

ACTS
Salvation Comes to Philippi
Acts 16:16-40

What is the supreme question of life? For most, the supreme question may be, “What must I do to get rich?” or “What must I do to get fame?” or “What must I do to get power?” or “What must I do to get recognition?” or “What must I do to get a husband, or wife, or security, or friends?” These questions, while important, are not the supreme question of life. The supreme question is, “What must I do to be saved?” The question of how a person can receive forgiveness of sins, release from guilt, assurance of life after death is the supreme question, and until this question is answered a person will never have peace of mind, freedom from guilt, release of fear about death or rest for the soul.

In Acts 16, Dr. Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded for us three conversions to Christ in the city of Philippi. The first conversion to Christ in Europe was Lydia, a Jewish proselyte and business woman, whose heart the Lord opened and she responded to the message of Christ. “. . . and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14b). The second conversion was that of a demon possessed slave girl, and the third conversion was that of the Philippian jailer. Our attention in this message will be drawn to the last two conversions, and hopefully, because of the message, we will all have a better understanding of the supreme question, “What must I do to be saved?”

THE SALVATION OF A DEMON POSSESSED FORTUNE TELLER (Acts 16:16-24)

Profession of the Slave Girl (16:16): “And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.” -- As Paul and his missionary band of Silas, Timothy and Luke were on their way to a place of prayer, probably near the river, to be with other Christians, a demon possessed slave girl began to attach herself to these missionaries. This slave girl had “a spirit of divination;” literally in the Greek this says, “a spirit of python.” This girl had a particular kind of demon possession connected with Greek mythology. Apollo, the Grecian god of music, poetry, fine arts, eloquence and medicine, defeated python, another god, by a particular oracle; that is, he was able to foresee the future and in so doing defeated python. Apollo, therefore, became the god who gives oracles to tell the future. He became the god of divination, soothsaying or fortune-telling. Beautiful temples were erected to him, and people came far and wide to worship him in these temples. The main temple was in Delphi. According to legend, there was a priestess of Apollo who claimed to be inspired. She became violently agitated during the periods of pretended inspiration. During these periods, she gave involuntary responses to inquirers which foretold the future. Apparently, this slave girl felt she was in contact with the heathen gods and believed that she was possessed with the same spirit as the priestess of Apollo. This slave girl did have the power to tell the future to some degree. She was not a ventriloquist, or an imposter, or a somnambulist (sleep walker) or a lunatic, but she was a demoniac. She claimed to be inspired of the gods, and when she went into trances she could tell the future. She was a medium or witch, possessed by an evil spirit who used her as a channel to convey clairvoyant messages, interpreting various events of the day, and predicting the future of people. Apparently she was a real “box office” attraction, and people from all around came to her to know the future, paying a handsome price for her services. This demon possessed girl was controlled and exploited by wicked men who may have been respectable racketeers or Mafia in Philippi. Whatever, this girl had a tremendous business that was very profitable.

We have multiple thousands of fortune-tellers in the U.S.A. today and they are growing in numbers as the Christian Faith weakens in power. Our generation has seen famous fortune-tellers such as Edgar Cayce and Jeanne Dixon. While they have predicted the future to a limited degree, their predictions contradict, in most cases, the Bible and cannot be from God. Their power is from demons who can enable a person to predict the future (Deut. 13:1-3). Unless God brings a mighty spiritual revival to our country, demonic activity of every type will increase and become more open and blatant against Christ and His kingdom.

Proclamation of a Demoniac (16:17): “Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saing, ’These men bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” -- This certainly is not the kind of speech we would expect to come from a demoniac. This demon possessed fortune-teller spoke what was absolute truth. She kept repeating to everyone that the missionaries were from God and proclaimed the way of salvation. Why would a demon possessed person support these missionaries? It was a subtle Satanic attack to get an alliance of true Christianity and cultic demon possession. Satan had suggested to her that she try to get Paul to link up with her Greek mythology, cultic practices and demonism. Before Satan and his demons resorted to violence and antagonism to defeat Christ, they would first attempt alliance with the gospel of Christ. If the slave girl could get the favor of the missionaries, she could then get cooperation, and if she could get cooperation by mixing truth and error, then she could bring about compromise so as to destroy the true gospel of Christ. The Devil loves to mix truth and error so as to confuse people as to the truth.

