

“SIRS, WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

Acts 16:16-40

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." 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.

But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.

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.

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed. (Acts 16:16-40 NKJV)

1.) "Sirs, what must I do..."

In almost every religion salvation has to be earned by a lifetime of good deeds. All of us are familiar with the Muslim belief that you can gain heaven by being a martyr in a *jihad*. That belief has been used by Islamic terrorists to recruit suicide bombers. In the Hindu religion your good deeds in this life can cause you to be reincarnated into a higher caste and thus advance closer to heaven. In Judaism heaven is gained by scrupulously obeying the Law of Moses. In Catholicism and Mormonism, even though Jesus Christ is called Savior, heaven is gained by the good works done in this life.

No wonder then that the Philippian jailer wanted to know what he must do. The Good News is that there is nothing left for us to do. It has all been done for us by Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus paid the full amount of punishment that our sins deserved.

If someone gave you a really nice suit for Christmas and then a few days later gave you the bill for it, that wouldn't be a very nice present, would it? When Jesus Christ saves us, makes us born again creatures, reconciles us to God, adopts us as a child of God and a brother or sister to Him and every other Christian, He doesn't give us a statement of charges. He doesn't tell us we can pay for it in seven years.

The Philippian jailer was prepared to do whatever was necessary. He was perplexed to find there was nothing he needed to do. He was like Naaman, the Syrian general, who came prepared to pay for someone to heal his leprosy. Elisha sent word to him to bathe in the Jordan River. When Naaman saw that he was healed he came back and wanted to pay Elisha but Elisha refused his payment. God freely gives His mercy.

2.) "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

When the jailer asked that question, he was thinking of the trouble that he would be in when the magistrates found out that the prison had been open and the prisoners' chains were loosed. They could have ordered him thrown into prison or even executed for such an offense. It was not until later that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. It was then that he learned of sin, damnation to hell as punishment for sins for those who do not believe, forgiveness of sins and everlasting life with Christ to those who believe. When he asked how he could be saved he meant from his immediate predicament.

Just as God saved the servant girl from the torment of demon possession, He saved the jailer from punishment by keeping the prisoners from fleeing when they could have done so and later by making the magistrates afraid for their own selves for having unjustly beaten two Roman citizens.

The jailer showed his repentance by washing the stripes on the backs of Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas went on to tell the jailer and his household how to be saved from a danger of eternal consequences. They probably did the same for the slave girl who was freed from demon possession. In Jesus' ministry He often healed a person who came to Him for a physical affliction and then forgave them of their sins, teaching that their sins were a more serious problem than their physical affliction. We know that the jailer and his household were born again and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord because he and all his family were baptized.

3.) "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.

The jailer and his household were saved by faith in Jesus Christ. He wasn't saved because he gave Paul and Silas a meal and washed the stripes on their backs. He did that because the Holy Spirit was already at work in his heart and life making him a new creature in Christ, giving him a new heart.

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26 NKJV)

We have been told over and over that we have to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and then we are born again.

Where does the will to repent, where does the faith in Christ come from while we are still sinners and still in bondage to our sins? While we are still sinners there is no good in us. All our righteousness is as filthy rags. It is only after God comes to us and causes us to be born again, gives us a new heart and a new spirit that we see what sinners we are, repent of our sins and ask God's forgiveness. It is not until God in His grace gives us faith that we understand the Good News of His love and are able to believe in Jesus Christ. That is saving faith and it is a gift.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV)

And in that day you will say: "O LORD, I will praise You; Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.'" Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation. And in that day you will say: "Praise the LORD, call upon His name; Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention that His name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, For He has done excellent things; This is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!" (Isaiah 12:1-6 NKJV)

