

What Must I do to be Saved? Acts 16:29-31

We have come to the passage of Scripture. We saw that Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten for casting out an unclean spirit out of a slave girl. After being beaten the two, they are put in stocks and shackles in the inner prison where only the most notorious prisoners would have been kept. About midnight, Paul and Silas began worshiping God through the singing of hymns. The impact this had on the prisoners had been immense. We saw last week there was an earthquake. The prison doors, along with all the shackles of the prisoners were opened. When the Philippian jailor came and saw the doors opened and feared the worst, and was ready to kill himself rather than face the consequences, but then in verse 28, **“But Paul cried with a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.’”** Paul’s voice must have been loud but also such a shocking and comforting voice.

And it is incredible the difficulties and trials that we go through, because the only good that we can see that God can do is to deliver us from those circumstances or the people around us. But think of the purpose of this earthquake. The purpose was not to save Paul and Silas from the prison, but the purpose was to save the jailor. It was to give him the freedom of sins forgiven, and a new and living and forever relationship with his new Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In trials we can be so myopic and self centred where it is all about us. God does more than we could ever ask or think.

Look at verse 29, **“And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.”** Remember, it was after midnight and there was no natural light so we see the jailor four-fold response. He called for light, which is necessary. In order to have clarity, we need light. In order for him to see if all the prisoners are there he needs light. And remember the greatest light is Jesus. He is the light that gives so much clarity as far as who God is, who we are, and of course how we can approach our holy God. He is the light the missionaries beam forth. We also see he rushed in. This is something that he cannot wait, just as today is the day of salvation. We are not promised tomorrow, this is urgent. The third response is, He was trembling with fear, and knowing that life could be over people have to realize it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God. But also fear is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Most High. And then, lastly, he fell down. Remember, on an earthly scale he is the superior here. Having known that these two are here because of religious grounds, and having known something of what they taught, he knows that the earthquake and the prisoners all accounted for have something to do with these two men. There is a humbling of this man, a grateful fear that has overwhelmed the soul. And true humility always overwhelms the soul.

We could certainly do a sermon just on that verse, but what I want to concentrate is on his question by the jailor and the answer given by Paul. Someone has once said that there are no dumb questions. And I know what people are saying many times, but there are some really dumb questions. They used to debate in the Middle Ages the question of how many angels can stand on the head of a pin? Who cares and what bearing will that ever have on my life? And there are better questions people ask about life, about government, or about marriage — will I get married, if I am, will it last and will I be happy? Is this the right job to take? What other freedoms

will the government take away from us next? And there is nothing wrong with these questions. But there are other questions that are far superior because they deal not only with the here and now, but with eternity. They deal with God and our relationship with him. They deal with how can a sinner like me can ever come in the presence of an all holy and glorious God?

Then there are answers. And we often say to get answers will always cause us to grow in Christ or grow as a person. Knowledge is good! And that is true in and of itself, but it is not so much the answers but both the right answers to the right questions. There are many things about life, technology, science, sports, cars, money, even relationships that I really do not need to know, and will never affect my life in the here and now, nor in the life to come. And when we get the answers about our God and relationship with him, it really does change our lives, not just our destinies, but as we grow in knowing Christ through good questions and Biblical answers there is such a rising joy, freedom, security and confidence in our God in who he is and what he has promised.

So here are the questions we are going to grapple with today: are we seeking the right and highest knowledge? Do you truly know God or do you seem to have a distance from him? Is your knowledge and delight transforming you? Because if it is not, you might not be asking the right questions about Christ and our relationship with him. So this morning I want us to look at a right question that was asked at the right time, and then the right answer. May God give us his grace through a growing knowledge of the almighty through good questions and answers.

1. We need to be asking the highest questions to know our God. V. 30.

There are questions you get as a pastor or even as a Christian many times where people just want to stump you. They just think that there is no answer or if there is, there is no way you can answer them. Such as, if God is all powerful can he make a rock too heavy for him to pick up. And that is an absurdity. It is a contradiction. God also, cannot lie, so when we say God can do anything, it is anything that is according to his perfect will. People will ask questions about evil or whatever. If God is so good why do bad things happen to good people? It assumes there are good people, or there is no good that can ever come through trial and even evil. The cross itself is the answer of how God can bring the highest good even out of the freest and most evil acts of mankind. But these questions are never searching for answers. After an answer has been given they just go on to the next question, but there is no humbling of the heart. There is no contrition before God. Even Christians can be guilty of this. It is not so much wanting to know God but how insightful we are to even ask the question we ask. We might use very complicated and theological language just to sound smart. Oh questions just to pacify our drift away from him. We might even know the answer but hope the other person doesn't.

But there are other questions, searching questions, where individuals really want to know God, we can ask really great questions about faith, trials, hope, trying to know God better and deeper through his Word, and seek to have the appropriate response and heart in all of life.