We who are true Bible-believing Christians must be careful with words that are being thrown around us. American theological circles like to use words such as “toleration” or “compromise” or “cooperation.” Liberals, modernists and cultists, who in my opinion are demon obsessed if not possessed, want all Christians to drop all doctrinal distinctions and enter into a spirit of love, cooperation and compromise. These people have some truth mixed with a lot of error. They deny the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, a literal second coming of Christ and many other basic Christian doctrines. As true Christians we cannot, must not and will not make a compromise with the forces of darkness and evil. To follow men who deny the fundamentals of the Christian Faith or to stay in churches which deny fundamental doctrine is to be in alliance with demons and error.

“Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty” (II Cor. 6:17, 18).

Possession by a Demon Exorcized (16:18): “And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!’ And it came out at the very moment.” -- The words “greatly annoyed” could be translated “deeply troubled.” Paul was deeply troubled in his soul about this demon possessed girl and saw clearly where her line of attack would lead. He knew only bad would come about if he recognized her testimony and linked up with her. He, therefore, exorcized the demon. In the name and authority of Christ, he set her free.

Should Christians seek to cast out demons today? Yes, but they must do it through prayer. Apparently the Apostle Paul had special powers not available to us today, but exorcism by prayer should be attempted, but it is very serious business. In my fifteen years as a pastor, I have had only two encounters with what I thought was demon possession. Once in Dallas, Texas a woman wanted to speak to me. She was in her forties. I invited her home where Carol would be close by. When she came, she had been drinking but she was not totally drunk. We talked, and every time I mentioned the word “God” she automatically blurted out a certain swear word. And every time I mentioned the name “Christ” she involuntarily belched out another curse word. This went on for about an hour. I sensed that I was dealing with a demon, so I attempted to cast it out by prayer. First I prayed that God would protect me, my wife and children, putting a hedge about us so as not to be attacked by the demons. Then I prayed for Christ to release the demon in this woman. She calmed down almost immediately, but I do not believe the evil spirit came out of her. She left and I never saw her again.

Perversion by the Enemies of the Gospel (16:19-21): “But when her masters saw that their hope of profit it was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities.” -- This young, demon possessed girl was miraculously saved and delivered, and this was a tremendous blessing to her. However, the Devil had not given up. He turned from the scheme of alliance to antagonism. He began to stir opposition to Christ and His servants. Violence was now resorted to, and it seems as though the Devil never learns that persecution causes the church to grow, not decrease. God would take this persecution, which was permitted by Him, and use it for the furtherance of the gospel in Philippi. Why this violence? Because Satan's kingdom was being threatened. Also, the message of Christ had caused a fortune-teller to give up her lucrative business. There was no more profit, and when these racketeers were being hurt financially, they began to buck. The gospel struck

close to home and the Philippian Mafia struck back.

Unsaved men really care nothing about Christianity until Christianity somehow affects them, and then they raise opposition to the Truth. Notice at Philippi the conversion of one slave girl put a whole racket out of business. The best way to fight crime in any city is to preach Christ to people, trusting the Holy Spirit to win men for Christ. The way to break crime, whether it be pornography, prostitution, drugs, illegal liquor traffic, gambling or whatever is to preach Christ with power. However, we must be willing to suffer the persecution which will certainly come when racketeers and respectable people are financially affected.

“And when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, ‘These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews.’” -- Immediately a false claim was being brought against the missionaries. It was true that the conversion of the slave girl, had dried up a very big source of money and crime, but Paul and Silas were not troublemakers. Notice the reference to Jews. These Gentiles hated Jews, and they did not know the difference between Jews and Jewish-Christians. They, therefore, appealed to the anti-Semitism of these proud Gentile, Roman citizens to stir their emotions against the missionaries.

