

Paul and Silas in Prison

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Bible Text: Acts 16:16-34; Acts 16:30-31
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Congregation, the text for this morning hour's sermon is from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 16, the verses 30 and 31. As the main verses, 30 and 31.

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31
And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,
and thy house.

So far.

Paul and Silas in prison. Three thoughts. The reason why; secondly, the singing in; and in the third place, the preaching in. So Paul and Silas in prison: the reason why they're in prison; secondly, the singing in prison; and in the third place, preaching in prison.

Congregation, young friends, this morning we are, so to speak, in Philippi. Philippi is a city now in Greece in the province of Macedonia, and I see someone walking through the streets there of that city, the city of Philippi. It's a young woman with a very strange look on her face. She's not normal, you can see that, and she is talking to people and I see people handing over money to her and who is she, what is she talking about and what are they doing with the money? Well, she is able to predict the future. She has a spirit of divination the Bible says. So she says, "I can predict who you should marry, where you should work, what you should do. So take this into account." And people love that. They love to know the future so they often went to her and said, "What is up for me? Here's a couple hundred dollars," so to speak. And this lady was occult. She had a satanic spirit. She was not just a ventriloquist or someone, or just pretending to know. No, she was really possessed with a devil. So she must have been rich. Actually not because she had to give all the money to her master. She was a slave, a slave and she had to give the money back to her master.

So she was walking in town and just collecting money and she was well-known, and one day I'm in town and I see her again and I hear her saying something different. She is pointing to a few people walking there and she says, "Those people are special. Those people are people of the most high God." So you can see that in the Bible. Verse 17, "The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." So who is she pointing to? Paul,

Silas, Timotheus and Luke, four, and they have been preaching in Philippi for a while already because they were in Turkey, Asia Minor, and then Paul had a dream, a man beckoning in Macedonia, "Come over to help us. Come over. Come over." And he could not resist that so that's why Paul and his friends are in Philippi and preaching the word of God, the way of salvation. The way of salvation, they said, they explained how you can be saved and why you need to be saved and, of course, they preached Christ, the Lord Jesus.

And now this woman is supporting them. She said, "Yes, they are servants of the most high God." She's right. "And they show us the way of salvation." That's excellent. So lots of support. The Lord is blessing the work because this lady with that divination spirit is supporting them and yet those missionaries are so different than she is because they are preaching free grace. They don't collect money. They don't say, "You know, you have to pay somehow and qualify somehow and then I will tell you something." No, the gospel was absolutely free, for nothing, whosoever is hungry, whosoever is thirsty, let them come to the waters of life. So how is it possible that she supported them? It's strange.

Well, that is typically Satan. Satan loves to confuse people and he loves some bait, some truth bait so that people say, "Wow, that's right. That's the truth. So we can trust her." And that's what Satan has in mind, that people would trust her and Satan likes it when all religions are just mixed in one pot and don't pay attention to all the differences and the distinguishing points, just make a melting pot of all religion and he likes that, that Paul and Silas are kind of in that same pot. No difference. What's the difference between a pear, an apple, an orange and a banana? It's all fruit. And so Satan says whatever religion it is, it's all fine. It's all the same. It all comes down to the same thing.

And that's exactly the devil's trick and the Apostle Paul does not like it. He does not like that approach and that support of this lady so one time he has enough, "And this did she," verse 18, "many days. But Paul, being grieved," grieved, not just angry but grieved. He was sad. He didn't think this was the right thing to do so he turned and he said to her? No, he "said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out of her." So he expelled, kind of, that divination spirit and he helped that lady that was abused by her masters and by the devil, and set her free.

"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone," you know, this means something to the masters, this means no money, no income anymore, they got really mad because they don't care about the woman, they don't care about faith, they don't care about salvation, they only care about money. They want to be rich and that's now over. No income from her anymore. "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone," and then they, those people in Philippi, they are after those four men and they catch two of them, two of the four, Paul and Silas.

And not the police arrested them, no, they themselves went after them and they dragged them to the marketplace and they brought them to the magistrates, the rulers, "they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans." So they bring complaints that they are troublemakers, and if there was anything, it was a threat to the governors in those times. It was an uproar, an uprising, so they tried to nip it in the bud all the time. No trouble in town.

