

An earnest appeal

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the portion of the chapter we have read, Acts chapter 16. Let me draw your attention to verses 30 to 32.

We could read again from verse 28, But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. And he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down, and therefore Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sir, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved in thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

Now we, if we had read the whole chapter, we would have seen for ourselves that, and even if we had dipped into the previous chapter, we would have seen for ourselves that, Paul, excuse me, Paul and Barnabas had been laboring together, and known to them, there was a very sharp contention imminent at this very point.

Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them on their missionary journey, and Paul was not in favour of that, because John Mark had forsaken them on a previous mission.

[1 : 34] There was something unstable about them, and hence there was a heated contention between these two great men. And in the end we find that Barnabas took John Mark with them, and headed for Cyprus, whilst Paul took Silas, and went from Cilicia to Derbe, then on to Lystra, on to Trichia, and eventually he came to Troas.

And whilst he was at Troas, he had a vision, and in the vision, a man from Macedonia appeared unto him, and told him to come over and help them. So leaving Troas, they came to Philippi, which was the principal city of that part of Macedonia.

And on arriving there, we see for ourselves that they met with a lot of success. Well, that's the way we're trying to look at it. First of all, we have Lydia's conversion, and that must have gladdened Paul's heart.

And then we see that there was this young woman, out of whom they cast a spirit of divination. She had done a good work, but of course others suffered, because this woman was now converted.

And because they did, they were going to lose to her conversion. They rose up in opposition to them, in opposition to them, and cast them into prison.

[2 : 59] Well, that is the setting of our text. But tonight I would like to look at three points briefly. First of all, we find lostness acknowledged here.

Serge, what must I do to be saved? Secondly, we find a plea for help. Serge, what must I do to be saved? And thirdly, we have, of course, salvation received by this man.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and they should be saved. And we find that, after Paul had expounded the truth to him, that both he and all his were baptized for work.

Let us look then at the first point. Now, I think I would like just to pause for a moment, and to maybe remind those of us who trust the Lord, of the good example Paul and Silas set before us here.

Here were two of God's saints, discharging their duties honorably, doing the will of God, preaching the gospel, bringing salvation to two people, and now they find themselves in prison, in the inner prison, with their feet fast in the stocks.

[4 : 21] And yet, we don't hear one word of complaint from these men. They are not challenging God's providence. They are not challenging his wisdom. We find them very contented there, with their feet in the stocks.

Why? Because they knew they were persuaded in themselves. They were where God wanted them to be. And it's good for you and for me to know that we are where God at presently wants us to be, and that we are doing what God wants us to be doing.

That's the best place on earth to be in, and that's the best duty to be engaged in. And let us not stand complaining about the providence of God, wanting to do this and wanting to do that other thing.

Let us do well the duties at our disposal. Let us discharge them all to the glory of God. And these men were in the inner prison, and they were contented for the time being with their lot.

They could have grumbled and groaned and found complaint with this providence. Surely they could have been better employed if they were not libertarian. Here they are incarcerated for doing good.

[5 : 33] Yeah, but here we have a grand example of the power and the sovereignty of God. All things work together for good. To them who love the Lord, to them who are called according to his purposes.

The wicked men who are cast them into prison, their design was to frustrate the purposes of God. But we see how unwittingly these wicked men fulfill the purpose of God.

How can you work against God and succeed? You cannot. So here we are then in the inner prison. And at midnight, they burst into praise.

And they prayed to God. And the lugubrious walls of that prison reverberated to the sound of this sweet music. I suppose the likes of it was never heard before.

And the prisoners must have wondered what kind of men are these? What kind of fellow prisoners are we here? That at midnight, they are praising the Lord and they are praying.

[6 : 37] And this was followed by a great earthquake. And little did the Philippian jailer realize at that moment that he would be a changed man within a very short while.

He was ignorant of his lostness. You know, friends, as long as we are ignorant of our lostness, a saviour will not mean much to us.

We don't see the relevance of a saviour. Any more than we, if we are fit and healthy and strong, a doctor doesn't mean a thing to us. And the moment we are unwell, he becomes very relevant.

That is something like ourselves. As long as we are ignorant of our sins, a saviour doesn't mean a thing to us. We are also like maybe a motorist. He's got his map.

As long as he can locate his position on that map, as long as he can locate his position from signposts, he won't ask anyone where he is. At the moment, he is lost.

[7 : 44] And he cannot find his position on that map. And he cannot find his position from road signs. He will ask somebody, where am I? I am lost. That the Lord will bring home to some sinner here this evening his or her lostness.

