Strategic Advancement
A Lesson From Paul and Silas

- My heart for this sermon this morning is vision, God's vision for Purpose Church and the powerful strategic nature of God's vision. Our God is a God of strategy and advancement, even when it doesn't look like advancement, God is turning everything around for His good! ***"God has Strategic Advancements for Purpose Church and for you!"***

- I want to break down what Strategic Advancement looks like and what it looks like for us as believers and thinking about what advancement really looks like to God, to the church as a whole I think of this verse out of Matthew 24. A little background on this chapter, this is a heavily prophetic chapter, this is Jesus speaking to the disciples at the Mount of Olives about the destruction of the temple and the end times.

- Jesus speaks on how nations and kingdoms will raise against each other, wars, earthquakes, people turning away from God and listening to false teachings, an increase in wickedness, a lack of love, but he describes it all as birthing pains. Because despite these hard things Jesus is describing he is describing the advancement of God's Kingdom and the gospel being spread. Let's read verse 3 to 14 of that chapter.

Matthew 24:3-14: "Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives. His disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?" 4 Jesus told them, "Don't let anyone mislead you, 5 for many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah.' They will deceive many. 6 And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don't panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won't follow immediately. 7 Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world. 8 But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come. 9 "Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers. 10 And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. 11 And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. 12 Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations[c] will hear it; and then the end will come." NLT

- Doesn't that sound eerily similar to today? We've experienced a lot of those things. And this isn't going to be an eschatology talk but I will say this: we will face hardships, we will never know the time of Jesus's return but in the midst of it all we can know victory is assured! It's already done! Despite everything going on around us and everything we as Christians and a church face, we will see advancement for the body of Christ by the Kingdom being spread! Spreading and proclaiming all over our world and demonstrating the reality of God.

- So if we are going to see strategic advancement in Zeeland, Holland, Hudsonville, Jenison, Grandville, all of Ottawa County and the surrounding areas, that means we have to step up and truly get active in our spreading the word of God! But just like God we need to be intentional and operate with strategy and wisdom. Let me define strategy because I love it's definition.

Strategy Google Definition: the art of planning and <u>directing</u> overall military operations and movements in a war or battle.

- I love this definition especially in the context to the Kingdom of God, because we are in middle of spiritual war every single day. This world and everywhere we go in it during our lives is a battlefield, a spiritual ground of war that we need to overtake for God. And when we spread the God's kingdom message with strategy and wisdom we will see more ground taken than ever before!

- Strategy is an art form, and God is giving us supernatural direction and plans for the exact movements we need to make, the operations this spiritual military needs to make, because I know with my whole being that God has big things planned for Purpose Church and I believe there are going to be huge victories here, when we allow God to direct and move us exactly as He wants in this spiritual battle. And actually not just allow God's direction but take the steps and move, we have to be willing to go! I love this verse from Paul's letter to the Church of Rome…

<u>Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile." NIV</u>

- How could we ever be ashamed? And the funny thing is we would never claim to be ashamed but judging our conversations and outreach efforts I would say we sure look ashamed sometimes. But the fact is: God has too much in all of our lives to be ashamed, to not bear witness to all we come in contact with!

We must strategically seize every opportunity to testify of the goodness of God!

- I believe God has been strategically laying the ground work for advancement through this church, in this community, God in His sovereignty has been placing the pieces and making the moves so that some Kingdom ground can be taken like never before! And all we have to do is open our mouths and share our testimonies, to be bold speak up! Share! God has ordained strategic opportunities for His Will and we have to be willing to step up! There is such power in testimony!

- The Bible is filled with the most powerful testimonies we will ever read or hear, and it is God's testimony to each of us. Now we are all part of God's story. As Christians we are to repeat the story of God's love to others who need to hear. That includes the nations around the world, and the neighbor across the street. We are to share the stories God has given us just as the Bible does for us.

