

The Belief That Saves

Acts 16:25-34

A couple of weeks ago, when we finished the portion of Acts chapter 16 that we were on, we had left Paul and Silas bound, shackled, and placed in the deep recesses of a Philippian jail. They've now **been there for about three weeks** and today my plan is to hopefully see them released by the end of our study.

Paul and Silas had been sent out by the church at Antioch to return to the places Paul and Barnabus had previously gone on the First Missionary Journey. Since the conflict over John Mark had caused a bit of a rift in the relationship or at least in the ministry directions of Paul and Barnabus, Paul was now traveling with another Christian brother, Silas (15:36-41). A short time after they had begun their journey, they added on a young man by the name of Timothy and soon afterwards Luke joined the troop.

In the earlier part of chapter 16 we find where they had come to the city of Philippi where they had opportunity to minister to several women who met by the river outside the city, a place where they came to regularly for prayer. As Paul and the others taught, a woman by the name of Lydia received the teachings of Paul and soon, she and her whole household came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Shortly after receiving the forgiveness of Christ in their lives, *she and her household were baptized* (16:13-15).” And I believe it was at that time that the Church of Philippi was born. Many scholars believe the Church actually began meeting at the home of Lydia.

Some days later while still in Philippi, as Paul, Silas, and the team were walking through the city a **slave girl with a demonic spirit** began following them and crying out, *“These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation. And this she did for many days.”* (16:16-18)

Verse 18 of chapter 16 tells us, *“Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour.”*

So let's pick it up there in 16:19

Acts 16

¹⁹ *But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. ²⁰ And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "**These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city** (these Gentiles did not like the Jews); ²¹ and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."*

²² *Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be **beaten with rods.** ²³ And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴ Having received such a charge, he put them into the **inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.***

Have you ever prayed the prayer,

"Lord, I just want to serve You, wherever You would lead me."

Rest assured of this one thing, the Lord will lead you to places and into situations you can't even imagine... if you are willing to fully trust Him.

For these Roman Gentiles, there was a strong hatred for the Jews and their religion. The prejudices of the Roman culture against the Jews had no doubt been the reason why there was **no Jewish synagogue in Philippi**. The women met at the river, outside the city because there was no synagogue – undoubtedly due to a long standing hatred for the Jews.

Well, this is where we **left off a couple of weeks ago**, so let's move forward.

Acts 16

²⁵ *But at midnight Paul and Silas were crying out and complaining to God in a loud voice, and the prisoners were listening to them.*

Oh, wait a minute. That's MY version.

I'm embarrassed to think how much of my time is spent on complaining to God about situations in my life rather than simply giving Him praise. And the fact is, all too often the world sees or hears our complaining; and then the testimony of our lives, as far as the reality and goodness of God is **suddenly washed away**. The fact is, God remains All Mighty and Sovereign; loving and compassionate in and through our sufferings.

It is A.W. Tozer who reminds us:

“God never uses anyone greatly until He tests them deeply.”

A.W. Tozer

We see this in the life of Paul, the life of Joseph, the life of Moses, David, Daniel, and a host of others we find in both the Old and New Testament. Our willingness to be used by God carries with it the understanding that **we must be willing to travel whatever and wherever the path of His choosing takes us**. Anything less and we limit our ability to be His chosen vessel.

Paul was wholly surrendered to God’s plan and direction in his life. Therefore, when trials came, we find him as he is in that Philippian dungeon cell... *not crying and complaining*, but...

Acts 16

²⁵ *...at midnight Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*** ²⁶ *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.*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon reminds us, “Any fool can sing in the day. It’s easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by ... Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men.”¹

Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; but there was another, a much greater audience to their time of worship – God was also listening to them!! And in response to their prayers and their praise and worship, **God loosed their chains and set the captives free!!**

Right here, in this spot, there is such a powerful lesson for us to learn. Not only to learn, but to come back to over and over again: “Chains are loosed and captives are set free when we place our focus – not on our issues – but on the One who is worthy of all praise.”

