

## SALVATION SIMPLY STATED

June 21, 1959

Scripture: Acts 16:25-31

"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . ."—Acts 16:31

One of Charles Haddon Spurgeon's greatest sermons was entitled "Songs In The Night." It contained the arresting phrase "Any fool can sing in the day . . . but the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by—who sings from his heart . . ." This great English preacher might well have had in mind Paul and Silas as they languished in a Philippian jail.

Instead of complaining, at midnight they were praying and singing praises to God. We are told that the "other prisoners heard them" (v.25). The word "heard" renders another which means to listen attentively. What a witness God's servants bore in their suffering!

God answered their praise in the power of an earthquake which set them free. Subsequent events revealed that God was working not merely through the physical power of nature but through the spiritual power of His grace. We shall see this as we consider, first, the question; second, the answer; third, the result. Thus we shall see salvation simply stated.

First, note the question. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v.30). This question was asked by a pagan Roman soldier. So brutallized was he by familiarity with pain that he had given no thought to the suffering of his prisoners. He evidenced no emotion of pity as he roughly "thrust" them into the inner prison, cruelly spreading their legs as he fastened their feet in the stocks. With no remorse he soon was so soundly asleep that it required an earthquake to awaken him.

This tremendous upheaval of God in nature left him in terror. If a Roman guard allowed his prisoner to escape, he was required to forfeit his own life. So

thinking that the prisoners had escaped, he was about to commit suicide by falling upon his Roman short sword. Paul arrested him with the cry, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here" (v.28).

Perhaps I speak to someone who like the jailer has come to the end of your rope. The circumstances of life have so hemmed you in that there seems no way but to take the back door out of life through suicide. Or maybe you have simply given up in despair, saying, "Oh, what is the use of going on?" Maybe you have lost your health or your money. Possibly friends have deserted you. Or your family life has fallen in ruins. Have you come to the point that you are dying a slow death by seeking refuge in alcohol, narcotics, or an endless round of futile pleasure? Your life is a shambles as you say, "Eat, drink, and be merry! For tomorrow we die!"

In such a moment God has a word for you. "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." Things are not as bad as they seem. You have exhausted your strength and way. You have come to your extremity. But your extremity is God's opportunity. Realizing that you are helpless within yourself, you are just right for God to do His wondrous work in you.

Interpreters disagree as to what was involved in the jailer's question. However, we believe that the circumstances warrant the belief that the jailer thought in terms of a spiritual deliverance. Certainly his inquiry indicates that he held Paul and Silas in great respect. For in place of his former attitude of indifference he now addressed them as "Sirs."

Actually, this Roman soldier lived in an age that was very much conscious of its need for salvation. The various religions of the time had failed to satisfy the hunger of human hearts. So when these men, arrested for speaking in the name of God (Acts 16:17), were delivered in

so strange a manner, the jailor rightly interpreted the event as an act of God. Hence his question. He simply asked, "What must I do to be saved?" The fact that the jailor asked the question indicates that he realized his need for salvation. He was under conviction for his sin.

The Greek word "to be saved" as used by the jailor is most revealing. It is a *first person singular of the first aorist passive subjunctive*. The "first person singular" indicates the jailor's personal sense of guilt. The "aorist" tense expresses his desire for immediate and instantaneous action. The "passive" voice suggests his realization of helplessness, and that his salvation depended upon the work of another for him. The "subjunctive" mode indicates the uncertainty but also the hope that was in his heart.

Before you can be saved you must in conviction realize your personal guilt and condemnation before God. There can be no procrastination. You must realize that your salvation lies not in yourself but in Another. There must be in your heart a hope conducive to faith that you can be saved. I pray that this may be your experience right now, as you cry, "What must I do to be saved?"

Second, consider the answer. It was a simple answer to a simple question. "Believe on the Lord Jesus (Christ), and thou shalt be saved . . ." (v. 31). God always simplifies. It is man who complicates.

