

The Conversion of a Jailer

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to Acts chapter 16. We're looking at verses 25 through to 35 to 34.

The account we have here of the conversion of the keeper of the prison or the Philippian jailer as is more commonly referred to. Now we have looked at the previous incidents here where you get the conversion of Lydia.

And we've looked last week at how that led to the slave girl here being released from this evil spirit that had possessed her. And we've taken it that that too was in fact a conversion, though it's not specifically said to be so.

But because it's part of what Acts here is dealing with as the establishment of a church in Philippi. And God is doing that here that these were the foundational members of the church.

That was how God came to build the church in Philippi as he always is wherever he builds a church. It's by people's lives being changed. It's by bringing people to be his own people, to be people who will come to witness for him and to be his people in that particular locality.

[1 : 1 6] And it is interesting that although you only read about these three, yet when you get to the end of the chapter there, as Paul went and Silas, they visited Lydia when they were released.

And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed. In other words, there were other people not mentioned here, obviously, who had come to form this church in Philippi by the time that Paul and Silas left.

The Lord had been at work through these various people that had come together. So you can see how they are all obviously there, how they're connected together.

The conversion of Lydia that gave a place then in her house for the church to meet. And then it says as they were going to the place of prayer, that's when they met this, they were met by the slave girl.

And it was because of what had happened, what happened to the slave girl, that they were thrown into prison. And it was because they were in prison there and these events happened in the prison that the Philippian jailer came to be converted.

[2 : 1 6] So in the providence of God, all of these things form one unbreakable chain of events that are so tightly bound together that you can see, obviously, that God is at work in arranging all of these things in his providence just for the establishing of his own church here in Philippi.

It is absolutely clear that everything that happens there is under the Lord's direction for that end of establishing a church for himself here in Philippi.

So we're going to look at the conversion of the jailer here. We'll look first at how the jailer came to know his need. Because he came to ask Paul and Silas what must he do to be saved.

Then we'll look at how the gospel met his need. Because what Paul and Silas said to him, they said, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.

That's the essence of the gospel. That's really what the gospel proclamation is about. That's what the gospel content is. It's about Jesus Christ and it's about having salvation in him and how we come to have salvation in him through believing in him.

[3 : 27] That is the essence, the core elements of the gospel. It's the gospel, the message of the gospel that met this man's needs as he came and threw himself in the presence and asked what must I do to be saved.

And then thirdly we'll look at how his conversion was shown to be genuine. How it proved itself to be genuine. And we'll see that briefly in conclusion. In the way that he both took care of Paul and Silas and also of the way that it mentions how he rejoiced.

And how his whole household came to rejoice with him that he had believed in Jesus Christ as his savior. So how did he come firstly then to know his need?

Well certain things took place in this prison. And the first thing you read about is that at midnight, about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns, praise to God.

Now that's important in its own right. It doesn't mean that the Philippine jailer was influenced much by that because he obviously had gone to sleep.

[4 : 32] He didn't actually necessarily stay awake with a sense of wonder about what was happening. That these people were actually singing in his prison and praying at the same time.

Or along with their singing, the jailer went to sleep. But this was happening in the prison. It's part of the whole event as God describes it for us here. And it is a remarkable thing. Because remember that, as you read earlier there, verse 23.

When they had inflicted many blows upon them. The lictors, as we saw last time. The people who the magistrates had appointed to apply such punishment as the magistrates sometimes would specify.

They had flogged Paul and Silas. They had used the instrument they had, which was a long axe handle. One end had the axe head.

The other had these canes attached to it. And they were just flogged with that. And when you're flogged like that with canes, then obviously your back is going to be lacerated.

[5 : 34] It's not just bruised. The AV translation of this, I think, is really probably a better description of what had happened when they inflicted many stripes upon them.

Stripes, their backs would have been cut into lacerated, bleeding wounds by the effect of this scourging.

And then they were thrown into prison, not just any part of the prison, but because they were high security, as far as the magistrates were concerned, they ordered the jailer to put them into the inner prison and fasten their feet in the stock.

The inner prison was not just the most secure part of the prison. It was actually the most cramped part. It was actually deliberately small. It was deliberately cramped so that whoever was put in, they really knew that this was a place of real pain and difficulty.

We're told that very often you couldn't even stand up. You just imagine in that environment with all of the pain that you'd been suffering from, the flogging you'd undergone, and then thrown into prison, into the innermost prison, sitting up against the wall.

[6 : 52] Their feet were made fast in the stocks. They couldn't stand up properly. They would have all of these conditions. And yet what are they doing? They're actually praying and singing hymns to God.