And so they are troublemakers and without any investigation or interrogation, they were not interviewed, not arrested, they were caught, "And the multitude rose up together against them." That's interesting, verse 22. A crowd of people, a multitude of people and they're just waiting for excitement. They're waiting for something new. They're waiting to get something happening in town and there is a mob mentality. That's always dangerous when there is a mass gathering, there is a mass demonstration, it easily gets out of hand as we have seen also in the recent past. Now you see, it is a mob mentality, "And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them." So I see without an official process, court process, I see that those two men, Paul and Silas, have to bend over and are tied to a pole and with a stick they beat them on their back, on their bare backs, and that hurts. And why? They had done good. They had delivered that woman. And money is the only issue here.

"And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely." So they tear their clothes off, they beat them up, and after that they bring them to prison. This is not Christian persecution but this is antisemitism because they are looked at as Jews, not as Christians. As Jews, "Those Jews," they say in verse 20, "brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city." So Satan is behind that and Satan hates the church and Satan hates the Jewish people. He hates Israel still.

So this commanded that the keeper of the prison lock them up in maximum security, so in the prison is also a door downstairs into the ground, underground, there's an underground cave, dungeon, and they bring Paul and Silas to that place because they are dangerous. They are criminals they say, and they may not escape. And they warn the jailer, "Make sure they're safe. We don't want them to get free so be careful because if you let them escape, you have to pay for it yourself."

"And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." Their feet fast in the stocks. So you would have had a wooden beam with some holes in there, and the legs to go in those holes and then another piece of wood on top of that and locking it up so they had sore backs and they couldn't move, and they're stuck in the block, in the stocks. Quite something for them and yet what a blessing. The Lord was with them.

I read in verse 25, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." The prisoners heard them, they're singing at midnight. So with a sore back, bleeding I suppose, and wounded, and with their feet in the stocks, in the middle of the night they begin to pray out loud and to sing and they sang praises unto God and the prisoners heard them.

So now we are in the prison and they sing in prison. That's the second thought. I had to think of a few verses from the Bible. Job 35, "But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" Isn't that remarkable? I would say the greatest joy of God's people is often when they're in trouble, there is something going on. When something is really depressing, something really undermined, it's so hard, especially at those times the Lord gives his nearness and joy, a deep spiritual joy. Not a joy like in having a baby or being married or being healthy but a spiritual joy, being loved by God. Before his account, who giveth songs in the night. Psalm 42:8, "Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." So that lovingkindness of my God is better than life. They experienced that, the love of God.

I thought of Acts 5:41, "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." So they felt connected to Christ. Now think about that. Do you know about that? Do you know of those times that it seems that everything is against you? That it's hard to continue? That you wonder if you even want to live? That it's so dark in the middle of the night and you are just worried to death and the Lord gives you a joy and the Lord gives you to say, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation." And you just pray with joy that you have a Savior and know the way of salvation and you have no complaints because the Lord is near. He is faithful and he is there for you. It's new every morning.

So they're in prison but it's good for them. The Lord makes it well for them. And the prisoners heard them, so the Lord is preparing those prisoners for something that's going to happen. They heard them and they were astonished. In the middle of the night and them with sore backs and in the inner prison, what do they do? They hear them sing and pray, "That's amazing, that's strange. They have something I don't have. They have a God that's not my God. I miss that. I'm jealous of them, of their response of that." Deepest joy often given in the most difficult circumstances.

The prisoners are hearing them and then suddenly there is an earthquake, 26, "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." So it was an earthquake, a great earthquake but also miracles because the earthquake did something specific. Their chains fell off. The doors sprang open. People's bands were loosed and people were able to go out and to flee.

So the keeper of the prisoners who had promised that he would not let anyone go and that he would be careful, woke up and he looked out of the window or wherever it was, you know, he was close to this place and he saw all those doors open and he thought, "It's over. That means my death. That means torture. That means persecution. That means I have to come before the court." And he drew his sword and he was going to kill himself and then there was that voice, "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and

seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." So this man was just not himself. He was despondent. He was in panic. His life was so dark and so meaningless that why would he live? And the Lord stopped him and the Lord made a way for him like we have to think of Abraham who was almost killing his son Isaac and the Lord interfered and said, "Do him no harm."

And this man began to listen, "he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas." This jailer was so humble and fearful and such a different person already. He was such a proud man, so strong, so authoritative, and now like this, he's falling down on his knees down before Paul and Silas. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Do you see that? This man is not in a good situation. He is trembling and he does not know where to go and what to do.

