

Acts 16:25-34

What Must I Do?

6/19/16

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

(Pastor Prays)

There is a sense in which the book of Acts tells us that God builds His church by saving all kinds of people in various and different ways. After the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 when about 3,000 people came to Christ, Luke goes to great lengths in giving us individual portraits of people and, more pointedly, the kind of people God saves.

This story is a portrait of grace. It's the fifth detailed story. The first was the Ethiopian – a black man held in honor. The second was Saul – educated, erudite, ambitious and thoroughly Jewish. The controversial Cornelius, a Gentile who opened Peter's eyes further to God's Grace in Christ. Here in Chapter 16 there are two (3 if you count the slave girl from last week): P Lydia, a Gentile businesswoman whose heart God opened and she believed. Now we turn our attention to a cruel, heartless man known as the Philippian jailer. (He was) probably a retired Roman soldier and, as F. F. Bruce said,

“Being in the Roman army developed many great qualities and the milk of human kindness was not one of them.”

Yet, as the church is taking root and as the Christian leaders are suffering, in Christ, God is redeeming all kinds of people for His kingdom – and this is a story of remarkable grace. This story is not so much about Paul and Silas being set free from prison as it is about a really hardened lost man being set free from sin and how God is working in your brokenness for his glory.

A Good God Uses Tough Times to Bring People to Christ

God Uses Suffering Worshippers

For some time now I have felt the need to address the discouragement and pain that many of you as God’s chosen people are experiencing and to say to you: your hurting is not in vain.

God knows, and God sees and God is near, as He was in the filthy Philippian dungeon so many years ago. See them there in v. 24-25, *Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.* ²⁵ *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*

It appears that Paul and Silas are unable to sleep due to their appalling circumstances. They’ve been publicly beaten, their feet are bound and they are lying in filth with open wounds, and v. 25 says they are worshipping, praying and singing hymns to God.

Listen, when the body is broken and the heart is injured, the soul needs to worship and that worship, in pain, is a peculiar kind of glory to God and an effective tool for evangelism. The text says that all the prisoners were listening, listening to two men who are hurting to the glory of God, and that’s what I am asking you to do.

I'm not asking you to pretend or put a face on it. I want you to ask God, "How can I walk through this in a Christ-exalting way?" You see, God is always working and even in your pain, He is using you for His glory.

You're going to be alright. Why? Because God uses suffering worshippers.

God Uses Real Crisis

There is a real crisis in the text and I don't mean just Paul and Silas. They're Christians, and suffering is normal for Christians. I mean for non-Christians whom God is pursuing.

If you are not a Christian, this is you. The crises you face when you are outside of faith in Christ, those crises are designed to rattle your senses and amaze your soul so that you will turn to Christ.

Let's read what happened that brought crisis to this Philippian jailer. It starts in v 26 and we will read down to v. 30: *and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.*²⁷ *When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.*²⁸ *But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."*²⁹ *And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.*³⁰ *Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

This man is in an absolute life crisis to the point that he is ready to kill himself rather than face the future. Here is a real and tangible state of hopelessness. You might say, "Well, that's foxhole religion or a deathbed confession."

Look, a Gospel that can't save a dying man is no Gospel at all. A Gospel that can't be presented to a broken man is no Gospel. It's self-help and the point of the Gospel is to show us that "self-help" is an oxymoron. Why? Because we can't help ourselves! We don't become Christians unless we come to the same place this Philippian jailer is: "What must I do to be saved?"

So I'm talking to you who are without Christ or maybe you had some kind of "experience" but really are not Christian. You know it, your soul knows it. God uses us in the crisis. He does so to get you to ask the question: What must I do to be saved? Do! We all want to do! We want to earn, give, charge, pay back. We want to somehow have our hand in the process, to add something... *Quid Pro Quo*...Lord, I'll give my life to you if you will heal the cancer. Salvation is not bargaining with God. It's an absolute surrender to the redeeming power of the cross of Christ. You don't do anything but surrender. If He uses a real crisis, then He uses a clear Gospel.

God Uses a Clear Gospel Presentation

Let's back up to v. 29 and come forward. Look at the brokenness. V. 29-31 ²⁹ *And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.* ³⁰ *Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* ³¹ *And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

There's the Gospel. "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." This is not decisional regeneration. This is not someone trying Jesus with a 30-day money back guarantee. This is God breaking into a man's life through crisis and awakening him to his desperate need.

I said earlier that a Gospel that cannot save a dying man is no Gospel at all. A Gospel that requires more than faith alone is no Gospel either. In v. 31, Paul and Silas told the jailer to believe in the Lord Jesus and in v 32. *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*

They gave him careful Christian instruction on what it means to believe in Jesus, and I'd like to slow down a bit here and talk about what it means to believe in Jesus, because Jesus is Savior to those to whom He is Lord. When you believe in Jesus, here's what you believe:

- Believe What He Said

That He is who He claimed to be. Jesus told Thomas in John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Believing

in Jesus means you have trusted that Jesus Christ is the exclusive and only way to actually know God and experience His grace and forgiveness.

Believing what He said – Do you believe that? What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

- Believe What He Did

Paul says it with precision in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

That's the atoning work of Christ, dying in the place of sinners. And if you believe that, and I'm asking you to, then He died in your place. Believing in Jesus – What He said – What He did. That means you recognize him as Lord. If you do see that, then there is nothing left to do except what this Philippian jailer did. Turn from your sin, turn to Christ and be saved.

(Pastor prays)