The other prisoners, we're told, were listening to them. They'd never heard such a thing before. They would have expected that these two men, having been dealt with the way they were dealt with, having been thrown into the high security part of the prison, that they would, as so often would be the case, they would be cursing and swearing.

And all sorts of complaints flowing from their mouth as they would curse those who had done this and as they would seek to bring further curses upon them for their cruelty.

Instead, Paul and Silas were actually singing hymns to God. And along with that, they would pray to him. Now, there's obviously in that something quite remarkable.

God gave them the grace and the strength to actually sing his praises in those situations. And, well, there's a lesson in that, of course, for ourselves, because it does tell us, doesn't it, about how frequently we complain over little things.

[8 : 17] How we get frustrated in life with things which are really relatively small. And even if they're rather, rather big in our estimation, are they really anything to compare with what you find in the likes of this situation and what you find in the likes of other people in the world today who are Christians, believers, who are, in fact, in similar situations to Paul, and yet who are not going about cursing and complaining, but singing praises to God.

It really tells us something about the amazing thing that grace is. When somebody in those situations, people in those situations come to sing praises, to actually praise God in these circumstances, then something remarkable is happening in their lives.

That's not from your own strength. That's not something that comes just because you're built that way, just because you have a certain personality. Even if you are a very bright personality ordinarily, even supposing there were ordinarily people who would look on the bright side of things, this would not itself actually mean that in these conditions they'd be singing hymns to God.

It's God's grace working in them. It's what God is doing inside their hearts. It's what God's Spirit is doing within the lives of these people that brings this amazing thing to the fore.

They are singing hymns to God. And it amazes you to this day how Christians in other parts of the world, severely persecuted, thrown into prison, having family members put to death, deprived of their homes, deprived of the few possessions they have, having to leave their homes, having to leave the place where they were brought up, having their churches burned to the ground, having their pastors put to death.

[10 : 10] Yet when they gather together, or even when they're in smaller groups or on their own, very often this is what they're doing. They're singing praise to God. What is the explanation for that? It is that God himself gives you the strength to do so.

God reveals himself. You see, this is not just revealing something amazing about Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas would never have said this was just showing what amazing people we were. They would have said, this was really a way that God showed what an amazing God he is.

That's what's coming across to us from these circumstances. What an amazing God this God is, when he enables people to do this in these circumstances.

So let's take from that, if nothing else, the fact that we have really nothing to complain about in life. And when we do complain and grumble, and feel that things are not going our way as we would like, let's remember that we have really cause to praise the Lord and to sing his praises.

If they were singing praises in the prison in Philippi, then we should be singing his praises in our homes at Garibust or wherever else we're living. But they are also praying as well as singing hymns to God.

[11 : 29] They were doing both. Alongside the praising, they were praying. They were calling out to God. They were seeking God's guidance. They were looking to God's intervention, if it pleased him.

And the next thing you read about is an earthquake. There was a great earthquake. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake. Luke is being quite dramatic in the language. He's bringing us into the situation so that it's just as if you're watching it happening.

Suddenly, there was a great earthquake and the foundations of the prison were shaken. All the doors were opened. All the various hinges and everything that held the gates together, they all broke.

Because you can just imagine this earthquake, this great earthquake, it says, not a small one, a great one, and it just rumbled and shook this prison to bits so that all the doors opened, all the bonds, all the chains fell off, they came off the walls.

And you see, what it's saying to us really is, it doesn't say it in so many words, but as you read that, you actually put together the fact that they were praying, and suddenly there was a great earthquake. The earthquake is obviously an answer to their prayers.

[12 : 34] Do you expect earthquakes when you pray? We should. Not literal earthquakes, but God to move, God to work, God to bring about changes in conditions and in people's lives.

Sadly, I'm not like that much of the time. I pray to God, I believe in God, I ask God for things to happen, I pray for a blessing on his word, but when I come to, like today, to come to stand to preach the gospel, I have to be honest and say, I'm not expecting an earthquake.

Why not? Because I don't have such a vision of God as I should have. But he's the God of earthquakes. He's the God who sends earthquakes in response to his people's prayers.

And you find that even the likes of Psalm 18, for example, just one of the examples where the psalmist speaks about God answering his prayers.

But Psalm 18, when it speaks there about God answering his prayers, well, here's the psalmist saying, I love you, O Lord, my strength.

[13 : 46] He's my rock, my fortress, my God, my refuge. But he goes on to say, the cords of death encompassed me. The torrents of destruction assailed me.

The snares of death confronted me. In my distress, I called upon the Lord. To my God, I cried for help. From his temple, he heard my voice. And my cry to him reached his ears.

