

Great Questions People Asked Series

2 – What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Acts 16:29-34

In the realm of questions there are many questions which are more on the **lighter side** – such as:

- what should I pick up at the store, or
- what's for dinner, or
- do you think the Vikings will beat the Packers today?

But then there are other questions that are on the much more **serious side**. And the question we're considering this morning would certainly fall into the serious category. In fact, it may very likely be the **single most important question you'll ever have to answer**. Because your response to this question will determine the destiny of your life beyond your earthly existence.

We discover this morning's question in a **really fascinating context**. Please turn in your Bibles to **Acts 16**. The **apostle Paul** and his **sidekick, Silas**, have been staying and preaching in the **Roman city of Philippi**. When they first arrived they went down by the river where they found a prayer group of woman and they began to share with them the good news of Jesus. One day God directed a **business woman by the name of Lydia** to come listen to Paul and while there it says, "**the Lord opened her heart**" to hear and respond to Paul's message and she accepted the Lord and her and her household were immediately all baptized.

A few days later, while going down to the place of prayer they encountered a **local slave girl** who made a lot of money for her owners in fortune telling. However, when she encountered Paul and Silas she immediately knew who they were and followed them around yelling, "**These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.**" After a few days of this, Paul got upset and commanded the spirit that was in her to come out and leave and when it did, she was no longer able to proclaim this nor make money fortune telling. Her owners quickly discovered that their lucrative source of income was gone. They were furious, so they grabbed Paul and Silas, dragged them before the local authorities, proclaimed some trumped up charges and the authorities ordered Paul and Silas to be beaten and thrown into a jail.

This is where the story gets really interesting. Paul and Silas are in this jail, which would have been a large cave in the side of a hill. All the way along the walls of the cave would have been built jail cells. At the very end would have been the worst of all the jail cells. It was this jail cell that Paul and Silas were in. Pretty bad conditions. However, they weren't sitting and moaning or complaining to the Lord about their awful conditions, nor were they praying for the Lord to rescue them. Listen or follow along in your Bibles as I read the rest of this account from **Acts 16** beginning with verse **25**.

Acts 16:25-34 (NIV) About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners **were listening to them**. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped (death would have been the penalty for allowing a prisoner to escape). 28 But Paul shouted, "*Don't harm yourself! We are all here!*" 29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**" 31 They replied, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.*" 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 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 household.

Before we get to examining the jailer's pivotal question, I have one of my own. **What was the purpose of the earthquake?** It doesn't appear to be for the purpose of setting the prisoners free- because they all stayed put. So, why did God cause the earthquake to happen, (I'm assuming He's the cause of this). I believe it was designed to get the jailer's attention and ultimately bring him into a right relationship with Himself. If my assumption is correct – Wow!!! **God will go to extraordinary lengths to allow people to hear about His Son and His plan to draw people into a right relationship with Himself.**

And why didn't the other prisoners try to make a run for it as soon as their cell doors were opened and their shackles broke loose? I'm guessing that they were so enthralled by what they heard from Paul and Silas' singing that they wanted to hear more.

And **why did the jailer ask that particular question?** Why not ask, "Why didn't you and the other prisoners make a run for it?" Or, "Why wouldn't he quickly move to re-lock up all the prisoners before they make a run for it?" No, he asks, "*What must I do to be saved?*" I believe the reason he asked this was because he'd no doubt heard what the fortune telling slave girl had been walking around the city for several days proclaiming to everyone that Paul and Silas have the message of how to be saved. Do you see how God was carefully laying the groundwork for the jailer and his household to come to know Him even before the earthquake. God was even using the work of the Devil, through the slave girl, for His glory. Just like when Satan thought he'd defeated God by nailing Jesus to the cross – how'd that work out for you Satan? God is absolutely brilliant in how and what He will use to draw people to Himself and put people into a position where they can hear about Him. And just like Lydia, earlier in this chapter, God can then **open up people's minds and hearts** to understand and accept Him.

This ought to give all of us great hope as we pray for those loved ones of ours who seem miles away from God. Don't give up but keep interceding for them that God will use whatever means to reveal Himself to them and soften their hearts and minds to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

So, what was Paul and Silas' response to the jailer's key question?

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

Simply "**believe**". I think sometimes we tend to make it way to complicated for people to come to know the Lord. Throughout church history we've developed classes to correctly explain to people all that's involved in accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And while I'm certainly not against people being well informed as to who Jesus is and why we all need to accept Him – we don't need a lot more than that.

This simple "**belief**" in Jesus as the way to salvation is well supported throughout the Bible.

John 1:11-12 (NIV) *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who **believed in his name**, he gave the right to become children of God*

Read with me likely the most well known verse in the Bible – John 3:16

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life."*

At one point in Jesus' ministry the crowd of followers asked him: "*What must we do to do the works God requires?*" Jesus replied, "*The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.*" (John 6:29)

The apostle John wraps up his gospel with this statement:

John 20:30-31 (NIV) *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that **you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

Unfortunately, "belief" in that culture implied more than it does now in 21st century America. We've largely defined "belief" as mere intellectual assent to something. Like, "**I believe that Brian is the minister at this church and that he is married to Connie**". Or, "*I believe, based on past experience, that we will be out of the*

service this morning in time for me to get home and watch the kickoff of the Vikings vs Packers game.” And that example proves that not all of our beliefs are necessarily true.

But back in the culture to which Jesus, Paul and Silas were living and ministering to, “belief” implied not only intellectual assent but also a commitment to living out what you believed. So, in that culture, to say that you believed in Jesus but that it didn’t affect the way you lived your life wouldn’t have made any sense. If you believed in Jesus it meant you committed to following him in the way you lived your life. That’s why we can have so many people today who claim to “believe” in Jesus Christ, without it necessarily meaning that it alters the way they live their life.

