

Bible e-Study on the book of Acts (16)

And awaaay we go! (from here on it's the journeys of Paul)

“30 He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Acts 16: 30

NUGGET – This question has more than one level of understanding to it. The jailer may have been asking, ‘what must I do to be saved from death because I have failed at my duty’. He may have been asking ‘what must I do to be saved from damnation because I’m going to take my life’. He may have been asking ‘what must I do to be saved because no one else will help me out of this predicament I’m in and I must do something’. Or perhaps he was asking what Paul answered, ‘what will save me from the wrath of God because I’m about to meet Him’?

This is a man near death either by his own hand or by the hand of the authorities because the integrity of the jail, his responsibility, had been broken. And even though it was an earthquake, and not the jailer’s fault, still he knew he was responsible. The escape of prisoners, no matter how it happens, or by what ‘act of God’ that allows it, does not remove the guilt he bears of letting the prisoners free. And he knows it.

This is a man of high honor. He does not shirk his responsibility, he doesn't try and shift blame or assign fault to others or to a god or to God. No, he recognizes 2 things:

- That he deserves punishment for failure.
- That He cannot save himself.

And so he seeks his salvation by means of an authority that he recognizes is greater than himself. He knows that apart from the mercy of Someone else, he is lost. And he comes to his prisoners, who he knows could have left but didn’t, and to them he makes his appeal. He knows that had they left, he would be dead by his own hand by now.

And here’s the thing, Paul and Silas know that same thing. That’s why they don’t leave. They put this man’s fate ahead of their own suffering and circumstance. When we read this we may think that *‘of course they would stay and of course they wouldn’t mind a little beating and bruising, that’s what saints do!’*

And yes that’s true, but couldn’t you also make the case that God was freeing them by the earthquake and so it would be prudent to receive that gift of from Him and get out of Dodge? Perhaps. But what we know is that they stayed. They stayed for the benefit of that jailer. They didn’t know what he was going to do next in coming to them seeking some form of salvation. But they did know that if they left, he was a dead man. And for his sake they stayed.

And for our benefit we get the simple lesson that sometimes what people ask of us, requires us to hear with the ears of God as to what they *really* need. Paul and Silas did not try and save this man from the authorities or from criminal prosecution. No they gave him the one answer he needed to face whatever came his way. The point for us is to be ready, no matter how harsh our circumstances, to be ready to hear with the ears of God, the cries of those in need, and answer with the simple message of salvation – Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved!

APPLICATION -

1. Sometimes we need to reject the premise of the question being asked of us and answer with what is needed in the circumstance, as we understand it through the lens of God's grace and mercy. In a conversation this week – listen for what’s needed not so much what’s being said.

PRAY – Give thanks to God for His mercy to us who, like the jailer, know that we deserve punishment and cannot save ourselves, but He grants us salvation of His grace.