And what's next? Then the earth reeled and rocked. The foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth.

He bowed the heavens and came down. And all the way through these verses, you've got God the creator taking hold of his creation and shaking it.

Why did he do it? He did it in response to this poor man's prayer. Because, verse 16, he reaches again to the conclusion of this particular point.

[14 : 46] He says, what a wonderful passage of God actually coming to demonstrate his power in answering prayer.

where it's really effectively God taking something and shaking it to bits because he loves his people. Because he wants to lead them out of their imprisonment and wants to actually look after them and show their enemies that he is God.

Let's go home and try and capture something of that vision, of that insight that the psalmist and that this passage gives us about God.

And when we pray later today as we spend the Sabbath day and as we come to times of prayer, let's see if we can get into this kind of vision of God that this passage gives us.

A God who shakes the earth. A God who has the power to actually create earthquakes in answer to our prayer. And we need these earthquakes. We need them in our own lives. We need them in our society.

[15 : 59] We need them in our communities. We need them everywhere that God will take a hold of things and actually shake them to bits so that he will reveal himself and so that people's life will be freed from the prisons in which they're held.

That's what the passage is really saying to us. You know, if you believe in Genesis chapter 1 verse 1, the first verse of the Bible, then you believe that this is perfectly possible for God.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He spoke his word and things that were not came to be. If you believe in John chapter 11 and the situation that the miracle of Jesus taking Lazarus back from the sepulcher and restoring him to life again, this side of death, then you believe in what is possible for God.

He's the God of earthquakes, the God who breaks into closed tombs and brings people out alive. That's the God we pray to. That's the God who is at the end of our phone call spiritually.

But how often do we see that and how often do we hold in our minds fast to, you know, the more you see and are convinced about God being this and God being able to do this, the more earnestly you will pray.

[17 : 23] If our vision of God is really not the one that this passage tells us, we're not going to be that earnest in prayer. We're not going to spend as much time in prayer. We're not going to actually be wrestling with God in prayer the way we should.

But here is something that tells us, when you go into the presence of God, spend time thinking about who you're dealing with before you think about what you're asking for.

And when you do that, then expect earthquakes. Maybe they won't come as suddenly as they did in Philippi, but he's still the God who answers his people's prayer.

And so this is what happened. And literally, the jail fell apart. When the jailer awoke then, saw the doors opened, and he drew his sword. He was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

Now that seems a bit drastic, but then you have to remember that in those days the authorities would have probably, more than likely actually, brought out the death verdict against him.

[18 : 27] It was a really serious thing to let prisoners escape, especially high security prisoners like Paul and Silas were regarded as that. For this man, this was a really, really serious thing.

And he knew that probably he was facing either jail himself or he might even be executed for it. So he thought, well, might as well do it now because I'm in really deep trouble.

And then Paul took charge of the situation. There you see again where you see that it's really God who's looking at it all, who is controlling it all.

Paul, when he sprang for this man, came, and Paul said with a loud voice, don't harm yourself for we are all here. That's another remarkable thing you would think that a jail full of prisoners and all of a sudden it's fallen apart and that most of the prisoners would say, right, let's get out of here.

This is our chance, let's escape. But they're all there. They all stayed inside. It's not that they couldn't escape, they obviously could. And the jailer in fact thought, yes, they've all gone, they're bound to have gone.

[19 : 37] You don't expect prisoners to stay in the prison when they've got the chance of freedom. But Paul said, no, we're all here. God had, again, his power worked that his people had just stayed where they were and Paul took charge of the situation.

So then the jailer came, he called for lights, and that obviously shows you the place was not just confined and difficult, it was dark. It was in the darkness they were singing and praying to God.

And he called for lights and said, he rushed in trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas. In other words, he's now really, really anxious.

And he's not anxious simply over what might happen to him if the authorities hear about this. This is an anxiety of a different kind. You can tell that from the question he comes to ask.

It's not just the fear of the authorities, it's more the fear of the of his, for his soul, fear of eternal things, fear of death, fear of things spiritual that come when people realize what they really are in their lives in relation to God.

[20 : 50] He'd heard about God from these men. He saw, he probably had heard some of their praying and singing hymns before he fell asleep. Now he's come to realize this is something I've never met before.

This is something that fills me with fear. What am I going to do? I'm so anxious. This is an anxiety that has come from God. This is an anxiety that's actually come into his soul that fears for himself and fears for his future.

And that's how it is with everyone in a measure. It doesn't mean that we'll come to such a tremendous anxiety as this man had, but you need to have some measure of anxiety.

conversion involves anxiety. Conversion involves concern. Conversion involves to some degree or other that people are worried about eternity and God brings them to see that they should be worried about eternity and dying without Christ.

