

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
Pastor Troy Schreiner www.victorylutheran.org

Worship Series: *Joining Jesus on His Mission*
Service Theme: *What's Jesus Up To?*

Sermon Theme: *The Right Place at the Right Time*
April 16, 2023 Acts 16:22-34

I think we understand the connotation of the phrase, “He was in the right place at the right time.” Or, its evil twin, “He was in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Being in “the right place at the right time” means being the beneficiary of some positive development-- completely by chance. The man who just happened to be walking down the street at the exact moment the wind dropped a \$100 bill at his feet was in “the right place at the right time.” But being in “the wrong place at the wrong time” means being the victim of some negative occurrence, again, by chance. The man who just happened to be walking down the street at the exact moment a tire came off a car, hitting and killing him was in “the wrong place at the wrong time.”

You can probably think of times in your life when you've been in both situations. But what I want us to consider today is that we're always in **The Right Place at the Right Time**, when it comes to **Joining Jesus on His Mission**. And it has nothing to do with chance!

An occurrence in the life of the Apostle Paul illustrates that for us. On Paul's second missionary journey, God directed Paul and his missionary team to Macedonia, a region of modern-day Greece. In Macedonia, they visited the prosperous Roman colony of Philippi, where Paul and Silas met a group of women gathered by the river at a place of prayer. After sharing the Gospel with them, many came to faith in Jesus—most famously, Lydia, the seller of purple cloth who became a major benefactor of the missionary team. Right place at the right time, right?

But one day, things seemed to do a 180 in Philippi. As they traveled to the place of prayer, Paul and Silas crossed paths with a demon-

possessed slave girl who could foresee the future, which made her owners lots of money! But the girl followed them around for days, shouting, “***These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved!***” Which was true. But would you want the leader of the local Satanic Temple to stand in the back of church shouting, “This church is teaching you the truth about God. Listen to them”? Think how confusing and disruptive that would be for people!

So eventually, in Jesus' name, Paul cast out the demon. What an amazing blessing for this slave girl! But her owners were furious over all the money they just lost. So, they dragged Paul and Silas into court on false charges, and got them beaten, severely flogged, and thrown into prison, where the jailer put them on extreme lockdown.

Sounds like being in the wrong place at the wrong time! If God hadn't steered them to Philippi; if they hadn't discovered the place of prayer, or been traveling there just as the demon-possessed slave girl was passing by; if she hadn't been demon-possessed, and disrupted their ministry; if the slave owners had even a sliver of compassion, then none of this terrible, negative occurrence would have fallen on them. But were they really in the wrong place at the wrong time? And was it really by chance?

Maybe there are circumstances in your life that feel like “wrong place at the wrong time” scenarios. Frustrating relationships, sad struggles, or negative circumstances that are completely outside of your control. The possibilities are vast and varied for each person. But when we have these random negative circumstances in our lives, it's easy to see ourselves as, and live like we're helpless victims of “wrong place, wrong time” struggles that are out of our control; to convince ourselves that no good can come of them.

It would have been easy for Paul and Silas to think that way, as they sat severely beaten, bloodied, and locked away deep in a Philippian jail cell. But instead, “***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.***” Not despondently singing, *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've*

Seen. They were praying and singing hymns of praise to God during their unwarranted suffering! Do you think that made an impression on everyone else in that jail? Absolutely! From the other prisoners to the jailer himself, everyone was affected by their jail cell witnessing! Just look at what happens next.

“Suddenly there was...a violent earthquake... At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

It’s no coincidence that after this act of God, everyone looks to the two guys who were obviously connected to God. Instead of taking this prime opportunity to escape, all the other prisoners seem to follow Paul and Silas’ lead. After Paul’s quick assurance alerts the jailer that he wasn’t a dead man, he doesn’t go around slamming cell doors shut and trying to re-establish his dominance. Instead, he throws himself down at the feet of his prisoners and begs them to answer the question every person in the world is trying to answer, ***“What must I do to be saved?”***

Paul and Silas knew this wasn’t a “wrong place at the wrong time” hardship, but a “right place at the right time” opportunity. They lived with the mindset that if God allowed this to happen to them, he was putting them right where they needed to be to share Jesus with people!

What would have happened if Paul and Silas hadn’t had that mindset? When the jail cells swung open and the chains fell off, they would have run for freedom. How could they share Jesus while sitting in jail, after all? But the jailer would have committed suicide, and Paul and Silas wouldn’t have had the opportunity to share Jesus with the jailer’s household, and bring them all into God’s family through baptism! The other prisoners would always remember it as the night they escaped, but not the night they heard prisoners sing praises and tell the jailer

who put them in maximum security lockdown about the Savior who had set him free.