“And proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.” -- Now the racketeers claimed to be good Romans who abided by the law. Actually, they did not care one whit about the law. They only wanted to make money. Men often put on a big front of being for law and other civic things, when their real motivation is business interests. The term “customs” means “religious rites” or “form of worship.” These hypocritical citizens charged the missionaries with introducing a new religion. This was crucial, for all religions had to be approved by the State, and they said that Christianity was not authorized by Roman law, which was absolutely true. These accusers actually cared nothing for religion because their god was money. They won the crowd over by appealing to their pride as Roman citizens, zealous for the law. This, too, would stir the emotions of the crowd.

Punishment for the Heralds of the Gospel (16:22-24): “And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.” -- Logic was cast to the wind. Emotions took over. This was a lynch mob who were ready to kill the missionaries even without a trial. According to Roman law, a man to be beaten was stripped down to his underwear (loin cloth), exposing his back and legs. Then with canes or ropes about three-quarter inches thick, the victim was beaten until the back was bloody and raw. By Jewish laws only forty lashes could be given so they usually stopped at thirty-nine. But the Romans had no such law and they beat a man as many times as they wished, almost always over forty lashes (II Cor. 11:23). After being beaten to a pulp, they threw Paul and Silas in jail.

“And he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks.” -- The jailer, desirous to guard the missionaries well, threw them into the inner prison, a subterranean dungeon, where there was poor ventilation, little or no light, dampness, rats and putrefying bodies. They were placed in stocks where their legs were stretched wide so as to make them as uncomfortable as possible. What discomfort they experienced -- backs torn and bleeding, legs in horrible pain, and they could only sit up, for to lie down was impossible because of the excruciating pain to the flayed back. These were horrible circumstances but God had not failed His people, and this imprisonment was all part of His plan to establish a Christian local church in Philippi.

THE SALVATION OF A JAILER (Acts 16:25-40)

Testimony of Paul and Silas (16:25): “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening.” -- What was the mental attitude of Paul and Silas? Did they say, “O Lord, why did you let this happen to us? Why are you allowing us to be treated so badly when we are your children?” No, they were praying and singing so loud that prisoners all over the jail could hear their voices. They turned the whole situation into a praise and prayer service. What a positive mental attitude for Christ in the midst of the worst kind of circumstances. Why could they do this? They knew God was in control of all the circumstances and could deliver them when He was ready. They were applying biblical truth to their situation.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thess. 5:18).

Their confidence was in a sovereign God. My friends, this may have been the greatest hymn sing of all time. What were they singing? We are not told but most believe they were singing psalms. Perhaps they were singing Psalm 100:

“Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.
Know that the LORD Himself is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter His gate with thanksgiving,
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him; bless His name.
For the LORD is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting,
And His faithfulness to all generations.”

Perhaps they were chanting and harmonizing such Scripture verses as Isaiah 45:22 which says, “Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.” Whatever they were singing caused the other prisoners to listen intently. The prisoners must have been stunned, for in most jails there is cursing, grumbling and bitter spirits, but these men were praising God. They knew these two prisoners were different and had something that gave them victory in the midst of trials.

The unsaved world, for the most part, is not interested in our Christian doctrine, but they are looking to see whether the God Christians claim to follow stabilizes them in the midst of intense pressure. If they can see this, then they may be interested in knowing the Christ Christians claim to follow.

Andrew Murray said there are four anchors to remember in suffering. They are: (1) I am here by God's appointment for He brought me here; (2) I am here in His keeping, for God will grant me grace and love to live as His child; (3) I am here under His training, for He has many lessons He intends for me to learn; and (4) I am here for His time, for He will bring me out of the suffering when He is ready.

Terrible Earthquake (16:26): “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.” -- It was not unusual for an earthquake to take place in northern Macedonia. The earthquake was not supernatural but the timing of it was supernatural. God brought the earthquake at precisely the right moment. The fact that all the doors were open and all chains had come off hands and feet was also a miracle.