You are here. I am certain you are here tonight and you are lost. Remember that. You are lost. That if God were to call your soul into eternity at this moment, you would be dumb.

And who can deliver out of the hand of God? Do you realize your denture, your insecurity? I wonder how many present here tonight are ignorant of their sins.

You know, we thank God for the faithful adherence we have, faithful in the sense that they come regularly to God's house. They're very supportive. They give well to the cause.

They bring their children above them morning and evening. And we want to commend that and we want to encourage that. But there's a grave danger there as well.

[9 : 00] Maybe we have our own idea of salvation. What is expected of us? We have our own code of ethics. And as long as we adhere to all that, we feel quite happy with ourselves.

We don't feel that we are bad. We don't feel that we are worthy of damnation if we are to die. Maybe we compare ourselves favorably with God's people. Ah, but that's where you're wrong.

Feelings deceive because a saint feels unclean. Because a saint feels wretched. That doesn't make him wretched nor unclean.

Paul cried, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? But Paul was a saintly man. And just because a sinner feels clean in his own eyes or her own eyes, just because they feel good, just because they feel that they are not offensive to God, just because they are good neighbors, they see themselves as good neighbors, honest and hardworking, respectable, circumspecting their life in general, that doesn't mean to say that that will save them from the damnation of God.

You see, we are all, we all come into this world guilty.

[10 : 31] It's strange that you are guilty before you have committed an act of sin. You see, oh, that's illogical. No, it isn't. David speaks of being conceived in his mother's womb in iniquity and sin.

And how are we guilty before we have committed sin? Because the guilt is a guilty contract in our mother's womb. And the guilt is the consequence of somebody else's sin, Adam's sin.

And that guilt he brought upon himself and upon all his posterity, every one of us. Because we are guilty, we come into this world with a bias towards sin.

Our natural propensity is towards sin. And sinning is as natural to us as eating or breathing or walking or talking. And we sin in thought, word, and in deed.

We sin habitually. the difference between the believer sinning against God and the unbeliever sinning against God is this, that the unbeliever sins habitually.

[11 : 48] He lives in sin and he lives for sin. Whereas the believer sinning against God has indeed is no longer, sorry, habitual.

the moment he repented of his sins, at that moment the habit was broken. And although he still sins in thought, word, and in deed, he goes on repenting of his sins.

If it were within his power, he would be sinless. If it were within his power, he would get rid of the pollution of sin. That's what Paul had in mind.

Oh, for the good that I would, that I do not, and the evil which I would not, that I do. A battle rages within the believer, the spirit fighting against the flesh.

Have you got that battle within your bosom? You haven't. No unregenerate person has that battle. That battle belongs exclusively to those who have come to a saving knowledge of the Lord.

[12 : 50] So then, the Holy Spirit takes the word of God and he convinces the sinner that he and she are guilty before God to turn them from their sins to Christ.

You know, friends, I often feel that there is a danger in preaching the gospel of appealing more to the emotions than to the understanding. And the order of scripture is that it must come through the understanding.

Faith cometh through hearing and hearing by the word of God. And therefore, we must expound the truth and appeal to the understanding of the sinner.

And when the word is blessed and when the sinner is enlightened, the emotions are also arrested and they are turned Godward. His will is liberated and he willingly turns from his sins to Christ.

Repentance into life is a saving grace for by a sinner that has a true sense of his sins, an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does the grief and hatred of his sins turn from it into God with full purpose of an endeavour after new obedience.

[14 : 10] A shorter character is a lovely little book, isn't it? Study it. It's full of material. You'll derive much comfort, much health from it.

So you wonder, friends, how profitable it is to tell complete strangers to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and that they will be saved.

You know why? Because we take it for granted that strangers we meet with know who knows who the Lord Jesus Christ is. we underestimate the ignorance there is of scripture throughout our nation.

And I feel that there is something of that nature before us here. Now it would appear that through Paul and Silas' prayers, through their praise, besides of course the work of the Spirit, that all that was brought to bear upon this man, a man who was hardened in his sin, a man who had lived in sin for many years, a man who had no thought about God and eternity, nor the salvation of his soul, at least, scripture is silent about these things.

And yet, these men were sent into that prison to rescue that man from his sins, for not to bow before the sovereignty of God.

[15 : 38] how did God rescue you from your sins? How? Where did he speak to your soul?

What instruments were employed? Can you remember the night? Can you remember the day? Can you remember the occasion? Some may be through the death of a loved one, some through sickness, some through sitting, listening, in God's house, the word being expounded.