None of the events and circumstances of this story were coincidental. God knew that Paul and Silas needed to be in that city, in that jail, on that night, so that many souls could be saved! Although their jailtime in Philippi might have seemed like a “wrong place, wrong time” hardship, in reality God was putting them in **The Right Place at the Right Time** to carry out their mission of winning souls for Christ!

Just think how faithful we could be at **Joining Jesus on His Mission** and how impactful at carrying out our church’s mission of Winning Souls for Christ if we all had that same mindset—that every moment of every day, God has put you in the right place at the right time to accomplish his redemptive mission! ***“What’s Jesus Up To?”*** The answer is simple! Just look around you at your life!

Just like Paul and Silas, there’s nothing “by chance” in your life either. Your life circumstances—even the challenges; your relationships, acquaintances, and neighbors—none of them are coincidental. Not that we’re pre-programmed fatalistic robots. God gives us a free will to make decisions and take action. But God knows perfectly how all of it fits together to accomplish his purposes! So joining Jesus on his mission, just means paying attention to what’s going on around you!

Sometimes, churches talk about **“Missional Living,”** which basically means living each moment of each day like you’re on a mission trip. Just, a mission trip in your own community. Missional living means you see each moment of each day as a “right place at the right time” situation. Walking out to get your mail. Stopping to pick up a gallon of milk. Dropping your kids off at school. Clinging to your faith, even in hardship. Showing love to neighbors who drive you nuts. Working faithfully for the boss who treats you poorly. In nearly every moment of every day, you have the opportunity to interact with people God has placed in your life, to share Jesus’ love with them through God’s Word, and through your words and actions! And you can bet, just like Paul and Silas, people will take notice.

When you have that mindset, it changes your perspective about the challenges and hardships of your life. There are no “wrong place at the wrong time” moments when it comes to joining Jesus on his mission. Every circumstance God has placed you in has purpose and meaning for you and those around you.

In the weeks to come, we’ll discuss practical ways you can turn those interactions into conversations and actions for Jesus. But for now, just think of the impact our church can have in Jacksonville and St Johns County, and the impact the Christian Church can have on the world if each of us saw every day as an opportunity; each interaction as a mission trip; each moment as a chance to join Jesus on his mission of saving lost souls!

I encourage you to adopt that kind of a mindset, not because I’ve perfected it. Far from it! Even as a pastor, there are plenty of times when I ignore the mission opportunities around me, or at least fail to act on them. But I encourage all of us to better adopt that mindset, because I’ve also seen the impact it can have when God puts us in the right place at the right time to share the Gospel!

Like during my vicar year in Summerville, SC. It just so happened to be my turn to follow up on any first-time guests we had in church that Sunday. So I drove to one address I didn’t have the chance to meet on Sunday, and met a woman and her adult daughter. They’d come to our church that Sunday because we were the closest one. But also because their granddaughter/niece had committed suicide that month, and they were broken. God put me in the right place at the right time, so that they were home; so that I could sit on their porch with them for over an hour; so that I had the words to share Jesus with them; so that on my last Sunday there, I got to baptize them both—like Paul got to baptize the jailer’s family.

Or while I was serving in Appleton, WI, and heard that one of our members was in the hospital. Our church had four pastors, four services, and over 1,800 members, so I wasn’t exactly sure what this member looked like. So I went to the hospital room number I was told, and found a man in the ICU barely conscious, covered in tubes and

wires. I introduced myself to the family gathered there, and started talking to the man in the bed--only to discover that I had the wrong room. I apologized to the family, and turned to leave, thinking I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But then I turned and said, “I brought some comfort from God’s Word. Can I share it with you too?” And the family said yes! When I finished sharing Jesus with them, they thanked me and said, “His wife was in the accident too. She’s up on the 4th floor. Could you go visit her too?”

What I thought was a “wrong place, wrong time” situation turned into an opportunity to share Jesus with six people I otherwise wouldn’t have met if they hadn’t switched the rooms. God knew I was in the right place at the right time.

I wish I could say the whole family came to faith, got baptized, and became members of our church. But I never saw them again. However, I still got to share the good news of their Savior with them, and who knows how God used that! Likewise, when have a “right place at the right time” mentality about God working through you, not every interaction will result in someone coming to faith. You might even get rejected! And that’s OK. Because God calls us to faithfully tell other people about Jesus! And when God puts you in the right place at the right time, just watch how he will use you in the most incredible ways, to bring people to him!