

The Night Of Salvation

Acts 16:25-34

Pastor John Miller

I want to read the text, Acts 16:25-34. The Bible tells us to read the Word in church, so that's what I'm going to do before we unpack it.

"But at midnight..."—so here's our night scene in the Bible—"...Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." They're in prison praising God. "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."

Have you ever wondered what the greatest question is that we could ever ask in life? I Googled that this week and found that the top five that are the most common are, number one, "Does God exist?" That seems to be utmost on people's minds. Number two, "Where did the universe come from?" Number three, "How did life begin?" Number four, "What is the purpose of life?" And number five, "Is there life after death?"

I found it interesting that all these top five questions that are asked in life are answered in the Bible. If you just open God's Word, He can answer all life's questions. "Where did we come from?" God created us. "Does God exist?" "In the beginning God..." is in the first book, Genesis, the first chapter, the first verse of the Bible. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The purpose of life is to know God and to glorify Him forever. There is life after death, if we believe in Jesus Christ, and we'll have eternal life.

In our text today, I believe we have life's greatest question; not one of the greatest but the greatest. It's our focus today. Verse 30 says, "What must I do to be saved?" It's so simple but simply profound. We're going to look at the answer.

But first, the jailer asked this question: "What must I do to be saved?" Jesus emphasized our need for salvation by saying, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" What good would it do to be the richest man in all the world, the most popular man in all the world, and yet you lose your soul in the process? It profits you nothing.

The answer to this question tells us where we will spend eternity, either in heaven or in hell. The answer to this question will determine your eternal destination—whether to heaven or to hell when you die.

What were the circumstances that led up to this question that was asked by this Philippian jailer? Let me give you the background.

Paul and Silas were on what's called "the second missionary journey." It began at the end of chapter 15. Paul and Silas headed off on Paul's second missionary journey over modern-day Turkey. They came to the coast of the Aegean Sea. The European continent was beyond that. They were praying and asking God for His direction. The Spirit said to them, "Don't go right; don't go left," so they were in a holding pattern, waiting on God to direct them where they should go.

When Paul went to sleep that night, he had a vision of a man from Macedonia. Chapter 16, verse 9, says, "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" So they woke up the next morning and Paul said, "Well, the Lord spoke to me and wants us to go over the Aegean Sea to Europe." This was the first time the Gospel of Jesus Christ has spread to the continent of Europe. When Paul and Silas got there, it was first a woman they shared Christ with, and she came to salvation.

So they came to the shore in Europe and made their way to the Roman colony of Philippi. In Philippi, a church was started, and we see that in this story. The epistle of Philippians was Paul's letter to the believers in Philippi.

Then they went down by the riverside. Why? Because evidently there weren't enough male Jews to build a synagogue; you had to have 10 male Jews to build a synagogue. They were some women gathered there for their rites and their cleansing as they worshipped. And the Bible said that God opened Lydia's heart, she believed in Jesus and was saved. So the first convert to Christianity in Europe was a well-to-do woman, Lydia. She was a businesswoman, a seller of purple and silk cloth and garments. She asked Paul and Silas to stay at her house. She took care of them there, and they mentored and disciplined her.

But as they were going around the city of Philippi preaching the Gospel, there was a woman following them who was a slave girl and demon possessed. She started yelling out loudly that these men were the servants of the most-high God and that they show us the way of salvation. Now Paul didn't want the devil announcing his ministry, so he turned to the evil spirit and rebuked it and commanded it to come out of the woman. Then this slave girl was delivered and evidently became a believer. So the first two converts in Philippi and in Europe were women. We have the seller of purple, who was high on the social ladder, and the slave girl, who was demon-possessed and at the bottom of the social ladder.

Now the slave girl was owned by some men who used her to do some divination and fortune

telling, and they profited by that. So when they found out she was now a Christian, they got upset with Paul. Wherever Paul went to preach, there was either a revival or a riot. And this took place at Philippi, where there were people who came to Christ, but there was also a riot.

So her masters, who lost their gain or profit, actually dragged Paul and Silas, verses 19-20, "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.'" Philippi was a Roman colony. So they wanted Paul and Silas to be punished.