Note what the apostles did not say. They did not say, "Quit your meanness, join the church, be baptized, or complete a course in the catechism." They simply said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus . . ." When God devised a plan of salvation, He required only that which all men might meet. Suppose that He had said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and crook the little finger on your right hand." You say, "That is simple. I can do that." But suppose there should be just one man in

all of history who had a stiff little finger on his right hand. Then God would be unjust to make such a requirement. But a righteous God made only one requirement—faith. And all men can meet that condition. Emerson once said, "A man bears faith as an apple tree bears apples."

Every one of you lives your daily life by faith. You have faith that your wife will not poison your food, faith that food will nourish, faith in your doctor to prescribe healing medicine, and in the pharmacist to prepare it correctly. You believe in the solvency of your bank, and in the government to stand back of the paper money that it prints. The fact that in isolated cases this faith may be ill-placed does not lessen the truth involved in such illustrations. For your faith for salvation is placed in the infinite and righteous God who never fails.

Look for a moment at this simple answer. The word "believe" in Greek is a *second person singular first aorist imperative*. The "second person singular" means that you must believe for yourself. The "aorist" tense speaks of the instantaneous nature of faith. You can trust in an instance, and the result is final. The "imperative" mode expresses a command. It is not a matter of alternative choice, but of absolute necessity. There were many religions in that day which claimed to give salvation. The apostles say that salvation is to be received only through faith in the Lord Jesus. The word "shall be saved" in Greek is a *second person singular future indicative passive*. Again salvation is personal and individual. The "future" tense is used simply because the jailor had not yet believed. But the "indicative" mode speaks of the certainty of salvation the second he believes. The "passive" voice emphasizes again that salvation results from what Another had done for him.

In many of the best manuscripts the word "Christ" does not appear. The reading is "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." We believe that this is a true rendering of what the

apostles said. The jailor, being a pagan in a city with little or no Jewish influence, would know nothing of Christ, the Messiah of the Hebrew scriptures. But recall Paul's words in Romans 10:9, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus. . . ." A study of Greek papyri shows that in the ancient world it was customary to apply the title "lord" to pagan gods and rulers. In Egypt we read "Lord Serapis" as applied to a god. Also the ruler Ptolemy XIII was called "the lord king god." Ptolemy XIV and Cleopatra were called "the lords, the most great gods." By the time of the Roman emperors Claudius and Nero, Paul's day, the title "lord" was applied to them. This usage involved more than respect. It was a term of worship directed to the emperors as gods. Such worship involved the confession of "Lord Caesar." To refuse to do so was regarded as treason punishable by death.

So Paul said to the Romans and to this jailor, "You must so believe in Jesus as your Saviour that, in the face of possible death, you will confess "Jesus is Lord" rather than "Caesar is Lord."

Summarizing we say to you that if you are to be saved it is an absolute necessity that you so believe in Jesus and what He has done for your salvation, that in the face of intimidation and opposition you will forsake all other allegiances for salvation as you confess "Jesus is Lord."

Third, note the result. Acts 16:32 says, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord." The jailor did not understand all that was involved in faith in Jesus as Lord. So the apostles explained it to him. They showed him that faith is *trust*. As you trust a chair to bear the weight of your body, so must you trust absolutely in Jesus, and Him alone, to bear your sin in saving your soul. They taught him that faith is *acceptance*. You must accept as a gift, apart from your works, the salvation which Jesus has provided. They told him that faith was committal. You must com-

mit yourself to Jesus as you would to an airplane. You do not fly it. You simply commit yourself to it. I Peter 5:7 says, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

That the jailor did believe is seen in the fact that we find him treating the apostles' wounds and feeding them. He was a changed man. And so will you be if you will believe in Jesus. Your attitudes will be different. Your habits will be changed. You will give an outward demonstration of the inward change which Jesus has effected in you. The power of God in your life will make it possible for this transformation to be effected.

Note that the apostles witnessed to the jailor and to his household (v.32). *After* they had believed in Jesus they were baptized (v.33). Because they had been saved, they symbolized that which Christ had done for their salvation, His death, burial, and resurrection. Furthermore, they symbolized the death and burial of their old life and their resurrection to walk in their new life in Christ (Rom. 6:4).

In conclusion, do you ask, "What must I do to be saved?" God's reply through His Word is "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved."

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