Right after Paul and Silas told the jailer that he needed to believe in Jesus in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved it says, **“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.”** Which means that they provided further explanation about who Jesus was and why they needed to believe in Jesus. We don’t know any specifics of what was included in that teaching time, except for one thing. It obviously included teaching about the importance of baptism as a first response to believing and committing your life to following Jesus. And the only reason I know that for certain is because of what happened next. **At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized**

What time of the night was it? Sometime after midnight (because that’s when the earthquake happened). Apparently, responding in baptism to their new found faith, couldn’t wait – even until morning, it was so important. And even more exciting is that not only did the jailer accept the Lord and was baptized but his whole household also believed and was baptized. Now, historically, some religious groups try to take passages like this and prove infant baptism – implying that within a household there must have been small children there as well. However, small infants can’t believe, which was a prerequisite to accepting the Lord. Clearly in Scripture, a proper belief in Jesus was an essential prerequisite to accepting Him and hence getting baptized.

If you read through the book of Acts you’ll quickly discover that baptism was consistently taught and practiced immediately after someone committed their life to Jesus.

The very first sermon preached in the book of Acts ended with 3,000 people getting baptized, per Peter’s instructions. (**Acts 2:38-39, 41**)

In Acts 8 we have another fascinating example of God orchestrating details to arrange for a person to come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. God instructs Philip to go stand on this certain road. And then when as a fancy entourage is passing by He instructs Philip to go stand next to it. And as he does, the royal official is reading from the writings of Isaiah the prophet, and it just so happens that he’s reading from a section that is a prophecy about Jesus (what an amazing coincidence). Phillip asks him if he understands what he’s reading and the official invites Philip to join him in his chariot and explain to him what he’s reading. And all it says is that Phillip started with that passage and told him the good news about Jesus. Just like with the jailer, in our main text this morning, we don’t know the details of what was taught, but one thing we know is that Phillip must have mentioned the importance of baptism as part of accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, because the next thing we know it says this in the passage:

Acts 8:36-38 (NIV) *As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*

Notice, the Ethiopian official didn’t wait until he got home to be baptized. He somehow thought it was too important to put off doing and he wanted to do it right away.

After Paul was blinded on the way to persecuting Christians and the Lord revealed Himself to Paul, it says that God instructed a man by the name of Ananias to come meet Paul and restore his eyesight. And as Paul recounts this event later this is what he says happened, “

Acts 22:14-16 (NIV) *“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, **be baptized** and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’*

I love the fascinating story of Cornelius and how God brought him into connection with Peter and ultimately to believing in Jesus. I don't have time to explain the whole thing to you but it would certainly be worth reading later today if you're interested in all the details of how God is amazing and creative in bringing people into a right relationship with Himself through acceptance of Jesus. But after God brings Peter into Cornelius' home, he begins this very eloquent explanation of who Jesus is and why He came to earth. The last statement out of Peter's mouth is this: *“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”* It was like, at this point God thought, okay they've heard enough and notice what happens next.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts 10:43-48)

There are other examples I could list as well. In fact, there's even an example in **Acts 19** where Paul re-baptized some individuals because they had only been baptized under John's baptism, which merely for repentance, and not Jesus' baptism, which was for forgiveness of sins and to enter into a right relationship with God. So, they were re-baptized.

I want to end with two summary points.

1. The teaching of Jesus and the early church leaders is that in order to receive salvation you need to believe in Jesus, which meant committing to following Him. And the reason for this is that we are all sinners in need of a Savior – and Jesus willingly and lovingly came to earth to pay the penalty for our sins by His sacrificial death on the cross.
2. An essential part of declaring this commitment is through the amazing act of baptism. In Romans 6, Paul compares baptism to Christ's death, burial and resurrection.
 - a. **Death**: When we commit to following Jesus, we commit to dying to our old way of living for ourselves and commit to living our lives for Jesus, with His help and power.
 - b. **Burial**: just like Jesus was laid in a tomb so also when the person baptizes us they lower us into a watery grave. We are completely covered with water, symbolizing our spiritual death to our old way of living.
 - c. **Resurrection**: we rise back out of that watery grave filled with the Holy Spirit and thereby equipped and empowered to live this new life for Jesus.

I really can't think of a more perfect outward demonstration of a person's commitment to Jesus than through baptism.

In just a moment we're going to be singing the hymn, **“Just as I Am”**. The words remind us that we don't have to have it all together in order to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. In fact, the words speak of lives that don't have it all together and in that messiness God invites us to come to Him and let Him give you a do-over. And not only that, God equips you, through the Holy Spirit living inside of you, to do it right this time around. So, if your desire is to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to come forward as we sing this song. We have the baptistery filled and ready for anyone who would like to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and be baptized.

Or, if you've already accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and been baptized and would like to join Knollwood Christian Church we invite you to come this morning as well.

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What had happened prior to our text in this city?

Where are Paul and Silas when our text begins?

What are they doing?

What happens around midnight?

What was the jailer about to do and why?

Why do you think the earthquake took place?

What question did the jailer immediately ask?

“What must I do to be _____”

What was Paul and Silas’ response to his question?

“_____” in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

What does “*believe*” mean in our culture?

What did “*believe*” mean when Paul used it?

What stands out to you about the many examples of baptism?

According to Romans 6, baptism symbolizes what:

a. D _____

b. B _____

c. R _____

Have you been baptized? Why or why not?

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