Have you felt that yourself in your soul? Have you felt under the word of God especially that there's a reason to be afraid if you die in your sins?

[22 : 03] That there's a reason to be afraid of eternal things, things belonging to eternity, of God's judgment, of God's dealing with you, of how God will find you in relation to his truth and to his requirements.

When all of these things come into our souls, to whatever degree, it doesn't have to be a great and tremendous feeling such as this man had, but to some degree at least, there must be an anxiety.

You can't actually see something of sin and something of your need, something of your guilt without having an element or a level of anxiety, without being anxious over your relationship to God and what your life is like.

And it's from that that the question came, what must I do to be saved? That's where the gospel met his need, secondly.

That's his question. What must I do to be saved? Sir, what must I do to be saved? What a great question. There's no more important a question. And it doesn't mean, as we've said, it's not just concerned about being saved from punishment from the authorities.

[23 : 11] The answer that Paul and Silas gave him obviously shows that what was in this man's mind was being saved in the sense in which these people were talking about salvation and praying to this God and singing the praises of this God, the God who saves, the God who sent this earthquake, the God who was in that prison.

Here is this man saying, what must I do to be saved? He's moving, you see, beyond anxiety to really seeking an answer to his need.

He's moving beyond being concerned about his life. He's moving beyond that to actually taking the step of saying, I want to be saved, what must I do? Tell me.

Where can I go? What must I do with this? The answer is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.

Isn't it interesting and isn't it important that Paul and Silas didn't say to him, there's nothing you can do about it. It's all to do with God. They didn't say at all, oh, well, yes, you need to be saved, but there's nothing you can do about it.

[24 : 30] They didn't say that. They said, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. In other words, what we're told here is that, yes, we cannot save ourselves.

That is true. We can't convert ourselves. We can't raise ourselves spiritually from the deadness of our sins into spiritual life. We cannot save ourselves, but we have to act if we want to be saved.

There are actions and there is an action specifically here that we need to take if we want to be saved. And that action is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the word that's used there, it's translated in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is very often how it is in scripture, but the word literally is upon. Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that's not different essentially to believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It comes to the same thing essentially, practically. But the fact that the word upon is used literally here in the text of the Bible is itself just gives you that little bit of an extra meaning to it, if you like, where believing upon someone is really more or less saying, well it is saying to us, you just put yourself into that person's care.

[25 : 51] You give yourself to that person. Everything that you have, you actually put it over onto this person, believing on him. It means obviously that you have to see this person as utterly trustworthy, someone who's going to be able to take care of you and your needs and your anxieties.

So you come to believe on him. You come to lean all your weight on him. And that's the wonderful thing about this Jesus. It's not actually the strength of your faith that saves you.

It's not anything to do with what you're, the quality of what you do yourself. It's all there in him to begin with. And you believe on him.

You accept him as he is. You entrust yourself to him. Let's do that today. If we haven't done it before, let's do it today.

And if we have done it before, let's do it again today. Because it's an ongoing thing. Faith is not something that begins at a certain point and places us in a right relationship with Christ.

[26 : 57] And then that's all that faith does. As your faith, as your believing, begins by believing upon Christ. So it goes on believing upon Christ. The things of your life are left over in his care, in his custody.

In other words, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing less than taking yourself, your anxieties, your circumstances, your past, your present, your future, every single thing about you and everything you have, everything that you may aspire to, all your hopes and all your fears and all your anxieties, you put them upon him.

You put them upon him. The Lord Jesus. Deliberately using this great title, the Lord Jesus.

You need a Lord. You need the Lord. You need the Lord of Lords to be able to cope with all the weight of your life, the weight of your sin, the weight of your guilt, the weight of your troubles, the weight of your anxieties, your questions, the weight of your future, the weight of God's judgment.

All of these things are a weight really in our lives and this is where we deposit them. This is where you find one who is fully able to carry them, to bear them, and to actually bear yourself with them.

[28 : 33] What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put yourself in his hands.

Trust yourself to him. Give yourself into the control of, the direction of, the abilities of his Lordship and you will be saved.

It doesn't mean that things will suddenly become brilliantly bright in your experience that you'll have all this magical experience of flashing lights in your head and all that sort of stuff that people sometimes wait for and without which they think they're not really yet saved.

it's very often a simple, gentle process. All you need to do is just give yourself to this Christ and to his keeping.

Place yourself upon him and everything that belongs to you. And God's promise is you will be saved. Not you might be or not you will think to be but you will be.

[29 : 55] And we prepare today to take God's word as his unbreakable promise. Well if we are then we will do this.