1 John 1:1-4: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete." NIV

- In this passage we find that John, who walked with Jesus, was doing just that, sharing his story. He was testifying, announcing the Good News of Jesus to those who would listen. And I believe testimony, eye witness accounts are so important for our strategic advancement. We all have testimonies, we all have experiences of God's grace. And that's how the New Testament church spread the Gospel, they testified.

- We are to testify, we are His witnesses and we are to bear witness. The greek word used throughout the New Testament for those who were witnesses of Jesus is ***Martus.*** This had three distinct ways of being used being:

Martus: a witness
- ***in a legal sense***
- ***an historical sense***
- ***in an ethical sense***

- ***those who after his example have proved the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ***

- And then we have the word Martureo which was verb version of Martus so this was witness turned into action or the exact definition being:

<u>Martureo:</u> to be a witness, to bear witness, to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, or knows it because taught by divine revelation or inspiration

- ***to not to keep back testimony***

- These two words are mentioned in the New Testament alone well over 100 times! I love the context of the first meaning of ***martus*** and that is the legal sense, meaning a witness in court. Someone who has direct and personal experience of events they personally took part in, or of people they met. What they have seen and heard certifies them as a qualified witness in court. And notice we are simply witnesses giving testimony, we are never to be judges or lawyers for Christ. We don't have to argue for Jesus or try to give judgements for Jesus just talk about Jesus as a witness!

- There is spiritual significance to what we have seen God do, what we have heard God say! Those eyewitness accounts, those testimonies they actually qualify us to bear witness, they makes us qualified as a witness of God's Word and Gospel to the whole world!

- In the Gospel of Luke and the earlier chapters of Acts the term witness or martus is used very specifically for the disciples who have shared in Jesus' earthly ministry, and have eye witnessed his death and resurrection.

<u>Luke 24:48: "You are witnesses of these things." NIV</u>

- ***"These things*"** refer to all the miracles He did on earth and the understanding of the resurrection as a fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. The disciples can tell these testimonies because they were eye witnesses, they are witnesses by what they seen and heard, and the New Testament is filled with instances of them just sharing the testimonies they seen, the early church saw massive advancement of the Kingdom due to sharing what was seen and heard.

- Guess what? God didn't stop doing miracles, giants are still being slain, mountains are still being moved, dead bones are still coming to life! And we are the witnesses! We have seen and heard God do amazing things in each of our lives! And we have the written Word of God, we have record of past

testimonies and current testimonies, God is the same yesterday, today, and forever and the miraculous has not ceased and will never, they will continue until God returns! So don't be ashamed! Bear witness!

2 Timothy 1:8: "So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God." NIV

- Again we have Paul writing do not be ashamed of the testimony of God and the testimonies in our own lives! Like I said before I know God has some supernatural strategic advancement for Purpose Church and for the Kingdom of God! And I fully believe a massive strategy God wants us to employ is the testimonies of the countless miracles God has done in us! And we can't be afraid of what God has done in us and for us, we must boldly speak out our story! That is our job as disciples as witnesses! We cannot stay silent!

Just as Paul wrote here we overcome and see victory in our community, our families, our workplaces, our schools, our government, all through the mighty Power of God!

- So how do we combat an ever growing moral divide in the world? The power of God! How about the corruption in our government? The power of God! The breakdown of Godly families? The power of God! Every single issue we should ever face, every attack the enemy can throw, we combat it with the power of God!

- So the stories of God moving in our lives is how we take ground for the Kingdom of God! And today I want to look at one of the biggest witnesses of God's power, testimony sharers, and kingdom advancers ever and that is Paul. Who had one crazy testimony, if anyone should have felt self conscious about his testimony it could have been Paul. Paul was a murderer, persecutor, the pharisees of pharisees, but God saved him and redeemed him for great purpose!

- Paul was never once ashamed of Christ and his position as a follower of Christ! He grew the early church like crazy with church plants, conversions, and many mighty miracles and letters, he made so much advancement for the Kingdom of God we all need to take after him and his boldness.

- But today I want to take a look at a very well known account of Paul and Silas as they ministered in Philippi and were thrown in jail, this story is often shared

in sermons about worship and we will talk about that, but I think it has some great lessons on Strategy, Kingdom Advancement, and Testimony.