Others may be through reading the word. He's got his own ways. And shouldn't you be thankful this evening if you're sitting there and you can say, well, he indeed loved me and gave himself for me.

Wonderful. We should commend the saviour to those around us, commend them to sinners. There is nothing like the happiness of God's people. Oh, happy art thou, O Israel, a people saved by the Lord.

Real happiness, real happiness. They have real security as well. They are there, they are built upon Christ, Christ, and against that rock the powers of hell can never prevail, and nothing can ever separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

[17 : 00] So on that night, at midnight, at midnight, this man was very close to salvation and he was unaware of it up to this point. And we find suddenly God was at work, and this man was convicted of his sins.

This man was troubled and he cried, Sir, what must I do to be saved? Isn't it wonderful what God can do?

You know, I was just mentioning to your minister today, how much unbelief is in God's people. We look at the world and at the universe, and we believe that God created the world and the universe.

We look at empty pews, and we wonder, will these pews ever be filled? Don't we? Under leased. Surely the one who has created the universe, he can fill the pews.

The one who created the universe, he can open the hearts of the people, he can turn a nation to himself. And here we see then his sovereignty, and we see the work of grace very much in evidence here.

[18 : 19] Let us leave them the first point, then very briefly move to the second point, a plea for help. Serge, what must I do to be saved?

Let me return again to the analogy of the motorist and his map. The moment he discovers he is lost, he will look for somebody, somebody reliable to tell him where he is.

Somebody who will lead him back onto the right boot, won't he? And the moment a sinner is convinced of his sins, he will begin searching and inquiring and looking for help.

You know, the moment God touches the heart, maybe God's people you never thought much of, all of a sudden, they become precious to you.

They know that they have something to offer, the man of the world having got. God has turned to the drunkard is converted. He doesn't return to the pub to see if some of his mates there can help them.

[19 : 27] He knows they cannot. He will go in search of somebody who can, one of God's people. And so some might turn to the word and begin searching the word for themselves, and God has blessed the reading of the word to many.

Others might turn to the church and listen to the word expounded. And we see in the case of Philip and the eunuch, though the eunuch had access to the word of God, he had the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, yet he needed somebody to interpret and expound that prophecy to him.

And God in his sovereignty sent Philip to that man, and Philip through expounding the truth brought light to the eunuch, and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing.

See again the importance of the understanding, the importance of understanding what we read. And here God in his sovereignty placed his servants, and none other than the apostle Paul at this man's disposal at this moment.

They have been employed there by the Holy Spirit in bringing conviction to this man's soul, and now they are still there to help that man find Christ the Savior.

[20 : 52] And what was Paul's reply? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Was he saved at that moment?

We know that we are saved the moment we believe, but the pertinent question is did he believe at that moment? I don't think he did. That brings us on to our third point.

Salvation found. Now, I feel in the reply that Paul gave to that man, he gave him the gist of the matter.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and that has never changed. that is still the remedy. That will always be the remedy. It doesn't matter how long the world lasts, it could last for another million years, and that will still be the remedy for sinners.

There is no other way. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh into the Father but by me. There is no other way. People tell you there are many ways to God. Nonsense.

[22 : 02] Only one way to God. And unless we come through Christ, we can't get rid of our sins. And if we can't get rid of our sins, we can never find acceptance with God.

There is no reconciliation. You can forget about your sins. That doesn't mean you got rid of your sins. Sin clings to us.

We can't get rid of sin. It clings to us. And hence we must come through Christ. And God will never be pleased with our miserable righteousness.

Our righteousnesses are described as filthy rags. So we must come through Christ. Now I find the answer to what I have said in verse 32. And they speak unto him the word of the Lord unto all that were in his house.

And then in verse 34. And when he had brought them into his house, he said, meet before them and rejoice, believing in God with all his house. And so forth.

[23 : 05] As far as I can see, Paul told them that it had to do to be saved. And then afterwards, he expounded this to him. He explained to him who Jesus Christ was and why and how we are saved through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and for what this man believed.

So friends, where can we learn about Jesus Christ in God's infallible word? That is the ground of our faith.

Let me illustrate. If you met your minister, maybe up there on high stage someday, and he would tell you, there was a big crash in the A9, four people were killed, five were injured.

Would you believe him? Or could I put it another way, would there be any reason not to believe him? You would believe him.

First of all, because he is a trustworthy person, and that's important. But he wasn't the type of person who would go around telling lies. So the person is important.

