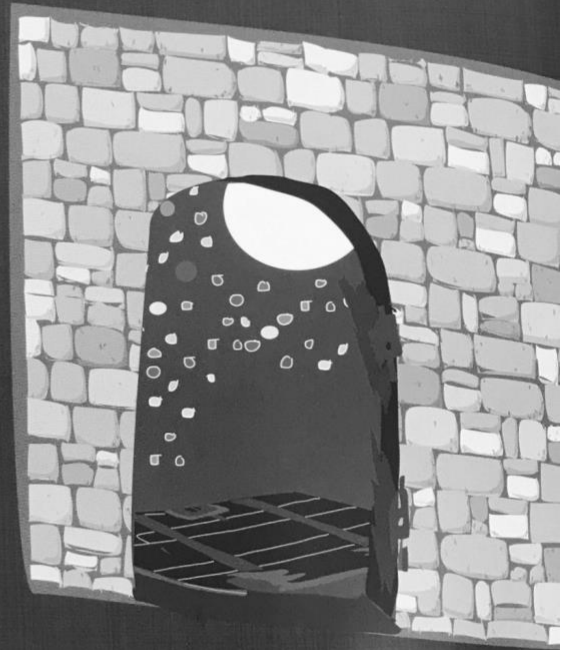
ACTS 16:16–40;
PHILIPPIANS 3

When Paul first preached the gospel in Macedonia, one of the very first Philippians to become a Christian was a guard at the prison. It happened this way: Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and thrown in prison for the work of the gospel. While the Philippian jailer guarded their cell, Paul and Silas started singing and praising God. Around midnight God sent a great earthquake to shake the prison. The cell doors flew open and the chains fell off the prisoners. When the guard saw what had happened, he thought the prisoners had escaped, and he was going to kill himself. But Paul called out to him to stop and said that none of the prisoners had left. The jailer was stunned and called out to Paul and asked, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Paul told him to believe in Jesus, and that is just what he did. That night the jailer and his whole family trusted in Jesus and were baptized.

Later, when Paul was writing his letter to the Philippians as a prisoner in Rome, he made sure to tell them that God was using his imprisonment in Rome to spread the gospel too. Paul wrote, “Everyone in the imperial guard knows I am a prisoner because of my love for Christ. And my Christian brothers aren’t afraid because of what has happened to me. God has made them even braver when they talk about Je-

sus!” Just like in Philippi, God was using Paul’s time in jail to bring the good news about Jesus to more and more people. God taught Paul that even a hard thing like being in jail could be part of God’s wonderful plan to spread the gospel.

For Paul, the most important things in life were to know and trust Jesus. Paul said that compared to Jesus everything else was rubbish! He meant that it was worthless compared to knowing Jesus. That’s why Paul



tried harder to live like Jesus and become more and more like him every day. Paul knew he wasn't perfect, but he said, "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Paul couldn't wait to get to heaven and see Jesus, and Paul wanted that for the Philippians too. Instead of getting excited about the things of this world, Paul said, "Remember, your real home is in heaven. Someday Jesus will come back for us, and when he does, he will change our earthly bodies to be like his glorious body." Won't that be

amazing! The world promises to make us happy if we run after earthly treasures like money, or becoming famous, or gaining a lot of things. With all that tempting us, it's easy to forget about the real treasure we have in Jesus. Even though he had been very successful before he became a Christian, Paul knew that Jesus was the most important treasure of all. You see, Paul was born a Jew and grew up to be an important Pharisee. But when God saved him he gave it all up to follow Jesus. Like the Philippians who first read his letter, we can imitate Paul's life and follow the example he left for us.



Let's Talk About It!

Who are the men in the picture?

How did the chains come off
Paul and Silas?

What happened to the guard?