- This occurred during Paul's second missionary trip: they reached Philippi, a major city in the Roman Colony of Macedonia, they met a prominent businesswoman named Lydia and she received the message and her and her entire family were baptized, Great ministry was happening then after few days they were on their way to a place of prayer and then we have what happened starting at verse 16…

Acts 16: 16-24: "Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks." NIV

- One day they are on their way to pray and a demon possessed woman started to follow them for days! The New King James Translation tells us this woman was possessed with an evil spirit of divination, this poor woman was completely possessed and messed up. But her masters loved it, because she made them tons of cash.

- But just imagine this: she was following them for days! Paul and Silas handled it fine the first day, and a few days after that but then "many days" passes by and they reach their breaking point they have had enough! The Bible says: ***"Paul was so annoyed,"*** Paul was so over it that he then commanded the spirit to leave in the name of Jesus, and the demon came out immediately.

- Every other instance I can think of in the Bible it was a great thing when a demon was cast out, it was a moment of triumph but here there were men who that demon made money for, they were extremely angry. Their dreams of wealth were crushed, so they dragged Paul and Silas to the authorities and a mob was formed, they were brutally beaten, thrown in the depths of the prison, but guess what? Their story didn't stop there.

Acts 16: 25-32: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. 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 then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house." NIV

- They worshipped! They prayed, they sought God and because of that the Earth shook, ministry took place, the jailer was saved along with his family, and they were released from prison the next day after the *city magistrates actually apologized to them* for their wrong treatment.

- I think there are so many lessons to be learned from this particular account, from their time in Philippi, but today I want to zero in on four lessons in the context of testimony, and God developing testimonies for us to then use to strategically further advance His Kingdom. Those lessons are:

1.) Advancement doesn't always look like it
2.) Every Step You Take is Stepping Into A Testimony
3.) Our Worship Shakes The Earth
4.) Miracles Can Be Birthed From the Most Painful of Places

- I want to break them all down so let's first look at number 1:

1.) Advancement Doesn't Always Look Like It:

- How often have we been going through life waiting and waiting for God to move, answer a prayer, give us that promotion, use us in a specific way we

want, and in the waiting we think God just isn't doing it or isn't there? I would imagine all of us feel that way one time or another.

- We get caught up in wanting to dictate how God is supposed to move, what a move of God is supposed to look like, how we think advancement should happen or look, and because of our preconceived notions we don't even see what God is doing in front of us.

- I think that christians as a whole love to put limits on God, or stipulations on how or what He should and can do, we love to quote Romans 8:28 and then tell God what that good needs to looks like.

Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." NIV

- We need to understand sometimes the true good for us as a believer isn't what looks super good in the moment. That stage of God causing everything to work together for our good somethings involves things that don't seem good, but it's necessary for ***HIS*** good.

- Advancement works the same way, sometimes there is spiritual pruning that hurts in the moment but is needed for good fruit in the end to grow. God knows exactly what needs to happen for the exact advancement of us and His Kingdom that needs to happen. This instance of Paul and Silas has some prime examples of this.

- First we can look at some verses before Paul and Silas were even in Philippi:

Acts 16:6-8: "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas." NIV

- At first Paul was pretty set on going to the province of Asia, he tried twice before going to Troas, and once there, having a vision from God that sent him to Philippi, Paul had the plan he felt he needed to take but then God had another plan. Plus, and this is just conjecture here, I imagine in the moment Paul and Silas didn't feel being beaten and put in jail looked exactly like an opportunity for Kingdom advancement, but in fact it was. Which brings us right to point 2…

2.) Every Step You Take is Stepping Into A Testimony

- Paul and Silas were sent to jail and while it may not have looked like advancement those steps into the jail were stepping them right into a powerful testimony and work of the power of God.

- I'm not sure if they knew that while they stepped into that prison they were stepping into an amazing ministry opportunity and place of miracles. But that prison was just that, a place of mighty miracles! There were many miracles that happened in that jail cell that night, and one powerful testimony being made not only for Paul and Silas but for that jailer that night as well.