Now this question certainly fits in that right category. Let's read it together again, **"Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'"** He

brought them out could have been in the courtyard of the prison, and this was a safe place to ask further questions of Paul. Paul and Silas no doubt have been talking to him and the other prisoners, which brings up this question. And it really is a humble question. If God is holy and God is perfect, and we are not, in fact if we are sinful and we have willfully sinned against God, how can we ever approach God? We know we need clean hearts and clean hands and we have neither. We are evil at the core of our being, which goes against the self-esteem of our age. And in order to be brought to see the significance of what we call the good news of the gospel of Christ there first has to be a humbling. I have to know who I truly am. If there is no humbling, then there can be no salvation.

Now many people have tried to downplay the significance of what the jailor asked. Some say he asks this question because in his Greek way of thinking, earthquakes are a judgment of the gods, how do I appease the gods? What sacrifice should I bring to them in order to gain their favour. But I don't think that is what we have here, because he not only bows down to them knowing that they represent a God that he does not know, but he would have known something of the crimes that they were guilty of, and heard something of this God through their speech and hymns they sung. He knows by them being present and not fleeing that this earthquake was caused by their God. And it is this God that he has to deal with in the end.

Some are also critical of the question because listen to the question again, **“What must I do to be saved.”** Some say that he is asking for something that he can do, some way to merit or earn his standing in God's presence. People would love for you to give them something to do. That is where pride comes in. When you look at the doctrine of justification by faith it is the most humbling of truths. Justification is not what we do, but through faith we have a perfect standing in Christ. His righteousness is put on our account just like we lived that perfect life, and our sins are laid on Christ, and he pays their wage on that cruel cross. It is a humbling and at the same time glorious truth. It is the truth we sing about in Rock of Ages. The third stanza, **“Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to Thee for grace: Foul, I to the fountain fly, Wash me, Savior, or I die.”** Utter humility! There is nothing I can do. We look to the work of another. And we celebrate the truth, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”! Think of it, if I had a thousand life times to do good works I would not be any closer than I am to my Jesus right now. I stand in his righteousness.

So, some say that he is looking to do something, but Paul does not go in the vanity of works, because this man was already on his knees, and he has truly been humbled by his sin against a holy God. He realizes there is nothing good in him. Paul discerns his condition through not only this question but his heart. There is no pride here that there is some kind of work he could accomplish that could shift this all around. And think about it, because there is a doing as we will see. And that is — there is a response to the gospel. And the gospel response is believing on Christ. We appropriate salvation through belief. We even say, “I have trusted Jesus as Lord and Saviour.” But in the end and as we grow in knowing Christ and knowing our own hearts, we see that believing and trusting Christ was even a work of his grace. Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not**

your own doing; it is the gift of God, “not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

So let me ask a couple of questions about this question before we move on to the answer. The first is — have you ever asked this question? Have you ever seen your sin before a holy God? The evidence of your sin is all around you but it is easy to say, “Well, everyone sins,” which would be entirely accurate, but that is a way so often of just downplaying your personal sin against God. Because not only is there evidence of your sin, there is evidence all around us that there is a God. He is a God of all power and glory, and his judgment will not be according to what others have done but what you have done. Think of all the lies, lusts, angers, words, pride, harshness, and the list of sins that makes up your life, and then coming before an all holy God, and you having to give an account. Listen to Hebrews 4:13, **“And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”** You and all your thoughts and actions have never been hidden from an all knowing and ever present God. One day all of us will come into his presence to give an account. The Scriptures do not say — you might but you must give an account. Does that truth frighten you? Does it humble you when you consider his worth and your sin? For those who realize that truth, such as this man who realized how close to death he was to coming into the presence of God, he asks the question that should be asked — what must I do to be saved? Have you asked that question in total bankruptcy of soul?

And secondly, I believe it is a great question even for believers because it reminds us of our own sin. The question still humbles us. It causes us to be different people — loving and patient and long suffering with others — because that question always turns us to the amazing grace of another.

2. We need to see the answer. V.31.

There are some verses that are so laden with meaning and with glorious hope and direction. And think of it, just a short time before this man was hopeless. He was in utter despair where the only thing left was to kill himself, and now he is brought to the most hopeful truth there is — the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But before you can get to the good news, the bad news of who we are needs to take root. And think how, even though the greatest news How obstinate people are to the gospel. Remember the missionaries, remember the persecution they endure. Remember, people are never persecuted because we just preach — God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. No, your sin has separated you from God and he is not for you but against you. People have to feel something of the weight of those truths and their guilt — if they don't, if they are good people then Jesus is irrelevant. But if we see who we are before a holy God, then this truth of Paul becomes the greatest news ever.