"What must I do to be saved?" What does that mean? What does that mean? "What must I do to be saved?" Some say that means that he wants to be delivered from the death penalty, that he just wants to survive this. I don't think so. You have to read it in context. You have to read 30 and 31 as a unit. "And brought them out, Sirs," he just looks up to them, "what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." So the salvation of Christ is the salvation he's looking for. He wants that real salvation because, don't forget, that Paul and Silas had been preaching in town for days and that that lady has been talking about them, that they are servants of the most high God and were showing the way of salvation.

So he must have heard about that and he must have heard about why they're in prison and he has seen the earthquake and he has noticed that they are special people, that they did not flee. You know, the Apostle Paul could have fled. He could have said, "This is the Lord. This is our opportunity. We are going to take this chance. Let's go, man! Silas, let's go together, run! The Lord has opened the doors. He's on our side." He's not leaving right now. The hand of God kept him and he saw that person, he saw that jailer, he saw him trembling and he felt, "I may not leave. It's a soul for eternity, I have to talk to him. I just can't, I can't leave. I feel such a burden on my soul. I have to preach the gospel unto these men." And maybe to them in prison, also others.

So by God's grace he did not flee but he had to talk. He brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must we do, what must I do to be saved?" Did he really think that he had to do something? Maybe but he did not know what he could do. He couldn't do anything. It looks like, it looks very similar to what we read on the day of Pentecost. Men and brethren, what must we do to be saved? He's really wondering how he can be saved from God's wrath, can be saved in a spiritual sense, can be saved in the way the apostle is talking about.

"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" You know, maybe some people in church this morning or listening at home can relate to this. You have experienced kind of an earthquake in your life, everything is moving, everything is

turning upside down and doors going opened and you're so confused and you have heard something in the past about the way of salvation and you know you need to be converted and you are panicking and you're on your knees and you're just praying, "God, what should I do to be saved?" Maybe it's that dramatic as it is in this case. It's not always so dramatic. Sometimes conversions are just more gradual like Timothy who was saved when he was young. Not so dramatic but yet the crossroads, the intersections are the same so you see it here kind of exaggerated and in drama.

Now what would you say? You know, there is a story about the British army, about a chaplain. I forgot the name of the chaplain. It was the head chaplain and he did also interviews with new chaplains. They wanted also to be in the army and go with the soldiers to the battlefields and just talk to them, comfort them. And so he had interviews with those candidates who applied for being a chaplain themselves and he always asked the same question, "What would you say to someone if that person has only three minutes to live? What would you say, three minutes to live? Just tell me." And if the answer was not right, then they were not hired. So they had to answer that question, "What would you say?" Now what would you say? If you would know that someone has only three hours to live or three minutes to live, what would you say? If someone is dying next to you unsaved, what are you going to say? Are you giving up and saying it's too late? Are you going to say, "Well, you can't read a book anymore, you can't read a Bible anymore. I don't know what to say, what to do."

You know, I think we can learn here, third thought, he is preaching. "But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down, brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said," they said, that's so simple, no? It's that not too simple? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," even, your family, your children. Maybe also including the servants.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Now did the Apostle Paul not forget something? Did he not forget he needed to repent? But you know, was he not repenting already? Had he not heard about the way of salvation? Was he not trembling? Did he not fall on his knees? Before was he not aware of, "I need to be saved"? I think there was, there was repentance already, no? But yeah, the summary of the gospel for someone close to death or maybe a year beforehand is the same, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

So that's what I must say today and if I am at the deathbed of someone and someone is saying to me, "I'm not prepared." I must say, "Repent. Lay all your sins before God even if you've only three minutes. Lay all your sin before God and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." I have to repeat that. I have to say the same thing. I may not do it any different ways. I may not say, "Well, you know, you need to go to counseling or so. I will just ask a counselor to come quickly." Or, "I need to baptize you somehow or have the last rites applied, or whatever." No, there's only one way, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Not to believe that you are saved. Do you see the difference? Don't believe that you're saved if you are not saved. You're not saved. Don't believe that you are.

