

The Conviction of the Jailer
Acts 16:25-34

Our passage this morning is Acts chapter 16. We'll be looking at verses 25-34. So, I'd encourage you to grab your Bible and turn there, and let's look at this together. And I want to orient you that the book of Acts is about the early church, the founding of the early church and the growth of the early church, which began in Jerusalem and moved throughout the Middle East. Beginning in Acts chapter 13, we're following the apostle Paul as he starts in Antioch and moves to what's modern-day Turkey, planting churches in towns. Then, in Acts chapter 15 through chapter 18, there's the second missionary journey as it's known where Paul returns to these places where he had founded to see how the church is doing, and that led him to be called by a vision to the area of Macedonia, and that's found in chapter 16. And Macedonia is in the northern part of modern-day Greece, and we find the gospel coming to the first city that Paul visited when he went to Greece which is Philippi. Philippi was a military city, and Lydia is the first convert in the continent of Europe. She's a seller, an importer, of purple fabric which is some high-end material for wealthy people, very expensive purple, and she becomes a believer in Jesus and a follower - and the church begins in Philippi.

Paul is preaching in Philippi, and as he's preaching in Philippi, he encounters a slave girl, who is demon-possessed, that is creating difficulties for his ministry, and after some time of difficulty, he, in the name of Jesus, cast out this evil spirit (And this is the area we're at - the area of Philippi is the northern part of the Aegean Sea. That's a city between most of Greece and then the land of Turkey which is Asia Minor.) ...so, Paul became in deep trouble with these men that owned the slave girl that was no longer then able to do the fortune-telling that they had been gaining substantial economic profit from. That landed him in prison because they were so upset with him, and the community was influenced by them, that he was dragged before the magistrates, him and Silas. They were picked out specifically because they were Jewish. There was a good deal of anti-Semitism in the area at this time with the Romans, so they didn't go after Luke and Timothy the way they did after Silas and Paul. Silas and Paul were taken by the magistrates, ordered to be beaten and then thrown into prison. So, that's where we'd left off. They were at the hands of a jailor in a prison in Philippi.

The prisons in Philippi were not very high-class, they were basically brick fortifications, not for the comfort of the prisoner. He was not only beaten, but he was in stocks. In other words, his feet were stuck in these wooden boards that prevented him from moving about and were not very pleasant to be in but rather painful. This story of this time in Philippi and this incident with the Philippian jailor is really happening over a period of a couple of days, from Acts chapter 16:16 all the way down to verse 40. So, what I decided to do to kind of deal with this and the messages we're doing is I divided it up according to time periods. So, the daytime where he was arrested, beaten, imprisoned, we covered down through verse 24. Now, beginning in verse 25 we're going to look at what happens in the middle of the night, and then, the last message will cover verse 35 to the end of the chapter, which will be what transpires the next day. So, this message will only be dealing with what happens at night and that will be with the Philippian jailor.

So, let's read together verse 25 and onward where Luke writes, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household." So, there's this story of the Philippian jailor and his conversion.

But it starts with a series of surprising events, and the first surprising event was really the faith that Paul and Silas are demonstrating, where they are in prison in stocks unable to move, wounded, having been unjustly treated, wrongly captured, and are suffering. And their response to this was praying,

singing hymns of praise to God, which is not what most people would be doing. It is what somebody does if they're actually filled with the Spirit and able to see the blessings of God rather than the difficulties of their situation. Each of us has difficulties in situations. We never get everything happening just like we want. Usually that happens because we've goofed it up somehow. Sometimes that happens because it's just sort of our lot in life, like we have certain illnesses that come our way as "[God] causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Jesus said that in Matthew 5. Sometimes things just don't go the way we want them to because that's the situation of life on earth. Occasionally, things don't go our way even though we're seeking righteousness and, like Paul, are serving God, and people don't like it and pain comes; but regardless of how it happens, this is a great opportunity to see how we should respond under difficult circumstances.

Regardless of our circumstances, we can pray and praise the Lord out of the outflow of being filled with the Holy Spirit. When we are yielding our life to the Lord, when we, in faith, truly have embraced the Lord and understand the blessings of all of what that means, the result of that, from Ephesians 5:18-19, is when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we do these sort of things, we sing praise, "...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord..." We give testimony to the greatness of God in our life, and we are joyful. That's why Paul could write in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks..." We can do this because it's God's work in us, and we are not just living for ourselves and so caught up in our bad circumstances, but we're living for Him who died and rose again on our behalf. And that can bring us the joy that we have in faith. And when that happens, and people see us in difficult circumstances, and rather than hear of our complaints about how bad things are for us, but rather they hear our testimony of God's grace in our life - they hear that, and they notice it just like those prisoners did in verse 25; "...the prisoners were listening to them..." and they were seeing them respond differently than what you would normally expect. In the midst of difficulties in our life, when we respond in a Godly manner, people notice. And this is one way that people can perhaps be drawn to the knowledge of Jesus Christ because that's unusual. The norm is we complain, rather we should be able to see God's hand at work and "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be [e]perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” according to James 1:2-4, that’s what Paul did, and it’s a great example to us.