Let's look at it once more, read it with me meditatively, **“And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”** Think of it, because this is answering the question of the jailor. How can I be saved? And saved speaks of being rescued. And the answer is he could do nothing. His situation and our situation is so dire, serious, and hopeless that the only answer is outside of ourselves. And what we need to be saved from is God and his wrath. And the answer therefore is shocking and glorious. The way God saves us from God is through trust in his

provision to bring us to the very God who was against us. The answer is “Believe in the Lord Jesus.” And the answer to the problem of God’s wrath against us, and how we can be saved is uniform throughout the New Testament. And that should not surprise us because there is only one path, one gate, one life, one truth, one way in which we can come into the presence of God. And that way is repentant faith in Christ which is presented as either “believe” or “repent.” Jesus said in Mark 1:15, **“and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”** Other times it was just to repent, such as later when Paul is in Athens, in Acts 17:30, **“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”** Here is the call repent. Then at other times it is simply to believe. The most familiar verse in the Bible is John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** How does one obtain salvation? Through simple belief in Christ.

And here is the thing, the reason why the difference in the charge is the audience and the response of the people in front of him. Because in true savings faith both repentance and faith are always present. You truly cannot have one without the other. Again, there is a logical order. We need to see something of the weight and seriousness of our sin. We need to recognize that there is nothing I can do. God needs to give us eyes to see that we are morally bankrupt. This is really the hardest truth to see. William Farley in his book called *Humility* quotes D.A. Carson as saying, **“‘The hardest truth to get across to [university students],’ he writes, ‘is not the existence of God, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, Jesus’ substitutionary atonement, or Jesus’ resurrection. . . . No, the hardest truth to get across to this generation is what the Bible says about sin.’** Isn’t it true? From infancy we have been told what wonderful people we are, and how good and special we are.

But repentance, true godly repentance that brings us low and in utter despair opens us to the glorious truth of Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen from the grave. It opens us up to the glorious love of God — that God would make a way to be declared righteous in his presence through the righteousness of another. And here is the amazing thing — those congregations that are the most zealous and serving and ardent and joyous followers of Christ are those who emphasize the bad news, because you cannot understand anything of the depth, breadth, height or magnitude of the love of God unless you understand the bad news. Salvation is through belief in the finished work of another. It is through God coming in human flesh, living that perfect and impeccable life, and dying in our stead. Imagine the jailor who was about to die hearing and realizing and revelling in that one died for him. Do you think that after hearing the truth of justification that he would want to continue in sin? No way! Perish the thought. Romans 6:1-2, **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”** Realizing Christ has done it all for sinners like us not only humbles us but really creates a new direction, new life, and a desire to follow him. If this is who we are and this is what we deserve, and this is what Jesus has done how could we ever be lukewarm?

And so let me end with a couple of challenges. We need to be constantly asking good questions and then preaching the glorious answers to ourselves even as believers. Because this question and answer here is not just for those who perishing,

but for those who have believed. The language of sin and its punishment are quickly disappearing from our vocabulary. We talk about missteps or errors in judgment or mistakes, instead of the language of Scripture, which is sin, iniquity, and rebellion. So when we talk about what we need to be saved from, we often talk about our shame or our purposeless life or our simply wandering away from Christ. And there is a real sense where God through the gospel does many wonderful things, but the main intention of the gospel deals with the sin problem. It deals with the wrath problem. And believers and congregations who ignore that will grow not in zeal before God but apathy. God is not so big and holy and glorious, but I am. Life become more about self and what God can do for me rather than God.

And then there is the answer. I am justified, accounted righteous through belief (think how counter-culture this is) not in myself, but in my Lord. My sin not in part was nailed to the cross and I owe it no more praise the Lord, praise the Lord oh my soul. When that gospel through the preaching, through the ordinance of the Lord's Table, through our private devotions in our lives creates a heart for Christ, it changes us. The most forgiving and loving individuals are those who have been gloriously and wonderfully forgiven and accepted by God when they deserve the exact opposite. So think how that changes our relationships with other. Think how that causes us to forgive even when we see the weaknesses and sins of others. Gossiping and slander are gone because who am I to run someone down when I consider my sin? How could I ever carry grudges and bitterness against others when my debt was unpayable? The full gospel creates in us hearts that love the Lord, whose fellowship is tighter because of that Gospel.

So here is my plea — preach the whole gospel. Don't settle for a truncated or half-gospel which is no gospel. Realize God can do far more than we ask or think. Paul and Silas are in that prison to proclaim Christ, and they do. But they are also in that prison and able to sing at midnight because of this very gospel they believe. It is on their hearts so much that they are so eager and ready to answer the question — what must I do to be saved? There is an answer — believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! That truth changes our lives and continues to change our lives. Keep asking the question, and keep preaching the glorious answer to others and to your own heart.