



“The Jailhouse Rocked”

‘Jesus Saves’ Series

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We’re continuing to make our way through the conversion stories in **the Book of Acts** in a series entitled *Jesus Saves*. We’re seeing how the apostles and disciples of the first-century Church spread the saving gospel of Christ to the world fulfilling the great commission. Last week, we met a religious woman named Lydia in the city of Philippi, and we learned how God opened her heart by means of the gospel to obey the teachings of Paul. Thus, she became the first convert to Christ on the continent of Europe and the charter member of the wonderful Church that came to be in the city of Philippi. A cultured and refined woman of business and a woman who was devout in the practice of her religion.

But today, another convert is made in that city, a man who is a stark contrast to Lydia. A doubtless rough and worldly man who also comes to a saving and obedient faith in the Lord Jesus. These two people form the very first building blocks of a wonderful and successful congregation of God’s people. It’s a marvelous picture of what the gospel has the power to do in bringing men and women of every class, every walk of life, every background together through the truth, and making them one in Christ Jesus, which is what the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ has always been about, and remains all about today.

Since the baptism of Lydia, Paul and Silas have gotten into some trouble in that city. They found themselves at odds with the authorities and they are put in jail. We pick up their story in **Acts 16:23**.

Acts 16:23-34 “And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 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 chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the

prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

It was just another night watch in the jailhouse for this jailer, but the power of God struck that place that night in more ways than one. You see, the ground not only heaved and shook causing prison doors to open. The power of the gospel caused another door to open: the door of this man's calloused heart. We'll study his conversion in today's lesson entitled *The Jailhouse Rocked*.

Paul and his travelling companions converted Lydia to Christ after meeting her at a riverside prayer meeting just outside the city of Philippi. After her baptism, she opened her home to these men of God as they remained and continued to work to establish the Church in that city. They used this familiar place where Jews and perhaps even some others would gather for prayer, as Lydia and those women had that day as a platform from which to continue preaching to the people. They would go back there day after day, and the Bible says there was a little slave girl who was being used by those who owned interest in her to make money. She possessed a demon spirit and they were profiting off her divination.

Acts 16:16-17 "Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

You might think that Paul would welcome her support because she was speaking the truth, but no.

Acts 16:18 "And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour."

Scholar and commentator J.W. McGarvey says that the apostles could not risk having their mission and work aligned with that of demons and did not want people to make that association, so Paul cast the demon out of her. Now, while that was good for that little girl, it meant bad news for those who owned her because she would no longer make the money for her divinations. So, they became angry and they raised a ruckus, getting Paul and Silas arrested, beaten, and thrown into jail. By the way, this is the first recorded instance we have of the early Christians being persecuted by the Gentiles. They would meet great opposition throughout the Greek world, just like they did among the Jewish nation.

Characteristic of Paul when he was jailed—and this was one of many times—he didn't sit in despair, fretting over his situation. He didn't throw up his hands and give up.

Acts 16:25 "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

In that darkened dungeon, all was quiet that night except for these two men, bound in fetters, singing church songs and praying. As McGarvey pictured it, here they were sitting on a stone dungeon floor in the darkness, their backs bleeding from the scourging they had just received, their legs held in stocks, being cruelly treated by a city they had only come to bless. But here they are with heroic faith, singing and praising God in the midst of all of that. That must have been a strange sound to all of those heathen men in that jail and a curious thing to them. They're just quietly listening.

The jailer in charge that night had drifted off to sleep. He had no particular interest in Paul or Silas and he was just doing his job. Some speculate that he was likely a retired Roman soldier who was now providing for his family by being a jail keeper. He likely would've been a tough, calloused type man. It's certainly not hard to picture. Not a pious or humble man, but a carnal and worldly man who was carrying out his orders and making sure the prisoners did not escape. No doubt he would've been capable of great violence had they tried to escape. Such a serious charge that his life was on the line if he let any of them get away under his watch, but this night there was nothing to cause him to suspect anything unusual. So, as Paul and Silas passed the hours with their prayers and songs, he drifted off to sleep.

All of a sudden, an earthquake struck—which is nothing unusual in that part of the world. But what WAS unusual was the power and the effect of that earthquake.

Acts 16:26 “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 chains were loosed.”

It not only shook the foundation of the prison, but also rattled loose the doors and supernaturally, it shook loose the chains from the prisoners' hands and feet. It certainly woke the jailer out of his sleep, and when he rubbed his eyes and saw the prison doors ajar and got his wits about him, his mind immediately leapt to the conclusion that if he had let those prisoners escape, his superiors would have his head.