In the midst of their times of *praying and singing hymns to God*, God moved and released those things that bound them.

In 2 Chronicles 20 we read where King Jehoshaphat was facing a formidable foe as the Kings of the Ammonites, the Moabites and the people of Mount Seir came against Judah. With the

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 468.

understanding that they were in danger of absolute annihilation, King Jehoshaphat and the people went to prayer. The LORD spoke to them: *"Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's... 'You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you..."*

On the day Judah went out against her enemies, *Jehoshaphat stood and said,*

*"Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: **Believe** in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; **believe** His prophets, and you shall prosper."*

That's not a head knowledge belief, that's a heart mindset changing belief.

And so, the army of Judah went out armed with praise to the Lord God Almighty as Jehoshaphat **set the worship team in front of the army – I love that!!** And as they went forward into battle, the singers began praising the Lord with a loud voice:

"Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever." Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.

Here in Acts 16 we read:

*(As) Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ 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.***

The doors were opened and the chains were loosed.

In Luke's Gospel record, we read in chapter 4 where Jesus publically proclaims **the beginning of His earthly ministry.** Following His baptism and the forty days of temptation in the wilderness, Luke tells us that Jesus

Luke 4

¹⁴ *...returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, ¹⁶ ...He came to Nazareth..., (and) went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day..., ¹⁷ And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the (passage in Isaiah 61) where it was written:*

Isaiah 61

¹ *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD..."*

And what we see happening here in the **stench of this dungeon cell** is a fulfillment of that prophecy in a **literal way**. But now, we are going to see it happen in a **spiritual way**. Here we see **physical shackles being loosened**, we see the **metal bars of prison cells** being opened and we see **freedom** from their **physical bondage**. But next we will see one who although he was **considered a “free man” in the physical world**, in the spirit he was **bound up in the chains and shackles of sin and hopelessness**.

Look with me at the man we only know as the Philippian Jailer –

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

²⁹ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

³⁰ And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

You see in the Roman structure of things, if you had the responsibility to guard someone and that individual or group escaped, regardless of the situation, **your life would be exchanged for theirs**. So here we see this Jailer ready and willing to commit suicide rather than face the humiliation of being imprisoned in his own jail, or worse, being executed himself if a prisoner with a capital offense had escaped. He knew what his fate was should any of those under his charge would have escaped.

Paul also understood the situation and his concern was **more for the physical and spiritual welfare of this jailer – than for his own physical freedom**.

Paul cried out with a loud voice, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

Can you imagine the shock of the Jailer? No one had escaped? Even though they had the perfect chance!! He couldn't believe it, so...

He called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Do you realize how marvelous that question truly is?

What a powerful question that is?

Don't misunderstand the question. The jailer wasn't asking for any kind of physical safety. He knew... he saw that the prisoners were all there, so he fully understood that **his physical life had been spared**. He wasn't asking Paul to save him from the actions of his Roman superiors. His concern was in **how he would stand before the God that Paul and Silas were singing about and to**. His concern was to **understand the truth of what had been proclaimed about these men and their message of salvation**.

I fully believe that the Holy Spirit of God was speaking to this man and leading him to heed the words of Paul and Silas: men who truly were spokesmen of the One, True God.

"What must I do to be saved?"

What a marvelous question... hopefully it's a question that **each one of you – rather you're here today, listening on the radio, or listening over the internet – hopefully it's a question that you've stopped to consider, and then responded to the only answer there is**.

This jailer knew that the prisoners were still in their cells, his life and reputation as a jailer was still intact. Yet, he knew he **needed to be saved**. Suddenly there was **a draw by the Holy Spirit** in his life which caused him to consider his **eternal standing before this One, True God** these prisoners were singing about and to. This powerful God that opened up all the doors of the prison, and yet caused all the prisoners to stay where they were.

"What must I do to be saved?"

You who know Christ, you who have come to a saving faith in Jesus, **how would you answer this man's question?**

You who know Christ, how would you answer **the world today that is so lost and in such desperate need for a Savior?**

"Oh, come to our church and you will hear the message preached."