There’s a next surprising thing that happens in verse 26, and that’s an earthquake; “...suddenly there came a great earthquake...,” that freed Paul, and it freed Silas, and it freed the prisoners; “...the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened.” This earthquake is, actually, in an area that’s fairly common. They’re fairly common in this region of the world. If you look at a map and see where the earthquakes happen in the world, well, guess what? We’re in one of them. Right? We got a red dot over southern California. The whole state of California is a red dot. If you look down the coast of the Pacific in South America, there’s lots of earthquakes. If you look over to Japan, big, big, red dot over Japan. They have lots of earthquakes. Southeast Asia, remember the tsunami that hit Indonesia and then Thailand? ...lots of earthquakes. But if you look into Africa and Europe, not much, kind of just one real area, and that one real area happens to be where we’re looking at today, the area of Greece. In fact, historically speaking, the first person who was to connect earthquakes and tsunamis together (hundreds of years before this time we’re looking at in the Scriptures) was Greek because they have earthquakes in that region of the world. So, it’s not unusual. But, you know, it happens. Like, it’s not unusual for us. Yeah, some time might go by before there’s another earthquake. In fact, when was our last big earthquake? 1994? Right? It’s been over twenty years. How many of you even remember the Northridge earthquake? Raise your hand. You know, we maybe have half of us because time goes on, and we sort of forget what it’s like. So, that’s why we don’t necessarily see the immediate response that everybody has - some earthquake preparedness going on here.

Certainly, these prison areas were not, like, fortified to be protected of earthquakes. They hadn’t learned a lot about earthquakes back then, but they were in an area that was very common. What happened? Well, the earthquake broke the chains free from the wall. It freed them for the prisoners. Now, don’t think the chains were unfastened from their wrists. The earthquake destroyed the prison in such a fashion so that the chains were no longer fastened to the wall, and the stocks were no longer able to hold them, and they could be freed. Notice also that “...all the doors were

opened...” ... “...the doors...” plural, and the deliverance was for all the prisoners, all, not just Paul and Silas, they all could be freed, and God’s work here, as He often does by acts of natural occurrences like earthquakes, accomplished His will of freeing Paul and Silas. And caught up in this were also the prisoners, and they were freed. They were all freed.

So, the next surprising thing, and if you were, actually, to think of the number of surprising things, the next surprising thing is perhaps the most surprising thing and that’s when the jailor was roused-up from his sleep. He saw the prison door open. Well, he’s about to kill himself because he thought they were gone. But, no, Paul was found. He had not escaped. He stuck around; that was not what would be expected. And the reason this jailor is so concerned about this, that he’s going to kill himself, was because of the Roman law that had been in existence for hundreds of years. The Roman law was that a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was liable for the same consequences, the same penalty, of his prisoner, and so, rather than endure this, he thought he’s just going to kill himself because he believed that the prisoners had escaped. That kind of tells you something, I think, about the sentence that Paul was suffering, an indication of what the sentence was. At this point, there was no understanding that Paul was indeed a Roman citizen. That wouldn’t happen until later, and people that were not Roman citizens (that were disturbing the public as they were viewing Paul as having done) were in great jeopardy and possibly destined for losing their life.

The expectation of the guard was not that the prisoners would stick around; he expected escape. I mean, wouldn’t you? I don’t know how many prisons you’ve been to, but prisoners like to want to escape. You know how I know this? I’ve been to maybe one or two, but I see movies. Right? They want to escape. All prisoners want to escape so the expectation is they don’t want to be there, and if they can leave, they’re going to flee. And there’s not quite the system to track people that there is today, so you might be able to really escape and never be found again, which is why the jailor was so concerned and why this law is so heavy on the part of Rome to keep the jailors liable for their prisoners. Why he was roused from his sleep? He probably was just living adjacent to the jail so he could be ready to act in any incident, but they don’t escape, do they? Why not? “...Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” Why didn’t they leave? Well, I don’t know, really, much about the prisoners, doesn’t say much

about them, like, they believed or anything like that. They, maybe, just were kind of doing what Paul was doing or maybe out of fear or the earthquake was so fearful, but I think there's a couple reasons that Paul didn't escape. One, an escape would make him a fugitive. Now, how would that do with the ministry, even with his own teaching that would be coming up, like, Romans 13 of obeying the Roman authorities? This isn't how you act. Just because there's an earthquake, we're going to just escape. That would make him a fugitive. That would not help the ministry of the church, but I think there's another reason, also. In his love for the jailor, he knew what the jailor's jeopardy would have been, and his love for the jailor led him to remain, too, and I believe this is why the jailor recognized this and was so astonished, "And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas..." and recognizes that they surprisingly stuck around.

