

# What Must I Do To Be Saved?

## LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

It happened sometime past midnight after one of the most miserable days in the Apostle Paul's life. He and Silas had been walking to the river where they looked forward to another day of spiritual discussions and Bible studies with the new Christians and other interested people who would gather there. However, their optimistic plans for a productive day were frustrated when they suddenly found themselves dragged into the marketplace, lied about, severely beaten and thrown into prison. Paul and Silas had certainly known better days! However, the mistreatment they endured didn't crush their spirits.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).

Then an earthquake hit the prison, and all the cell doors flew open. Even the chains that bound the prisoners came loose. When the jailer woke up and saw what had happened, he feared his punishment more than he feared death. Drawing his sword, he was about to kill himself when the voice of Paul came from deep within the prison. He said, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" What happened next is the basis for this study:

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?" (Acts 16:29-30).

There is so much that we do not know about the jailer. Was he kind or cruel? Did he worship in the temples of idols? Before that night had he been spiritually interested at all? Had he heard anything about Jesus or Christians? We simply don't know.

What we do know is that he was terrified by his near-death experience, and he was thankful just to be alive and to have a second chance. Some power greater than anything he had ever known had shaken the foundation of the prison—and his life. Was there anything he could do to be saved?

## WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES

Before we look at what the jailer was told to do, it is important to realize that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot earn our salvation, and we cannot provide a worthy sacrifice for our own sins. In writing to the Ephesian Christians, Paul stated this clearly.

It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

---- On another occasion, Paul wrote to the church in Rome,

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6, 8).

Without Jesus, we are powerless sinners, incapable of doing anything that would save us. So, whatever the jailer was told to do on that memorable night, he was not challenged to save himself; only Jesus can be a Savior! But the jailer found that there were things that he needed to do to respond to the Savior's invitation.

### **THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS**

---- In response to the jailer's question, Paul and Silas replied,

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house (Acts 16:31-32).

The process of salvation begins with hearing the good news about Jesus. The jailer had probably heard little or nothing about the Savior before that night. So when he was told to believe in Jesus, he then had to be instructed about who Jesus was and what he had done. Paul explained this when he wrote to the Romans:

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Our response to Jesus begins when we hear about him.

### **BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS**

Faith is the word that summarizes our response to Jesus. It includes the following elements:

Assent – This is an activity of the mind. We hear something, examine it

and then decide whether or not we accept it. When we hear the message of Jesus and decide that we believe it, we are assenting to the truth of what we have been taught.

Trust – This is a movement beyond assent. It involves taking Jesus at his word. A Bible translator living among a tribe who had no written scripture was frustrated because the people had no word for "faith." Then, one day a friend came from working in his field, sat down wearily and said, "It is so good to have a chair to put your whole weight down on." That was the expression for which the missionary had searched so long. Faith (trust) means putting the full weight of your life down on Jesus!

Obedience – Faith that does not obey is not faith at all. Paul, in writing to the Romans, mentioned "the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5). James clearly stated,

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder (James 2:17-19).

Faith, then, involves mental assent, trust and obedience. It involves giving our mind, our heart and our life to Jesus. Surely that was a lot for the jailer to accept that night, but the earthquake had made a lot of things clear to him. The God who shook the earth and spared his life was worthy of his faith.

## **REPENT!**

The words "repent" and "repentance" appear nowhere in the story of the Philippian jailer, but they are certainly implied. When Paul and Silas "spoke the word of the Lord to him," they would surely have told him about the changes he would have to make in order to live as a Christian. If he had been harsh to his wife and children, he would have to stop. If he had bullied poor prisoners or taken bribes from wealthy ones, that would no longer be allowed. If he had visited prostitutes or gotten drunk at the end of a long week, he had some significant transformations to make in his life.

Repentance is a change of the heart, mind and will that results in changed behavior. It involves a complete switch in the focus of our lives, from serving self to serving God.

John the Baptist and Jesus both preached repentance (Matthew 3:3; 4:17). Following his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples that

Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations... (Luke 24:47).

In Acts 2, when the people were deeply touched by the message of the gospel, they asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" The Apostle Peter replied to them,

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38).

When people come to Jesus for salvation, they are called upon to repent.

### **CONFESS YOUR FAITH**

Another part of our response to the gospel is the confession that we believe Jesus is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). About this confession, Paul wrote,

It is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Romans 10:10).

One of the ways our response to the gospel is described is "calling on the name of the Lord" (Romans 10:13; Acts 22:16). In the early hours of the morning, Paul and Silas told the jailer to "believe in the Lord Jesus." Confessing with his mouth that he had come to believe that Jesus was Lord was part of the jailer's response to the gospel.

### **BE BAPTIZED**

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 brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family (Acts 16:33- 34).

Baptism, being plunged beneath water in the name of Jesus to wash away sin, was part of what it meant for the jailer to "believe in the Lord Jesus." It was not a work nor an attempt to somehow earn his salvation. Instead, it was an act of humble submission to the call of the gospel. In the New Testament, baptism is the place where and the time

when God forgives our sins and makes us his children (Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16). The jailer was happy to submit to baptism, and he wasted no time in doing so!

### **TO SUMMARIZE**

"What must I do to be saved?" is still the most important question in the world. From the story of the Philippian jailer, we have seen that the answer to that question can be summarized in the following way:

Hear the good news about Jesus.

Believe in Him.

Repent.

Confess your faith.

Be baptized into Christ.

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