So he doesn't say that, believe that you are saved. He says believe on. It says in Greek *epi*, it means "in." In him. Completely trust in that Savior. Put all your trust in him. Believe on him. Give yourself over unto him. "But pastor, someone cannot do that himself." You're so right. I know that, but the Lord can work it and I still have to say it. I still have to say it. I have to say what the Bible says. It is not that the Apostle Paul said, "I first want to know how deep it is, how far it goes." He has to leave it over in the hands of God. He has to do what he's supposed to do.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Is there someone listening this morning who is kind of, "I don't know anymore. I'm at my wit's end. I feel cornered. I have no hope. I have nothing to qualify with. I am a hopeless case. I am close to death. I don't feel well. I have cancer or something else." You know, I pray that the Lord applies it but you have to say this, I have to repeat this again, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Not hopefully. Not maybe. Not perhaps. But shall be saved. "Whosoever believeth in him will not perish but have everlasting life." That's not something that needs years and years. No. This can happen just in a split second. This can happen in a few minutes. This can happen so quickly as it is here.

And this man had not a very deep knowledge and deep understanding of all those secret things because the Apostle Paul that same night, that same hour came to his house, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." The Apostle Paul in the middle of the night came into his house, very close, adjacent to the prison, and he spake the word of God and he filled them in with all things, and he had his first lessons in religion, in true religion. But he was saved and things went very quick. You know, we are still in the days of Pentecost, I would say, still in those days that things went quick because the dikes broke through, right? You see those rapids in the river and things go very quickly with Cornelius and with the people on Pentecost, the 3,000 saved and baptized even.

"And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." So that's why I've chosen this text for this morning. So he was baptized. So where? Did they go outside to the river? I don't have that impression, you? I have the impression they were still there close to home in that house. So did they have a big well or so that they were submerged or was it sprinkling? You know, I don't know but it is possible that they were sprinkled upon, the word baptized can also mean sprinkled. But he was baptized and all his and that does not prove infant baptism. It does not prove it but it's likely, isn't it? "And all his." There are more texts like that in the Bible, "and all his, and her whole house and his whole house." And if you think of all those texts together, were there never families with children among them?

So they were baptized and all his, and I'm sure the adults among them, that there were adult children or adult servants. They had to confess and profess before. They had to believe before they could be baptized. I'm sure about that. But the immature ones, the

infants could really well also be baptized. When you put the whole puzzle together, I would think so and this is one of the pieces of the puzzle.

I was baptized, "he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." What a joy for them. They're saved. See how miraculous the ways of the Lord are? The Lord is a wonder-doing God and a family God, and again, some are converted in a very dramatic way like this man and things go very quick, and in other's lives things are going slower and not so dramatic but yet the same things. What are the same things? The same things like what must I do to be saved? That deep question, that need. The Lord always works that need in the heart. "I need to be saved, forgiven, be reconciled to God." That's always part of it and it's always part of it that that prayer to God, "What must I do?" That feeling of responsibility, "What now," with urgency. Do you see the urgency? It's always urgent. And then that true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, that's the heart of it. The heart of it is that looking upon him and that you just do not assume something but that you believe in someone personally who has revealed himself in the Bible to your heart and then he's precious. So then let me ask you the question: if you say that you believe in the Lord Jesus, in what way is he precious to you? What do you like in him? And if you say, "I don't know." Well, what faith is that? But then the Lord gives that faith and you see the love of God, and you see the willingness of Jesus, and you see his humility, and you see his invitation, then you see some of his names, then he means everything to you and more and more.

So the Apostle Paul preached that same night to them. So sore back and was in prison and he was listening to that jailer and he did not say, "Well, let's talk about this tomorrow. It's too late now." He said, "I want to speak the word of God tonight yet." So it was by now maybe 1 o'clock in the morning or so and that baptism took place that same night. So he was in a hurry, wasn't he? He was and in that way we should be in a hurry as well because we may not procrastinate, we may not say, "Well, let me think about it." You know, when I say believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, don't say, "Well, think about it," because I know how that goes. You will never get it. "So today if you hear his voice, harden not your heart. All ye that are heavy-laden, come to him and he will give you rest," and the only thing you need is to not work anymore, to not do anything yourself anymore, but to only rely on him, that Savior.

"And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." So that's the gospel preaching, and we have the privilege to still hear that ourselves. So dear family, you baptize your child, parents, grandparents, beloved ones, one thing you need from him. Also for your grandfather in the hospital, one thing is needful, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved and your house. It does not mean that all the children, all the grandchildren, they will all be saved but there's hope the Lord will save people in generations for his glory to the joy of his people and the joy of God. Amen.