Why the earthquake? First, to confirm to Paul and Silas that God was with them. When we pray, God does earth-shaking things. Second, to cause the prisoners to know that the True God answers prayer. Third, to shake up the Philippian jailer so as to make him face a Christless eternity so as to drive him to Jesus Christ.

What a contrast as to the various ways God chooses to save people. With Lydia, the Lord quietly opened her heart and she responded to Christ. With the demon possessed girl, He cast out a demon, a rather exciting conversion. With the jailer, God brought an earthquake, which was a dynamic experience. Each person was equally saved, but none of the three had exactly the same circumstances.

It took an earthquake to start the jailer to thinking about his soul. What will it take, my non-Christian friend, to start

you thinking about eternity? Will it take a death of a loved one, or a sickness, or a financial setback, or the breakup of a marriage?

Trying to Commit Suicide (16:27, 28): “And when the jailer had been aroused out of sleep and had seen 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 yourself no harm, for we are all here!’” -- According to Roman law, any jailer who had a prisoner escape, would pay for that escape with his own life. The jailer, sensing guilt and frustration, did what many Romans did to save honor. He pulled out his sword, put it point up to his heart, and was about to fall on it. Suicide to pagan Romans was considered a duty and a virtue under certain circumstances. But when Paul either saw him silhouetted in the light of the door, or heard him draw his sword, he said, “Stop, do not kill yourself. No prisoner has escaped.” Now this was another miracle. God had providentially kept all the prisoners from escaping. Who knows, perhaps some or all of them had become Christians by this time.

Trembling with Fear (16:29): “And he called for lights, and he rushed in and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas.” -- The jailer was trembling for a number of reasons: (1) he feared the earthquake; (2) he was amazed that the prisoners were still there; (3) he was confounded at the calmness of Paul and Silas; and (4) he was overwhelmed with the presence of God. Just a few moments before, this jailer looked down the edge of his sword and was about to pass into eternity, and he had no answer for life after death. At this point, he came under great conviction of his sins. He was an awakened sinner but he was not yet saved. He was trembling with fear because God was convicting and drawing him to Christ.

The Ultimate Question (16:30, 31): “And after he brought them out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” -- God had now so worked in this jailer's life that he was driven to ask the ultimate question of life: “What must I do to be saved?” He certainly was not talking about physical deliverance because no prisoner had escaped; his physical life was not in danger. He was asking about spiritual deliverance from the bondage of sin and death. Where did the jailer get enough information to ask this intelligent question? He may have heard the testimony of the slave girl but shrugged it off. He surely knew why Paul and Silas were thrown in jail. Surely he heard Paul and Silas singing and praying in prison. Perhaps Paul and Silas had an opportunity to witness to him. Whatever, he was asking how to be saved from sin, guilt, habits and hell.

For a person to be truly saved, he must experience the convicting and drawing work of God whereby a person sees his or her sinfulness before a holy God, realizes that his soul is lost and condemned to a Christless eternity. But that saves no one. One cannot be saved without this, but that is not salvation. Many folks have experienced the convicting work of the Spirit of God and never been saved.

“And they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved, you and your household.’” -- Paul and Silas sensing that God was convicting and drawing this man, commanded him to believe in Christ. They did not ask, beg or encourage but commanded him to rest his sinful Roman soul on Jesus Christ for salvation.

Notice that the object of salvation is Jesus as Lord. To be saved one must accept Jesus as Savior and bow to Him as Lord, so as to give Him the right to rule in the life. Notice also that salvation is personal. It says, “you shall be saved.” Each person must believe for himself. Parents, friends and ministers cannot believe for a person. It must be a personal act of faith in Christ. Notice the certainty of salvation in that when a person believes in Christ he shall be saved. A person's entire salvation is taken care of, past, present and future, the moment he commits to Christ.