And he asks them a question which leads us to our next section - this ministry to the Philippian jailor. The Philippian jailor had been delivered and not having to suffer the consequences of a prisoner escape. But he asks something else here, something beyond that when, verse 30, "...after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Now, there's some real question of what does he mean by this? I think we can say that his concept of being saved was far short of nowhere near an understanding of what salvation meant as we understand it. I mean, for heaven's sake, he was a Roman ex-soldier that had been, probably, very successful in the army. He was at least at the level of a centurion over a hundred men, and now he's over a jail and had no real knowledge. Maybe, he gained some by the preaching of Paul maybe he might of encountered it before Paul was in prison. Perhaps he heard a little of the praising of Paul and the prayer. Certainly, it was more than simply physical deliverance. What he meant by "saved" had to be more than physical deliverance because he was already delivered. The prisoners hadn't escaped so he was no longer in jeopardy.

It reminds me a bit of when I was nineteen years old, and I first started to attend a Bible-believing church, and first began to hear about Jesus. I, looking back at this, believe this is the day when I became a Christian, when I didn't know a lot, but I certainly knew that my life was not pleasing, in great difficulty, and dead on arrival and destined for not good things. And the Lord Jesus brought hope for me, but to explain it all, I couldn't do that. So, I was in church, maybe, kind of, like you are. This was much smaller,

about, maybe, forty people in this church, and I was sitting there, and a guy I knew from high school saw me and comes up to me, and he says to me, Gerry, are you saved? He's kind of a nerdy guy, you know. not as cool as I was. And so, I didn't know what he meant. So, I said I guess so. Well, I don't know that a jailor really knew all of what salvation meant, just like I didn't know what all of salvation meant, but he knew enough to say whatever this is I'm interested. What do I need to do?

And there's a simple answer to that. When anyone comes to faith, you know, they only know a part of what salvation is. When you came to faith, how much did you understand? Now how much do you understand? I don't know how much we understand. I think there's some disparity of understandings in this room, but I can say we're all short of the full knowledge of what salvation means. But true faith is involving giving all of what we know of ourselves to all of what we know of Christ. And even if we don't really understand it, maybe we're not that sharp, maybe we've not heard that much, but we can genuinely respond. We don't know us that well. That's part of why we read the Scripture, so we can know ourselves better. And we certainly don't know Christ of all who He is, but what we do know, we could respond to. So, while our perspective of our need for God is far short of what our need truly is, and I think that's true of all of us, our perspective is short of what truly our need is; nevertheless, each one of us can grow and needs to grow in our understanding of salvation, and we all need to learn more and more about all of what this means.

The jailor needs to know about this, and we need to know about this, but how do you start? The jailor was starting by, " 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' " That's it. That's the answer to the question, "...what must I do to be saved?" There is no list. There are no tasks. There are no places to be. There is no content to figure out. It's pretty straightforward here; "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." The gospel is not complicated. Yes, we have a evangelism training program that helps you to communicate the gospel, and it's great, and I'd encourage you to attend, but not because the gospel's so complicated. It's because people are so complicated. We can communicate the gospel enough so that people can understand it and respond to it. It's very straightforward; "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Now, does that mean that somebody's going to

understand it all? Of course not, but we can help them get started, and that's what these words are, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." That begins the relationship with Jesus Christ and moves us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of life and enables us to then understand all of what salvation means and all of who Jesus is and all of who we are and what belief is all about. It's not only not very complicated, it's something that you can understand. It's also something you can communicate. You can get this down, and you can say it. You have the ability. Now, I know you're thinking, oh, yeah, right. I'm going to say this, and they're going to ask me a question, and I'm not going to know the answer, and that may happen, and that's okay because you don't have to know all the answers to be able to say to people, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..."

I'm not saying their answers aren't worthy to answer. I'm just saying you don't have to answer it. Oh, I'd like you to answer it, that's why I'd like you to take our Evangelism Explosion training program. But if you don't have the answer, you are not debilitated because, number one, you can find out the answer, number two, you can help them come and be involved with people who do, actually, have an answer from the Scriptures. That's called church. That's us. You can invite them, and they can come, and they can learn more. So, you are not handicapped to such an extent that you can't be an active participant. In fact, the Lord wants you, if you're a believer in Christ, to be helping to be a part of His mission to bring His word to the world, and your part of the world needs you to be communicating on His behalf; "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." You can do it, and as you do it, you'll learn more. You'll learn that the essence of the gospel is the Lord Jesus. You're right in the middle of this, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." That is the gospel. There's no other person. "...there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." ... "There is salvation in no one else..." says Acts 4:12. There's no other way. "[Jesus is] the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

In addition to that, there's no other name that's worthy to be conveying the title of Lord. It's not just Jesus our buddy, Jesus our counselor, Jesus our Savior, Jesus our helper in time of need, it's the Lord Jesus. That's the same word as the jailor said to Paul and Silas when he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So, he uses the plural, sirs or Lords, "...what must I do..."