So without a trial, without a fair hearing, they were punished; they were beaten, put in stocks and thrown into the inner prison. That would really be a bummer. You're whipped, beaten, put in stocks and thrown into an inner dungeon or prison.

Now this is where the story starts, in verse 25, our text. "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

And this whole scene happened because they were preaching Christ. People were being saved, and these Roman citizens were upset because they were losing their profit and gain. So Paul and Silas were thrown into this inner prison.

Now, in verse 26, it says, "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." This is the kind of experience you hope you have when you're in prison. God sent an earthquake. They said, "Thank God we're free at last!"

But the Philippian jailer thought his prisoners had escaped, which means he would take their punishment and be killed, so he pulled out his sword to commit suicide, but Paul stopped him. Paul said, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." The jailer was so shaken up that he grabbed a lantern and came into the prison and asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So this is what led up to this important question that I want to focus on.

Notice that this is a personal question: "What must I do to be saved?" He's not asking about anyone else. Salvation is a personal question. It's not, "What does my mom do?" or "What does my dad do?" or "What do my friends think" or "What do my friends say?" No; it's "What must I do to be saved?" You have a personal responsibility to examine your own life and ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

And notice that the jailer did not ask, "What can I do to be happy?" or "What can I do to be rich?" or "What can I do to have a better marriage?" or "What can I do to have more possessions or a bigger house?" This is what a lot of people ask when they go to church today: "How can I be happy?" or "How can I be rich?" or "How can I be successful?" or "How can I have a happy marriage?" But it starts with salvation. This is life's most important question.

Yes, God can bless you with these things, but more importantly, Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange

for his soul?" What profit is that? So life's most important question is, "What must I do to be saved?" The question is answered here in our text.

So the jailer is asking about salvation from sin and eternal judgment. But sadly, many don't ask that same question today, because in our society and culture, we no longer believe in sin. But the Bible teaches it. We've eliminated God, we've eliminated sin and transgressions against God, so we think men just need to be educated, fed and disciplined by government. But God says that we need a change of heart. Sin is in the Bible.

In Genesis 3, when God made man in His image and likeness, He gave them free will. He wanted willing worship, and He wanted obedience from man. So He put a tree in the Garden, which He forbid man to eat from. God said Adam and Eve could eat from all the trees in the Garden freely, except from the one tree in the midst of the Garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Some people think this is a fairy tale, but it's a true story. And Satan tempted Adam and Eve, and they ate the forbidden fruit. We don't know if it was an apple. I feel sorry for apples—they got a bad rap. It could have been a cumquat or a kiwi; who knows? But they ate the forbidden fruit, so their sin was their act of disobedience. The essence of sin is disobedience.

God said, "You shall not bear false witness," but we lie. God said, "You shall not steal," but we steal. God said, "You shall not covet," but we covet. God said, "You shall not commit adultery," but He said that if you look longingly, in your heart you've committed adultery. God sees your heart. In God's economy, if you have hatred toward someone, you've already committed murder.

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23 says. "There is none righteous, no, not one," Romans 3:10. Every human being is born into the world a sinner, separated from God. When God told Adam, referring to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die," He was referring to separation from God. The word "death" literally means "separation."

Spiritual death is being separated from God; that's the state in which we are all born. Physical death is a result of sin, as well, but it means that your soul or spirit leaves your body—separation from your body. The real "you" leaves your tent or your body. Eternal death occurs when you die and you are separated from God in hell for all eternity. So there is spiritual death, physical death and eternal death, all the product of sin, which wasn't God's design from the very beginning.

So thank God that Jesus came as the Redeemer! He came to right all wrongs. He came to restore man and even this fallen planet back to its rightful place.

So basically sin is the breaking of God's laws. The real heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9 says. I hear people say all the time, "Oh, they have such a good heart." Isn't

that one of our common statements? Not according to the Bible.

Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." He said that from the heart comes adultery, murder, a lot of wicked things. There have been times when I've heard people say a bad word, they didn't know I heard it and they say, "Oh, sorry Pastor John. I don't know where that came from." I say, "I know where that came from." If it's in the well, it comes up in the bucket. It comes from the heart. You need a heart change by God. You need God's love, joy, His Spirit in your heart to change the way you speak.