[24 : 20] He is trustworthy. And secondly, was there anything unreasonable or incredible about a crash in the A9 in which four people were killed and five were injured?

No, there's nothing reasonable about that. Things like that almost happen every day. And on the basis of these two important issues, you would believe what he told you without any proof whatsoever that there had been a crash and that people had been killed and injured.

And you would move on and tell the first person you met. But there is another dimension to this. If you met a local scoundrel renowned for lying, he told you the same story, would you believe him?

Ah, there's another dimension here. What he told you was reasonable and credible, wasn't it? But then there is the person, could you trust his testimony?

testimony. So maybe you'd go away with reservations. He might say, he might be telling the truth, he might not. He might be afraid to repeat what he said.

[25 : 37] Well, you see, the ground of our faith is God's infallible word. This is God's divine testimony. testimony. And when we believe, we believe everything that this word contains, from Genesis to Revelation.

And there we are told all about sin, at least all we need to know about sin. And we're told about God's wrath and curse upon sinners.

God will never be reconciled to sin, he hates sin. And as long as sin is part of us, we cannot be reconciled to God. We must get rid of sin.

And you can't get rid of sin without Jesus Christ. He died for sinners. And in coming to God through Christ, you are relinquishing everything else you ever placed confidence in for salvation.

You're throwing away your prayers, you're throwing away your self-righteousness, and you come to God as a sinner. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

[26 : 49] And it takes the power of God to convince us that we are sinners, that we have nothing whatsoever to offer God. Isn't that wonderful? Yet people think that they must come with something.

What must I do, said the man, to be saved? He wanted to do something. The answer will believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt be saved. Before I end up, let me remind sinners here this evening, that you also, you're as close as that to salvation, if you will believe.

Believe, and thou shalt be saved. And imagine the joy this conversion brought to this home. He and all his were baptized forthwith.

He and all his were brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord. Is there a parent here this evening, or are parents here who are unbelieving parents, and you're looking for satisfaction from the fleeting things of this life, but you've discovered that the kind of satisfaction you derive is very evanescent, isn't it?

It's like vapor, it appears for a moment and it vanishes away and it's got a diminishing effect. You try one thing after another and you're still not happy. I can tell you, you're wasting your energy, you're wasting your substance, you're wasting your time, you'll never find satisfaction in the world.

[28 : 17] Just consider the blessing that would enter your home if you were to cast your lot in with Christ. It's a happy home, a Christian home.

I wonder that God has given you children, precious children. There are people out there in the world that would go to any extent to have children. God has given you such gifts.

They're precious, while their souls even are more precious. It's a tragedy if both the mother and father are setting an example before these children, an example that is working to the detriment of their spiritual interests.

The Lord will touch your heart. There's someone here this evening who frequently visits the pub, who tries to get away from reality. This is what they think.

Take a wee drink and you get above your sorrows. Forget them. The sorrows are still there. In fact, you only exacerbate your misery. The following day you realize that you have wasted X amount of pounds and made a fool out of yourself into the bargain and the problems are still there.

[29 : 32] They haven't gone away. That's the same with sin. You can put your sin for life at the back of your mind. It's still before the mind of God.

The day you die, if you die in your sins, and God forbid, you will be judged according to the deeds done in the body, whether they were good or evil.

Be wise, turn from your sinful ways, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and know what the peace of God is that passes all understanding.

It is wonderful. It is wonderful. The love of God being shed abroad in the heart. You'll find new friends. This is what Paul says.

You become a new creation. Not just a new creature, a new creation. All things become, you will see even providence in a different light. You will see nature in a different light.

[30 : 29] You will see a blade of grass in a different light. You will see it as a handiwork of God. And even when God deals with you in providence, you can see his wisdom there.

Sometimes his providences are inscrutable. On other occasions we can understand what he's doing. But by faith we know that he will never do anything that will work against our spiritual interests.

Cast your lot in with them. May God bless you these few thoughts. Let us pray. O Lord, we praise and we thank thee for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is the power of God into salvation. May it please thee this evening to apply it with power to somebody here. we know not what is going on in the hearts of people.

There might be someone searching, someone under deep conviction even at this time. We pray that they would look to the Savior, that they would know his peace.

[31 : 41] And we know that supposing one were to offer the whole world to someone under conviction of sin, that he or she would find no solace in that.

Bless every family here, every parent, every child. Take each of us to our homes in safety now. And when the mouth of man is silent, may the Spirit speak with power in his own quiet but effective way and guide us in Christ.

Amen.