

## Acts 16:25-34

It's a question that usually pops up when there is some kind of a **problem**. "What do I have to **do**?" - I can't read my e-mail - the copier won't copy - I can't figure out how to use my new cell phone - "What do I have to **do**?" Usually all you need is an **expert**, and the expert can **show** you what you need to do. Although my experience has been that more often than not, the **expert** will simply **do** whatever needs to be done **for** you. It's not that you **can't** do it yourself, but it's just a lot **quicker** if the **expert** does it. Maybe in time, you will **learn** how it works, and **then** you will be able to do it all by **yourself**.

However, in our text for today that's **not** how it works. When the jailer asks Paul and Silas "*What Must I Do to be saved,*" they make it very clear that he **can't** do **anything**. Everything that is needed for salvation has already been **done** by **Jesus**, our **Savior**. The jailer simply needed to **hear** about what Jesus had done, and then **believe** that it had been done **for him**.

Let's look at the **background** for today's text. Paul and Silas had been sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people of **Philippi**. Things had started out **pretty well**. They had the opportunity to bring God's Word to some **women** who had been praying down by the **river**, and they had even been invited to **stay** at the home of **Lydia** - a wealthy business woman - and to use **her house** as their base of operations in Philippi. But then at a later date, Paul drove an **evil spirit** out of a **slave** girl, who had been making a lot of money for her owners by **fortune-telling**. Paul's actions had **destroyed** their business proposition, so they brought Paul and Silas before the local authorities to get some **justice**. The end result of their so-called trial was that Paul and Silas were **stripped, beaten**, severely **flogged**, and thrown into **prison**. They must have been considered to be criminals of a **most severe** crime, because after all that, they were placed into the **inner** cells of the prison, and were also fastened into **stocks**.

It seems **strange** to us, that God would have sent a special **vision** to Paul and Silas encouraging them to come to Macedonia and preach the **Gospel**, only to have them severely **beaten** and then locked away in a **prison**. But as always, God had a **plan** - a plan which became more **evident** to Paul and Silas as our text for today begins. We read, "*About **midnight**, Paul and Silas were **praying** and **singing hymns** to God, and the other prisoners were **listening** to them.*"

Up to this point, Paul and Silas had only found a willing **audience** among those **women** who had been gathering by the river for **prayer**. But, now that Paul and Silas had been **arrested**, they found **another** group of willing listeners in their fellow **prisoners**. Granted, they were literally a **captive** audience, but our text makes it very clear that captive or not, they were **willing** listeners - men who were listening **carefully** to the words of Paul and Silas. Isn't that **interesting**? Who would have thought that a bunch of prison **inmates** would be so interested in listening to **hymns** and **prayers**, especially in the middle of the night? Obviously, the words which Paul and Silas **sang** and **prayed** must have **touched** their **hearts**, and **softened** their hearts, as only the **Word of God** can do. We don't know what **crimes** these other men had committed in order to be **imprisoned** in the first place. But we **do** know that after hearing the **Word of God** from Paul and Silas, they didn't try to **escape**, even though they were **free to go**. They didn't **rush off** to make sure their family and friends were all **safe** following the earthquake. Instead, they **stayed** to hear **more of God's Word** from Paul and Silas.

We might do well to take a look at that **earthquake** which God sent in order to **free** these men from their **physical** chains. We read, "***Suddenly** there was such a **violent** earthquake that the **foundations** of the prison were **shaken**.*" This was no **ordinary** earthquake, as if **any** earthquake can really be called **ordinary**. But, **this** earthquake shook the very **foundations** of the prison. It **opened** every door, and it **unlocked** every chain. It may even have **knocked out** the jailer. When he came to, or when he woke up, he was so **distraught**, that he was preparing to take his own **life**.

Can you imagine the **fear** which must have gripped his heart at that moment? The jailer knew that the authorities would hold him **responsible** for the loss of all his prisoners. He knew that he would have to suffer the **punishment** which had been determined for each and every one of them. He **reasoned** that all things considered, he would be better off **dead**. That is, until he heard Paul call out that **no one** had **escaped**. **All** the prisoners were **still there**. It was **unbelievable**. The jailer had to **find out** what was going on.

So our text continues, "*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?'*" That brings me to the reason I think the jailer had been **knocked out** by the earthquake, rather than **sleeping**. His **response** seems to indicate that the jailer had been listening to Paul and Silas **before** the earthquake

struck, just like those other **prisoners** had. He immediately recognizes that the **earthquake**, and the non-missing **prisoners** have something to do with Paul and Silas, and the **message** they had been proclaiming. He seems to realize that the **answers** he is looking for can only come from **them**. That's something he could **not** have **known**, if he had been **sleeping** as they proclaimed God's Word with their hymns and prayers.

The problem is that although the jailer had **heard** the message of Paul and Silas, he had also **misunderstood** it. The jailer had the impression that there was something **he** could do in order to **gain** the salvation which they had been proclaiming. He was **wrong**. There was **nothing** he could do, because everything that was necessary to **earn** salvation had already been **done** by the Lord **Jesus**. All that was left for the **jailer**, and for everyone else as well, was to **hang on** to the **perfection** of the Savior. Anything which **he**, or anyone **else**, would try to **add** to what Jesus had already **done**, would only **remove** the **perfection** that Jesus had already **accomplished**. As Paul and Silas "*spoke **the word of the Lord** to him and to all the others in his house,*" the significance of the free and perfect **gift** of that precious Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ **alone**, became **clear** to the jailer too. And it **immediately** produced **fruits of faith** in him.

We're told, "*At that hour of the night the jailer took them and **washed their wounds**; then immediately he and all his family were **baptized**. The jailer **set a meal** before them; he was **filled with joy** because he had come to believe in God - he and his whole family.*" Considering the way they had been treated **prior** to their imprisonment, Paul and Silas must have felt like they were in **heaven**. Previously they had been **stripped, beaten, and flogged**. But **now** the jailer **washed** their wounds, received **baptism** for himself and his entire family, and even fed Paul and Silas a **meal**. And notice **what time** it was when all these things were happening. It was in the **wee** hours of the morning, and it was immediately after a **major** earthquake. Isn't it interesting that the jailer and his family were **not** clearing away **rubble** or looking for **missing** or **injured** persons. Rather, out of **gratitude**, they were **serving** God's **servants** - because Paul and Silas had shared with them the gift of **eternal life**. Only the Good News of **forgiveness, life, and salvation** through Jesus, can bring about such a dramatic **change** in human hearts.

So in the end, everything **does** make sense. God had allowed Paul and Silas to suffer greatly, as they were **arrested**, treated very **badly**, and even thrown into **prison**. But because they were in **that place** at **that time**, they were able to share

the **words** and **works** of Jesus with their fellow **prisoners**, with their **jailer**, and with his entire **household** - including his **wife**, **children**, and **servants**. Through the work of Paul and Silas, God removed the physical **chains** of their fellow prisoners, and He removed the physical **fear** of the jailor who watched over them. But most important of all, God removed the **spiritual ignorance** which had been plaguing them **all**. By the end of the night, **dozens** of people, who wouldn't have had the opportunity in any other way, understood that God **always** has a plan for our lives. They understood that there is **nothing** we can do to earn salvation for **ourselves**, because Jesus has already earned it **for** us. Amen.