One of the first evidences in my life that said I was born again was the fact that my language changed. What a blessing that is when God changes your heart so that the words that come out of your heart honor and glorify Him!

So the heart is the problem. It's not man's environment, not man's education, not man's skin color, not government, not a philosophical or psychological problem; it's a spiritual problem. All the chaos in our nation right now that I see in the news is a spiritual problem; we need the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The heart is "deceitful" and "desperately wicked."

This question, "What must I do to be saved?" implies two things. First, it implies that there are two classes of people: saved and unsaved. The Bible says that you're either saved or unsaved, you're either going to heaven or to hell. You're either saved or lost, either a child of God or you're a child of the devil. What constitutes the difference is if you're born again.

Remember what Jesus told Nicodemus, this very good, very religious man? He said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" if he was to enter the kingdom of God. It's so very important. We need to be born again if we are to be saved. And there are only two roads to be on, with two gates. Jesus said, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it...Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Being a believer is traveling on the narrow road and going through the narrow gate.

This is why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." And just so He makes sure we really get it, He said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." No one gets to heaven unless they go through Jesus Christ. In John 3:36, it says, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." So there are two eternal destinies.

The second implication in this question, "What must I do to be saved?" is that there is an awareness in this jailer's life of being lost. The reason the jailer asked the question was because he realized that he needed to be saved.

What made the jailer realize his lost condition? Number one, it might have been because of the testimony of Paul and Silas. At midnight Paul and Silas did two things: prayed and sang hymns. If this was me who was falsely accused, beaten, put in prison and in stocks at midnight, the Bible would have said, "Pastor Miller sulked, complained and griped. And we never saw him

again. There was no earthquake, and the Philippian jailer didn't get saved."

But Paul and Silas were singing praises. Can you imagine that? They were whipped, beaten, thrown in jail and Paul said to Silas, "Let's sing." Slap that dude! Sing?! Not only were they falsely accused, put in stocks and thrown into prison, but it's midnight! "At least we should try to get some sleep."

"No; let's sing."

And they started singing praises to the Lord. The Bible says, "In the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life," Psalm 42:8. I like that.

I grew up as a little boy in a Christian home. My Dad and Mom were believers. I used to hear my Dad singing at night in bed down the hallway. It still touches my heart to think about it. And I know through the good times, the bad times, the hard times, there always was a song in his heart.

In the deepest, darkest valleys David said in Psalm 23, "You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me....You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

So Paul and Silas are singing in the night. That's why I like this night scene. They are praying to and praising God. Maybe they sang Psalm 34:3,

"Oh, magnify the Lord with me,

And let us exalt His name together."

Maybe they sang Psalm 103:1,

"Bless the Lord, O my soul;

And all that is within me,

Bless His holy name!"

Then Luke writes in verse 25, "And the prisoners were listening to them." Why did Luke add that in that verse? Because Paul and Silas were a testimony of what God can do in your life. And when the jailer heard them singing, he thought, These guys are different; they're singing! They're not cursing or complaining; they're singing praises to God!

Our lives can be a testimony to others that God can use to bring them to Christ when we sing in our darkest night.

Maybe the jailer had heard that they were brought to him because they had been preaching.

Maybe he actually talked to them on the street. Maybe he heard them in the city as they were making their way through the streets preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was intrigued by them and he was watching them. And all the prisoners heard Paul and Silas, as well. So it could be that God used the testimony of Paul and Silas praising in the prison.

Secondly, God could have used the earthquake. Verse 26 says, "Suddenly..." It's midnight and "Suddenly there was a great earthquake." I believe this was God bringing about this earthquake miraculously. I don't believe all of them are. This was a miracle at midnight, a divine intervention by God. "...so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed." Some feel that maybe the chains were still on the prisoners' wrists, but they broke off from the walls, and the doors opened up. They could have waited and said, "When you hear the jailer fall under his own sword, then were outta here!" No, they didn't do that.