What does it mean to believe in Christ? Many people say they believe in Christ but are not saved. To believe means to trust, commit, rely upon. It is not enough to believe about Christ intellectually, but one must believe on and in Christ. To believe in Christ is to abandon to Christ as our only hope of salvation. We stop trusting in self, human works, culture, the church, our baptism, our confirmation and we trust only in Christ and no one else to save us. He becomes our Savior, God and Master.

Notice once again that it is not good works, or theology, or religious ritual, or church membership which saves us. It is faith in Christ. Notice once again that it does not say believe in Calvin, Luther, Augustine or even the Apostles, but believe in Christ.

Quite often you will hear Christians say., “You don't have to do anything for salvation, except believe in Christ.“ Is not faith something we do? Yes, faith in Christ is what every man must exercise if he is to be saved. God does not believe for a man; a man believes by an act of his will. Man most certainly does do something to appropriate salvation. He believes. Is not faith then a work? No, faith is a gift from God, and it is God who works to bring a man to faith in Christ. Yet, a man's responsibility to be saved is to believe in Christ. He will not and cannot be saved until he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ with the mind, the heart, the will (volition, intellect and sensibility).

The words, “You and your household,” is not a promise that if a father believes his household will automatically believe as well, nor is it saying that a father’s faith saves his household. It means that the household would be saved if they would believe in Christ also.

True Evidence of Salvation (16:32-34): “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with those in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and 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.” -- The jailer and his family demonstrated they believed in Christ by being water baptized. Conversion always means a changed life, and this new life became evident immediately in the life of the jailer. Before his conversion, he was hardened to Paul and Silas; he cared nothing for their pain and suffering. Now as a true Christian, he took them and cared for their wounds and fed them. The person of Christ softened, tenderized and made gentle this hardened, worldly sinner. He was showing love for his Christian brethren. Only Jesus Christ can radically change a man's life like this. The way we know the jailer was truly saved is that good works flowed from his life.

Tough Stand by Paul (16:35-39): “Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen saying, ‘Release these men.’” -- We do not know for sure why the authorities decided to release Paul and Silas. Perhaps these superstitious pagans knew they had treated Paul and Silas wrong and felt that the earthquake was a judgment from their gods. More likely, the jailer put in a good word for Paul and Silas with the authorities.

“And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore come out and go in peace.’ But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.’ And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.” -- Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and Roman law said to punish a Roman citizen without a fair trial was tantamount to death. There had been no trial and no justice for Paul and Silas, and the magistrates feared for their own lives. Paul demanded a public apology from the magistrates because he was a Roman citizen. But more importantly, Paul went to all this trouble to protect the young church in Philippi from further physical persecution. Paul used leverage against these magistrates, indicating if they would not persecute the Christians at Philippi, he would not tell the Roman authorities about the bad treatment of Silas and him as Roman citizens.

Tangible Body Life (16:40): “And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.” -- Paul's final act in Philippi was to gather with the brethren in the house of Lydia before he departed. The moment these Christians were together, they were encouraging, admonishing and bearing one another's burdens. They were sharing the life of Jesus Christ together. Who are the “brethren?” They may have been some of the prisoners who were converted by the testimony of Paul and Silas, and released because they did not flee from prison.

CONCLUSION

The supreme question is, "What must I do to be saved?" Rationalists would say, “Salvation is a piper's dream and supernaturalism is a fairy tale, so they deny salvation of any kind and have no answer to the supreme question. Liberals and modernists would say that salvation is living the best life one can and then God will accept everyone ultimately, but this reduces Christianity to a works system. Cultists say that salvation is attained by accepting their

doctrines which are contrary to the Bible. Papists say that salvation comes when one is water baptized as a child, belonging to the church and acknowledgement of the Pope. Libertines say that Christianity cannot be proven; “therefore, eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” and don't even think about salvation. Existentialists say, “If you need the salvation kick as a crutch to live, that is fine, but everyone doesn't need it and must be left alone to do their own thing.”

What does God in the Bible say the ultimate answer is to the supreme question, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” Will you believe men or God? Will you trust the Word of God or the word of demons? Trust, commit, lean upon, abandon to the person of Jesus Christ alone for salvation and you shall be saved.