Like he's falling down before them trembling. The answer is they're not the Lord. There's one Lord, and that's Jesus. And the idea of the Lord is He's the One in control. He is the One that is pre-eminent and is bowed before and no one else is. So, we just can't take the part we like about Him. We get Him all or nothing, and as we do this, then, that is belief in the true Jesus, not some made-up Jesus, not some Jesus that has been concocted by some religion - the true Jesus, the Lord, the same Lord as the Old Testament, the God of Israel, the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, that guy, the Lord Jesus. But then we have to believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation.

So, just kind of as a side note here you know the order is "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." You know, salvation or regeneration follows belief. This is a package thing. You know, yes, by grace this all starts, God's grace, nothing happens apart from God's grace. Ephesians 2:8-9; "For by grace you have been saved..." but then there's "...through faith..." which is the word for belief and then "...not as a result of works..." There's nothing else. So, God works by His grace in our lives through, then, our faith to accomplish salvation. So, regeneration follows belief. Also, belief is not simply an intellectual agreement, so when the word belief is used in the Bible, this is not something that we just say, yeah, I'll go along with that. Like the eastern religions that have many Gods; like we add one more, yeah, we'll add the God Jesus, no problem. That's not it. That's not belief. It's not just an agreement. Yeah, I can accept it. I can live with that. I can fit that in. That's not belief. Belief is not simply an intellectual agreement because there is no belief apart from following Christ. That's why He told the disciples when He came to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." And what did they do? They "...immediately [left their nets] and followed Him..."

There's no belief apart from following Jesus. That's what being a disciple is. That's what making disciples are. That's the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples..." And what the technical definition of a disciple is, is a learner. There's no following Christ apart from learning, so if we are not learning, we're not growing, and we're not following. And if we're not doing any of that, that is testament of your belief as just an intellectual exercise, something that's for you and not because you're responding to God. It might make you feel better. It might make you happier. This is not going, "...what must I do to be saved? ... Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." This is not seeing living for yourself is

hopeless, we're living for God. So, we need to be learning, and that's what happens in verse 32; "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house." Belief means we are following Jesus. That's what belief is, but it's only belief. It's nothing else. It's not doing anything else. It's not adding any other act in order to believe. In general, there's a response. Like, this is how, Luke 24:47, Luke's version of the Great Commission, can use the phrase, "...repentance for forgiveness of sins..." Repentance is part and parcel of belief, but the danger comes when we believe that repentance must include this - there's no faith unless you're baptized - there's no faith unless you stop doing this - that starts to then add some work to belief.

But there is a response, and what is the response? Well, here the response is; "...they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household." That's what transpired. So, there's a response that included getting more information, and it also included baptism. And I think the baptism thing here is demonstrating how important this is. Yes, it's not bringing salvation because baptism doesn't bring salvation. We learned that when we were taught out of Acts 10:44-48; you can see it's clearly, logically separated from salvation. However, it's obviously important. It's the middle of the night. There's no, oh, you need to be baptized when it's convenient.

That's how important it is, and it is commanded. You know, we do it through our small groups, our growth groups, our college ministry, our high school ministry, whatever is where you connect, and we are wanting to baptize people that believe in Jesus. And if that's not you, that needs to be you, but keep in mind the only prerequisite for salvation is belief, and when we see the "...whole household..." baptized, it's because the "...whole household..." believed, and that's explicitly stated in verse 34; "... having believed in God with his whole household." The "...whole household..." is believing, so don't think that, oh, we have some people there that got baptized, and they weren't believing. That's a prerequisite - belief. So, what happens? The jailor cares for the wounds that he was at least an indirect part of making. He was a part of that system. He's now caring for those wounds.

He's demonstrating a desire to fix what had been damaged. That's one other evidence of faith.

So, we kind of put all this together, and we see a guy... he was lost, now he's found. He believes in Jesus. Does he understand about Jesus, completely? No. Does he understand about the atonement of Christ in all its implications? I doubt it. Does he understand of what glory lies ahead for him? I don't think so. He's in the process of learning, and he's eagerly desiring. And in his eagerness, we see baptism. In his eagerness, we see learning. In his eagerness, we see service when he's caring for their wounds and providing food. And in his eagerness, we see great joy and abundant rejoicing. Those are great testaments to what we should respond with. May we respond to Jesus with the same eagerness of the jailor through baptism, learning, and service - all with joy. May that be us and the testimony of us.