If I were in prison, the chains fell off the walls and the doors opened, I would say, "Thank you Jesus!" and I'd be outta there.

Verse 28, "Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.'" Why didn't Paul use the situation to escape? Because he had a concern for the lost. He was concerned for the jailer and the other prisoners, and he knew that the jailer would die if the prisoners didn't remain and also hear the Gospel. So God used these circumstances.

Thirdly, in verses 27-29, God used the jailer's helpless estate, and even his attempt to commit suicide. "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." Why? He thought he was finished, no hope.

Under Roman law, if you were a jailer and your prisoners escaped, then you actually would get their punishment. He would have been executed. If some of them were there for murder, the jailer would have been put to death. So he took out his sword to kill himself.

So there was the testimony of Paul and Silas, there was the earthquake and the jailer felt it was hopeless and wanted to commit suicide.

I looked up the statistics and found there is one death by suicide in the United States every 12.3 minutes. Someone takes their own life. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds in the United States. And this Covid crisis has only increased those numbers. People are taking their own lives.

Perhaps God has you reading this sermon through the testimony of others, through the circumstances of life or maybe out of a sense of helplessness.

Several years ago I received the story of someone who came into our sanctuary and then accepted Christ but was first driving by the church, had a gun in his car and was going to take his own life. Something kind of spoke to him and said to go back to that church. He came into

the parking lot, sat in his car and watched people getting out of their cars and going into the church. He finally made his way into the service, heard the Gospel, accepted Jesus Christ and his life was changed.

I can't help but feel that you are reading this because God brought you to it, to hear this message and to open your heart. If you are asking the question, "What must I do to be saved?" you have the Holy Spirit to thank for that, because the Spirit of God comes to convict or convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. You cannot come to Christ unless the Holy Spirit comes to you first. He convinces you that you are a sinner who needs God. The best day of your life is when you realize that you are a sinner and need God. What was uppermost on the jailer's heart was, "What must I do to be saved?"

And in just a few minutes I want to give you an opportunity to accept Christ if you haven't been born again and have your sins forgiven, if you're not saved. This is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Now the answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is in verse 31. "So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.'"

A little footnote—whenever a cultist knocks on my door, I open the door, my question is taken from this passage. "What must I do to be saved?" If they add anything to the answer found in this verse, "No, thank you." If they say you have to join the church, get a haircut, get baptized, be a good person—"No, thank you."

What does Paul and Silas say? By the way, this is Paul the Apostle. If anyone knows how to be saved, it is Paul the Apostle. Verse 31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." Paul didn't say, "Behave, live a good life." When you ask people if they're saved, they say, "Well, I live a good life."

"Well, how good do you have to be to go to heaven?"

"Just good."

Well, that really narrows it down, because I can always find someone who's a lot more messed up than me and make me feel pretty good. If you want to feel good about yourself, then find some messed-up person. "Well, I'm not too bad; maybe I'll make it to heaven."

But the Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one...There is none who does good, no, not one." It says, "All have sinned and fallen short." We've all sinned against God. You have to be perfect to get to heaven; never having sinned. Only one person qualified, and that is Jesus Christ. He came from heaven, was born of a virgin, led a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, rose from the dead, and He will save you, if you put your faith and trust in Him. No one can save themselves; we need a Savior.

Paul didn't say just live a good life, go to church, get baptized. Nicodemus was told by Jesus that he had to be "born again."

So Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” What does that mean? It means that “believe” is the same as faith or trust. It’s the same as believing in Jesus Christ, as putting your faith in Jesus Christ, as trusting in Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the same Paul the Apostle said, “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.” So faith is the hand that reaches out to accept the gift. And faith is not a work. Baptism is, but faith is not. Faith is simply trusting.

Now we exercise faith all the time. I think it funny when we say, “Have faith in Jesus for your salvation,” and someone says, “Oh, no I can’t do that!” But you got in your car this morning and started it by faith. Some of the cars you drive—it takes a lot of faith to even think they’re going to start. When you drive down the street and come to a stop sign, you put your foot on the brake in faith that it will stop. You get on an airplane by faith.

