

Paul goes to prison.

Read Acts 16:16-18 Paul had, under the authority of Jesus, cast a demon out of a lady who was following them. The owners of this girl were upset, being more concerned with their wallets than her well-being. Read Acts 16:19-21 which picks up the story.

Note that they did not mention their loss of money but instead accused them first of being Jews. The clincher came with the accusation that they were advocating customs that were not Roman. Philippi had been granted the status of a Roman colony, a privilege they took great pride in. Being anti Rome was a serious charge, so serious that no one bothered to ask for specifics. Read Acts 16:22.

Read II Corinthians 11:23-25. If you follow any of the Christian web sites that detail persecution of the church today, you know little has changed. Christians are still being beaten and cast into prison for their faith. Jesus declared His followers would be persecuted and they have been. Paul and Silas experienced something of that persecution.

Read Acts 16:23-24 The jailer made sure the men were secured, placing them in the dungeon and shackling their feet in stocks. That was probably a little overdone considering the condition they would have been in after being beaten by iron rods.

I would have been very upset with all of that. They had only done what was good for this lady so they did not deserve a beating. It is one thing to be punished for doing something wrong but altogether different being punished for something you didn't do. I would have been having some serious thoughts about where God was when I needed Him. God could certainly have prevented that but He didn't.

Paul and Silas **“were praying and singing hymns to God.”** Note the attitude and actions of Paul and Silas. They were praying and singing hymns to God. Instead of groaning they were singing. Instead of cursing men, as most prisoners did, they were talking to God. I wonder if I would be praising God after that.

What enables men who have been severely beaten and unjustly thrown into a prison dungeon to praise God? Nothing but absolute confidence in the sovereignty or control of God and the realization that ultimately God will make all things work together for His glory and our good. Paul later wrote in Romans, that as a believer we cannot begin to even compare our suffering to that of Jesus. Real praise in the midst of difficulty comes when one is absolutely certain God has allowed it for a purpose and will honor it in some way.

One of Paul's last letters was Philippians and was written from prison in Rome. The key words in Philippians are **“rejoice” and “joy.”** They appear 12 times in that short letter. Often, when things don't go the way we would like them to go, we try to suck it up and endure or survive. Paul and Silas rejoiced. That is possible only when one is totally convinced that God is in control and one is certain He never makes a mistake in what He allows to come our way.

Read Acts 16:26. God performed a similar miracle for Peter in Acts 12. Roman prisons were considered maximum security so no one could escape. They were mere paper houses to an all-powerful God.

One might attribute that simply to good luck. An earthquake happened at exactly the right time and place. But that is not a valid explanation. An earthquake might rattle doors open, although that would probably have meant the whole building was coming down, but it would not have rattled open the chains and stocks. There is only one explanation! God was at work and Paul and Silas were certain of it.

Verse 27 tells us that the jailer was preparing to commit suicide because he assumed that the prisoners had escaped. Under Roman policy a guard who lost a prisoner for any reason was disgraced and put to death. The jailer reasoned that suicide was a better option than what otherwise awaited him. In our day we might argue an earthquake was not his fault but in those days that was no excuse. Read Acts 16: 28. Verse 29-30 tell us that the jailer rushed in and asked Paul and Silas **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”**

Think for a moment how close that man was to entering into eternity forever separated from God. He was literally within moments of falling on his sword and ending his life here. Notice I said he would end his life here. I could have said he would die but death is a concept too easily misunderstood. Many in our society today assume that this life is all there is and that when one is dead it is all over. The Bible paints a very different picture. When the Bible uses the word “death” it means “separation” and is used in three different contexts. First, death is used to describe our spiritual condition as sinners in relationship to God. Because of sin we are spiritually dead or separated from God. In time we will die physically, which is separation of the body from the soul. The body goes into the ground and decays but the soul lives on. The Bible says it is appointed unto a man once to die but after that is judgment. The soul exists forever. If one has not made a commitment to Jesus then the soul is, in a sense, dead, not because it no longer exists but because it is forever separated from God. The soul belonging to one who has trusted in Jesus will never die for it will never be separated from God. It will, instead, be with Him in heaven forever.

That jailer came within moments of dying physically. Had he fallen on that sword his body and soul would have separated and while the body would have decayed his soul would have stood before a holy God and heard Him say “depart from me.” Fortunately, Paul told him that none of the prisoners had left and that enabled him to ask that all important question, **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”**

Some critics of Scripture suggest that the jailer only wanted to be saved from the certain death if any of the prisoners left but that clearly was not the case. He already knew none had left. Still it seems like a strange request coming out of the blue, unless we remember the context. Paul and Silas had been proclaiming the need of salvation and the demon possessed girl had declared that they were telling people how to be saved. Philippi was a small community and it is unlikely the jailer had not heard those reports. Even if the girl did not understand what she was saying, she

was telling the truth. And the jailer had to have been impressed with the attitude of Paul and Silas in his prison. Who sings in prison after having been brutally beaten? I doubt that jailer fully knew what he was asking but I am sure he knew that whatever those men had, he wanted. Our most effective witness is always living in such a way that others will want what we have.

The jailer found out. Regardless of what kind of salvation he wanted Paul knew that the salvation that men really need is salvation from the penalty of sin and the only one who can provide that forgiveness is Jesus Himself because He paid the penalty on the Cross. Read Paul and Silas' answer in Acts 16:31.

There is a lot more involved in following Jesus but that is the basic message of salvation and the starting point. Read Acts 16:32-34 to see what the jailer did because of his new found faith.

The world tells us we can be saved by doing. God says it has already been done on the Cross. The world says work and God says just accept. The world says that's not enough and God says apart from the Cross it would not be, but His grace is sufficient so you are always and only saved by grace through faith not of works.

Paul's declaration that one must believe is simply a repeat of what Jesus declared. Read John 3:16 and John 11:25-26.

Paul left the next day. You can read about that on your own in the last few verses of Acts 16. Notice in verse 40 Luke shifted from "we" to "they." Evidently Luke stayed behind to nurture a growing church. One of the members of that church was a Roman jailer whose life was changed when he asked how to be saved.

Paul's answer to the jailer's question is the same today. The only way to be saved is by believing in Jesus and what He did on the Cross. That then begins an exciting journey of walking with Jesus.