Acts 16:27-28 “And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

As I said a few minutes ago, the power of God not only struck the earth that night and opened the doors of that prison. The influence of God and of these men of God also struck that man's conscience and opened the door of his heart. Now, instead of towering over Paul and Silas in authority, he comes to them almost like a helpless child.

Acts 16:29-30 “Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

My, how his attitude must have changed. It may not have been an earthquake, but I've seen some things come along that shook the foundations of someone's life, that rocked them to the core, brought them to their knees, as it were. Might've been a great tragedy in their life or some betrayal. Their life came unraveled. It's a shame that it takes those things, but sometimes that's what it does take to bring a person to the knowledge of Christ, to open their mind and heart to the gospel, to break that arrogant pride that had caused them to refuse the truth for so long.

This man is now humbled and is at Paul's mercy. No, he is at God's mercy and he now knows it. He doesn't come to Paul with the high-minded presupposition of Naaman the leper. He doesn't approach the Lord with the reservations and withholding of the rich young ruler. He doesn't stand torn between two worlds, two forces in his life, like Nicodemus. He comes and falls down at the feet of the great apostle of the Lord Jesus, and just as humbly and sincerely as anyone could, he asks, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" Now, the Lord is in charge, so far as he's concerned.

I don't know what all he heard that night before he went to sleep or how much he knew about Paul and Silas who had been thrown into his jail. I don't know who he thought these men were or what they were all about, and consequently, I don't even know for sure what he meant at first by the word *saved*. Regardless, Paul saw a man who was amazed at what had just happened, and whose heart was now prepared to hear the gospel, so he answers his great question of the ages:

Acts 16:31 "So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

This succinct reply from Paul introduces another question and raises a number of issues over which there is much disagreement in the religious world today. First, is Paul affirming salvation by faith alone? That is, that no obedience to gospel commands is required to be saved? That there are no conditions of obedience in the gospel? Is he teaching that one must just simply believe and that is all? Second, does the jailer's household receiving salvation imply that even infants and small children are candidates for baptism? That they are saved through the faith and obedience of the parents? In other words, does this affirm the doctrine of infant baptism? Let's consider those two questions.

First, does Paul's answer to *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved* affirm that a person is saved by belief only, with no other conditions involved? People certainly use Paul's statement to try to prove that one is saved without being baptized. They will point immediately to this passage to try to refute the idea that baptism is a part of gospel obedience, and they say, *see here, Paul didn't tell him to be baptized. He just told him to believe and he'd be saved*. If that's what we're to conclude from this statement, then we have to conclude some other things as well. We would have to conclude that one can be saved without repentance because Paul doesn't mention repentance. Can a person be saved if they don't repent of sin? Repentance is not only a plain and direct command to every person; it is attached to the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 3:19 ""Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."

Now, if you can be saved without repentance, then you can be saved without being converted and you can be saved without having your sins blotted out. You can be saved without forgiveness. You can be saved while rejecting one of the plainest commandments ever issued from Jesus Christ Himself or His apostles. Who can believe that? Yet, the record doesn't tell us that Paul told the jailer to believe and repent, but perhaps repentance is included or implied in what Paul said when he told the man to *believe in Christ*. Could it be that here is a synecdoche? If that is the case, why couldn't baptism also be included in the command to believe? In many other passages, the Bible does connect the believer being baptized with salvation and the forgiveness of sins. We've noted those throughout our series. The record does go on to tell us this:

Acts 16:32-33 “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

You see, when Paul told the jailer to believe on Jesus and he would be saved, he wasn't necessarily finished with his sermon. There was more to be told. Remember that this jailer was asleep as Paul and Silas were singing and praying. We don't know how much he heard, but it's highly doubtful that this man had heard enough that he was able to understand God's plan of salvation up to that point. All that was said and had happened to that point had simply prepared or opened the door of his heart to hear the good news of salvation. When he inquired of Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved, you might say that Paul summarized the gospel by saying to believe, place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But, friend, that doesn't mean that there are no other things connected with the gospel that this man needed to hear, learn, and do because Paul went on the *speaking the word of the Lord to him*, which must've included the fact that he must turn from his sins and be baptized because that was the immediate response of the jailer and his family to the things that Paul and Silas preached.