I remember the first time I ever flew on an airplane, we started cruising at 35,000 feet and the pilot walked by. I thought, “Whoa; who’s flying this sucker?!” I didn’t know there was such a thing as an autopilot.

A couple of years ago in the news there was an article about a pilot who was drunk trying to get on a plane to fly it. Yeah, sure.

We put faith in elevators when we get in. Have you ever checked the cable to make sure it wasn’t frayed? No. Before you go over a bridge, do you go underneath and kick the pilings to make sure they’re sound? No. Everyday we live by faith.

So God’s Word says we are to have faith in Jesus Christ. We are to have faith in His finished work, what He did for us on the Cross. He came from heaven, died on the Cross and rose from the dead. The object of our faith is Jesus Christ. It is “the Lord Jesus Christ,” because He is God, who became a man and died in our place on the Cross; He paid the penalty for our sins. It’s because He rose from the dead—it’s called the Resurrection—and He’s coming again. He promised in John 14:2 and 6 that He would not only make a place for us, but He is “the way, the truth, and the life” to the Father’s house. He comes to save us from sin.

And notice that Paul says, in verse 31, “you will be saved,” and not “might be saved” or “hope to be saved.” I believe that the Bible teaches you can be absolutely sure that you are saved.

In the church there are two groups: the saved and the unsaved. You’re either going to heaven, or you’re going to hell. There is no middle ground. There is no place to wait and then finally get to heaven. The moment you die, your eternal destiny is fixed.

What are we saved from? Sin. We’re saved from sin’s penalty; He died on the Cross and paid the price. We’re saved from sin’s power; He’s given us the Holy Spirit to break the chains that have us bound. And we’re eventually saved from sin’s presence altogether; when we go to heaven, we’ll have new bodies, and we’ll no longer have to deal with sin.

So when you are saved, your life will change. This Philippian jailer's life changed in that he had a new love, verse 33. He "washed their stripes." He had a new life; "He and all his family were baptized," verse 33. And he had a new joy, verse 34: "He rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

Earlier, when Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household," some misinterpret "your household" part. They believe that God automatically saves your family when you accept Christ. That's not Biblical. What Paul is saying here is that they of your family—your husband, your wife, your kids, your family members—if they believe in Jesus, they will be saved. So salvation is an individual decision. God only has sons and daughters, no grandchildren. You must personally, individually receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. It doesn't matter if your mom and dad and spouse were believers or not. It means you must personally, individually trust in Jesus Christ to be saved.

It says in verse 32 that "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." So Paul and Silas not only shared the Word with the Philippian jailer, but they shared the Word with his family. And they had their own faith and trust in Jesus, so they were saved.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, it says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." You can really have a new beginning in Jesus Christ. All your sinful past can be forgiven and washed in the blood of Christ. You can start brand new; you can be born again through faith in Jesus Christ. You can have a new love, a new life and a new joy, believing in God and in what He's done for us.

Now my question to you is, do you want to be saved? Is God the Holy Spirit convicting you of your need for Jesus Christ? If you don't know that you're saved, and you want to be saved, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." Admit that you're a sinner, believe that Jesus died for your sins and believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But you must—I say again, you must; it's absolutely essential that you—put your faith and trust in Christ alone.

We sing the song,

"Nothing in my hand I bring.

Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

You can't plead your own goodness, righteousness or religion. All you can say is, "Jesus, I take Your hand. Without You I'm lost."

We all know the words to John Newton's son, Amazing Grace.

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found;

Was blind, but now I see."

Won't you let Jesus come into your heart today? Won't you let Him forgive your sin? You're not reading this by accident; God brought you here to read this message and be given this opportunity.

The Bible says, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." And the Bible says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do harden not your hearts." It's with the heart. So if God is speaking to you, if God is convicting you—maybe He's used testimony, maybe He's used circumstances, maybe He's used your hopeless sorrow. Who knows; maybe you were contemplating suicide these last few days. God loves you and wants to save you by His grace. He has a purpose for you.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you're not sure you're a child of God—maybe you don't know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you've never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

"Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. I pray that You'll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We'd like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we'd like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, "I prayed to accept Christ." We'll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.