If you want to be saved you go to this God who is so true to his promise that he will save you when you come to believe upon Jesus.

How precious is this Jesus to us. The Bible uses the word precious. It would be a good series of studies perhaps to do a series of passages or passages in the Bible where the word precious appears.

We've seen in Peter 2 Peter the first chapter how Peter spoke about God giving us like precious faith to the apostles themselves. 1 Peter has the same thing about Jesus and about the salvation that's in him.

And to those who believe he is precious or you could translate it is the preciousness. Everything becomes precious. Everything connected with Christ becomes precious to those who believe.

[31 : 07] Why? Because they've come to realize that all their salvation all their future is in him. All their past is taken account of. And now he is precious.

And that's what this really is saying to us. Have we done this? Have you done this? Is there anyone here who is not yet saved?

And not yet saved because they've not come to give themselves holy to Christ? Sounds rather too simple doesn't it?

It is for human nature. Because as sinful human beings we want to have something of ourselves to boast in. Something that we can say well I contributed to that salvation.

I contributed to my own destiny. I'm proud of the fact. No that's not what God is saying at all. You don't contribute anything to your salvation. But you do believe in Christ so that everything he has contributed to make salvation perfect and complete for you will become yours.

[32 : 29] Believe upon him and you will be saved. And how did he come to show that he was indeed saved? That he was converted? That he was a new person?

Well look at the care that he took of these servants of God first of all. They spoke the word of God to him so obviously they added to what they said at the first and to all who were in the house.

He took them the same hour of the night. There's an instant change in this man. It's not something that happened a week after a month happened. He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds.

He was baptized and he and his family. Then he brought them up to his house and he set food before them. Now you contrast that with verse 24. Having received his order he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

He turned their backs back upon them, left them there in the darkness and in their pain and that was that. He didn't want to care any more about them. As far as he was concerned, that's what they deserved.

[33 : 31] That's what he had been ordered to do. That's what he did coldly and just matter of fact. That's where he left them. What is he now? He's tenderly dealing with their wounds.

He's applying something to make it more comfortable for them in their circumstances of pain. washing their wounds and then he comes to set food before them.

He can't do enough for these people now. He's a changed man. He's a new man. He's gone completely the reverse of what he was. Remember, this man would have been a pretty rough character.

Mostly these jailers were retired Roman soldiers. They'd seen life at its most brutal. They'd seen things which other stomachs would churn at. They were quite used to these sort of things as they had served in the Roman army.

And here he was having been changed into a gentle man, a man of love, a man of peace. What happened? He believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and he was saved.

[34 : 49] It affected his whole life, his whole outlook, his behaviour. And indeed his whole family, he rejoiced. That's the second thing that shows you that he was indeed changed. He rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

There's something wrong when a person says, yeah, I've been converted and yet you don't see joy in that person's life. You have to kind of call into question whether or not that person's profession is really true.

Is it something that's genuine? If there's no joy, if there's no outward rejoicing, you see, what happens inwardly shows itself outwardly, not just in acts of kindness and a changed behaviour, but there's an obvious joy about a person.

It doesn't mean that necessarily that they go about expressing that joy and saying, come on, look at me, look at the change in me, I'm so different, I'm now rejoicing. They don't have to do that.

You can see it in them. You can see it in their face. That person's life has gone from what they were to a person that's now quietly but certainly joyful in Jesus.

[36 : 00] and it will be very obvious in this person's life. I'm sure before this he had a pretty miserable life. Who would want to be a jail keeper looking after all of these prisoners and having that from day to day and going about the business of acting so cruelly towards people maybe he wouldn't think twice of it, but he wouldn't be very happy in it.

Not much job satisfaction. Now it's changed. Christ's come into his soul. He's a new man. He's rejoicing and has changed his whole house.

They've all come to rejoice with him that he believed in God. That's what conversion really does. It doesn't just affect ourselves, it affects others too.

They get the benefit of it. Even the ponies in the coal pits in Wales, in times of revival when so many miners were blessed and were converted.

It's said that even the ponies knew the difference. They were no longer cruelly treated. They were dealt with kindly. They were given food. They were groomed properly.

[37 : 15] Why? Because Jesus changes lives and it affects even ponies, even the animals. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your grace that enables your people in all circumstances to look to you, to go on in the strength of the Lord.

We thank you for your salvation that we come to avail ourselves of by your gift of faith. We thank you, Lord, for all that is in yourself and for the way in which by changing our lives you bring us truly to contentment and peace and joy that we were designed for initially in your creation.

Receive our thanks, we pray now, and forgive our sin. For Christ's sake, Amen. Amen.