- I want to encourage you today and let you know that it may look like you are stepping into a prison cell today or a spiritual stronghold today but let me tell you, you are actually stepping into a mighty testimony! Let's look at Romans 8:28 again but this time from the Passion translation:

Romans 8:28: "And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His plan and purpose." Amplified Bible

- Listen to that, every single detail of your life is being woven together into a beautiful testimony and instance to show off God's great and mighty power!

- That means today it may look like you are walking into a prison, but you are stepping out of that prison into a mighty work and move of God, and it is all according to God's mighty purpose! And that move is a testimony that can be used to bring others to the Kingdom and bring mighty advancement for the Kingdom.

Acts 16:29-32: "The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house." NIV

- The Kingdom was furthered that night because Paul and Silas walked into the prison, no matter what you are facing today you aren't walking in to a prison or attack, you are stepping into a mighty testimony that can be used to speak the word of the Lord into others all for the advancement of the Kingdom! God's Sovereignty is so much more powerful than we could imagine, He has a plan

through it all and those plans are good! Step into that storm looking for how God can use you and grow you through it!

3.) Our Worship Shakes The Earth

- Sitting in the jail cell Paul and Silas probably didn't victory right that moment but You know what they did to adjust their focus so they could see victory and not defeat? They prayed and worshipped! What happened at midnight is what lead to the victory, to that prison becoming an altar, that prison becoming a testimony.

Acts 16:25-26: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose." NIV

- Their prayers, their worship it literally shook the foundations of the earth, God has told us many times our prayers of faith move mountains and here is another instance of their worship and prayers moving the earth, it brought an earthquake that then lead to miracles and testimony.

- Prayer not only has great power for miracles but it has a great power to shift our perspectives and how we see what we are going through.

The difference between seeing a prison or seeing a testimony is perspective!

- What eyes are you looking with? Your human eyes or your spirit eyes? Prayer and worship helps shift our vision from that of fear to that of faith. And that worship, those prayers it lead to mighty miracles, and let's look at them with lesson four:

4.) Miracles Can Be Birthed From the Most Painful of Places

- The Bible tells us they were "severely beaten" before thrown into that prison, they were stripped of their clothes and beaten with wooden rods. I can only imagine how extremely painful that was.

- But I bet this morning we have all faced some extremely painful attacks of the devil, some spiritual and physical beatings, but guess what? From the most painful of places miracles can be birthed. Ministry can happen.

Acts 16:27-28: "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!" NIV

- I think one of the biggest miracles of this is the fact they are in a prison and all the bars down, the doors are open, and yet not a single prisoner even attempted to escape. Maybe I'm unholy saying this but if I was one of those prisoners not knowing what was going on I would have ran out of there as fast as I could.

- But no one left, or even tried, they were all there and because of that the Jailer didn't take his life, and He must have known it was a God thing because right on the spot he was ready to be saved.

- And through this and the ministering to Lydia a few days before the Church of Philippi was birthed. Lydia, this Jailer, and his family became the founding members of the church, the same church the epistle of Philippians was written to that is now apart of the New Testament and used to edify and build up thousands upon thousands of believers all the time.

- Whatever you are going through today, whatever prison you are facing, you are building a testimony of miracles that can be used to build up the Kingdom of God by showing others the power of God in your life. The painful events and circumstances we face can birth not only miracles but huge growth in this church and in the Kingdom of God.

Call to Action:

2 Timothy 1:8: "So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God." NIV

- This verse is Paul talking to Timothy and I believe he is speaking into us as well, we are to never be ashamed to speak of the wonderful power of God that has moved in our lives, but also we are to never be afraid of the prisons we have to walk into to find those testimonies.

- I believe today God is taking us from prisons to testimonies and is going to strategically use those exact testimonies for his strategic advancement of not only Purpose Church but His whole Kingdom.

- So this morning I want to challenge you, this may be online but I want you to spend time in worship after this sermon make time to do exactly what Paul and Silas did when they faced their prison: they worshiped and prayed.