"If you would simply change your life and start living it in a good and moral way..."

"Go to church... live a good life... read your Bible and do good..."

If that's what our answer is to a lost and dying world, we might as well tell them what the Judaizers told them, *"You just need to be circumcised."*

But Church we need to remember there is **no deed of the flesh that will ever compensate the need we have in the spirit**. There is nothing we can accomplish in the flesh that will achieve our salvation.

Paul and Silas' **answer was so simple**. But don't misunderstand simple to be simplistic. The answer they gave and the response from the Jailer is **what changed everything in this man's life... right then and for all eternity...**

*³¹ So they said, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.**" ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*

This wasn't simply a head knowledge or an agreement with the facts. The simple declaration of the statement, bears with it the depth of what it means to **believe** and to believe on the **Lord** Jesus Christ. Two very important words: Believe and Lord.

To **believe** is to **receive and accept something or someone as Truth**. In this case it even goes deeper, it has the connotation of **staking your very life on this truth**.

For the Roman, **the concept of Lord was not difficult**. For them, Caesar was *Lord*. Anything and everything Caesar wanted, the people did. There was no question about obedience. The thought of disobeying the commands, directives or even the desires of Caesar would never stay within the mind of a Roman citizen... at least not for long. As a Roman citizen, you continually swore allegiance to Caesar. He was not only the sovereign ruler of the Empire, he was continually looked on as **a god and worthy of all honor from the Roman citizenry**.

So, for a Roman to change his allegiance from Caesar as lord (little "l") to Jesus Christ as Lord (big "L"), it was an **absolute and total change of everything in his life**. He was now placing his livelihood, his family and even his life on the line.

To **believe on the Lord Jesus Christ** is a *life altering* event that changes the very reality on an individual's life. The impact of **believing on the Lord Jesus Christ** brings us to recognize that we are now to be wholly submitted to and committed to the desires of Christ in our life over and above all else –

- Over the desires of our own flesh,
- Over the desires of our friends and family,

- Over the desires of a multitude of “Caesars” in our life

But, this world and its desires and its passions will still try to control you. The world will scream out, demanding that we hear her voice and disregard the voice of God in our life. As Del Tackett shared with us this last Wednesday night in the “*Deepening Our Foundations*” video series,

*“Every sin begins by believing a lie –
the lies of the flesh, the lies of the world,
or the lies of Satan himself.”*

We are called to **no longer believe the lie**, but to **believe in the Truth that is the Lord Jesus Christ**.

To **Believe** in the **Lord** Jesus Christ means:

- You no longer believe and live in the lies of the flesh, this world, or Satan

To **Believe** in the **Lord** Jesus Christ means:

- There is no longer a “Caesar” or other god that you answer to, no other thing or passion you allow to control you.

This Jailer Believed, and when he believed, the Holy Spirit changed his life forever.

³³ And (Jailer) took (Paul and Silas) the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ 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.

When Luke tells us in verse 22 that Paul and Silas *spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house*, I believe they were giving this Gentile crowd a crash course in Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment. I believe they were teaching this household of new Believers who Jesus was and what it means to be His followers.

Because they believed, they followed the Lord in Believers baptism. There was a change in their life that they wanted to attest to. There was an obedience in their life that caused them to follow what the Lord had commanded. It was evident to Paul, Silas, and the ministry team that lives were changed.

The joy that Paul and Silas shared as they were in the pit of that dungeon cell was now the joy that this Jailer and his family felt: *and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.*

So, what about you?

Have you ever come to the time and place in your life where you have publically professed that you truly and completely **believe that Jesus Christ is Lord?**

That He is truly **Lord of your life?**

Have you honestly and without reservation committed your physical and eternal life to His Lordship, recognizing that the One who paid for your sins has bought you, has redeemed you to Himself; that your Savior calls you to follow Him?

Perhaps today is the day you fully respond to the call of Christ.

Perhaps today is the day you receive the full forgiveness of your sin and enter into an eternal relationship with the God who created you.

Are you ready to ***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!***