That very hour, the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their stripes in remorse and repentance. And that very midnight hour—the hour they heard them preach the word of God—he and his household were baptized. You know, Paul and Silas were abiding in Philippi for some days at this time, but baptism was not put off until a later time. It was immediate, urgent. It transpired the very hour they heard Paul preach the gospel and they believed the gospel.

Friend, that's far different than what you see preached and practiced in most churches today in regard to baptism. It is absolutely contrary to what the majority of preachers you watch on television, hear on the radio, or who stand in pulpits across the land tell you about baptism. Shouldn't that tell us something? Paul was answering a man's question, who up until that time in his life didn't know who Jesus was, not to mention believed in Him. So, naturally, to believe in Jesus would be Paul's response to him. You see, the command to believe is used as a synecdoche. Belief is used to represent all that is involved in receiving and accepting the gospel. I think that's illustrated in the great commission.

Mark 16:16 “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

The fact that Jesus doesn't mention baptism in the negative in the second statement doesn't negate its necessity. Rather, it shows that belief and baptism are inextricably joined, and that true belief includes baptism because if one didn't believe, why would he be baptized? He didn't have to mention baptism in the negative. You see, baptism is faith put into action in the case of a penitent sinner seeking salvation. If a penitent sinner believes what he hears when he hears the gospel, the gospel commands him to be baptized and that faith will lead him to be baptized.

Let me ask this: in **Acts 3:19** when Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,” why didn't he mention belief? Is it because one can repent without believing and be saved? Of course not! We understand that one must believe under any circumstance to be saved. Nothing else in the gospel will avail anything if one doesn't believe the gospel. The fact that belief is not directly mentioned in this verse or in some other statements throughout the Bible doesn't mean that it wasn't part of the presentation of the gospel whenever it was preached. The jailer was told to believe on Christ, and that very hour—the midnight hour—he exhibited repentance in his changed treatment of Paul and Silas and was immediately baptized.

Acts 16:34 “Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

How did he and his household believe on the Lord? They turned from their sins, placing their faith in Jesus, and they were baptized. That’s what saving faith is and what it looks like. Saving faith always includes repentance and obedience to Christ’s command to be baptized for the remission or forgiveness of one’s sins.

For just a moment, let’s take up the second question: does the baptism of the jailer’s household imply that babies may be baptized or even should be baptized as well as adults? Look at the narrative again.

Acts 16:31-33 “So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

Let’s put those various statements together. Who was baptized that night? *He and all his family*. Who did his family consist of? *All who were in his house*. The same family members who were baptized are the same family members who heard him speak the word of the Lord. In other words, those who could be and were taught the truth of the gospel by Paul and Silas that night. There is not one word in the text that suggests that an infant or a small child was part of that number. You can’t teach a baby the gospel. A baby isn’t capable of hearing the word of the Lord. We’re told that all who were baptized that night heard the word of the Lord. Baptism is the response of faith on the part of the person who hears the gospel, understands and believes it, and wants to obey it and be saved.

You see, the Lord not only provided this jailer with the opportunity to hear, believe, and obey the word of the Lord that night. He also extended that opportunity even to his household. How gladly that man must’ve brought his family to Paul and Silas to hear them tell the glad tidings of salvation. He and his family were reborn that night. They turned a new chapter in their lives--in fact, were all given new lives that night in Christ Jesus.

Thus begins the wonderful Church at Philippi. It truly is a beautiful picture. It’s a church that was very dear to the apostle Paul throughout his life and ministry. They supported him, prayed for him, loved him, and were concerned about him, and it was very much reciprocated. Paul loved and prayed for them and thought about them continually. They enjoyed a wonderful relationship. In so many ways, this church was an exemplary Church of Christ in that ancient world. How did it begin? A wealthy woman from the upper class, refined, cultured. And a working-class man whose job was minding coarse and calloused prisoners who doubtlessly came from a dark and violent past. How beautiful that the gospel unites them in Christ!

That’s what the gospel does in this world, even today. Any and all can and should hear its message, receive it in faith, let it change their hearts, and be baptized into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, being added to the one true Church that Jesus established. The Lord doesn’t have a rich and a poor church, a black and a white church, a yellow or red church, a church of well-to-dos and not-so-well-to-dos. He has one Church and that is the blood-bought Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s what the gospel made of those people in Philippi long ago and that’s what it can do for you today as well. Even at the midnight hour, you, my friend, can and should obey the gospel and be saved like that man and his family were long ago.

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