

The Philippian Jailer

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[0 : 0 0] Regarding these events again in Philippi, where we find this account of the Philippian jailer. Acts chapter 16, and we can read at verse 29, The jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Then he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.

We've seen already the steps which led to this, or the events, if you like, which led to this particular event, where in Philippi, the Lord is busy at this time establishing a church, bringing a foundation to his church, to this congregation in Philippi, from which the gospel will go forth and gather others in as well, as you read then when you come to the letter he wrote to the Philippian church.

Lydia was the first convertent there. Then we find this young slave girl. We've assumed, although it doesn't say for sure that she was converted, because of the way it's sandwiched in between these two obvious conversions, that she too found the Lord savingly and was a changed person as a result.

And as we broke it off last time, just at the end of that passage in verse 23-24, the result of her conversion was just the annoyance of these authorities, these magistrates who actually then ordered that Paul and Silas be thrown into prison, and that, as they regarded it, was the end of the matter.

[1 : 4 5] But that's not what the Lord had in mind, of course. What seems to be yet another dark episode is one that comes very soon, to be filled with light and leads to the conversion of somebody else.

And that's always the case, isn't it? When the enemies of the gospel think they've done their utmost and finally achieved victory, as I'm sure was the case even with the cross itself, the Lord actually turns things around to confound them and to show that, look, I am God.

This is part of my plan. This is what I'm doing. And this is how I work. And so it is with the conversion of this Philippian jailer. Now, this man probably would have got up this morning, having been involved in this job.

We don't know for how long, but it's not exactly an easy job, of course. It's a pretty tedious job. He's looking after this jail. It's full of people, very often, who are disturbers of the peace, people who have committed crimes, all sorts of things, although, of course, these apostles and their companions weren't.

But this man had seen it all before. And he must have got up that morning just saying, well, I just wish I had another job, and I wish it was another day, and this is just going to be another humdrum day like the others before it, and I'll just have to see it through, and I wonder who's going to be thrown into jail today.

[3 : 0 7] Well, little did he know how different that day was going to be from any other day in his life. He had never actually had another day like that.

And actually, maybe you've come to church tonight thinking, it's just going to be the same service as before. Or we're just going to follow out the same pattern. The minister will give out the psalms.

He'll lead the congregation in prayer. He'll read from the Word of God. He'll then preach a sermon. And that's just what happens every week. Maybe if you're here and not yet saved, maybe that's the thought you've got in mind just now.

Maybe that's how you've come to this building tonight. But if it is, I do hope and pray that it won't be the way you leave it, that for you also it will be, as it was for this Philippian jailer, a day in which his life was truly turned around, truly changed, lastingly changed.

Because that's really what we're doing in looking at these conversions in the Bible. We'll do some in the Old Testament as well, God willing. But they are all about the way that God comes into people's lives.

[4 : 22] And as we said, they are so different, these three individuals. And yet that's what God is doing in choosing these three people to actually found a church for himself in Philippi.

And this is the third of them, this Philippian jailer. However that day had begun, this is how it actually proceeded and this is how it ended. A day that really was like no other in his experience.

Let's look at how the jailer came to know his need. And then we'll look at how the gospel, as Paul and Silas proclaimed it to him, how the gospel met his need.

And thirdly, how his conversion was proved to be genuine. These three points briefly. How the jailer came to know his need.

It all began at midnight. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them.

[5 : 24] That's important. That it says the prisoners were listening to them. The jailer would also be listening. He could hardly not be listening to what's happening in his jail. Here were these people.

They had actually been flogged. They had been lashed thoroughly. Their backs were sore and bleeding. They had been thrown into the innermost part of the jail. The smallest part, the most cramped part.

You would expect them to be cursing and blaspheming. And all that kind of stuff. Instead, they're singing praises to God. He had never, ever seen such a thing in his life.

How could these men, having gone through so much, remember, in those days, there are no painkillers. There are no sedatives. There's nothing to relieve the pain, at least not available to them there.

But there's nothing like modern medicine, nothing like that sort of care to anybody who had pain. You just had to endure it by and large. And yet, that's what he hears.

[6 : 28] At midnight, they were praying and singing hymns to God. Not just praying. If that had been the case, he might just say, oh, these men are just desperate. They've just come into this situation and now they're desperate to get out of it.

And so they're turning to God and here they are praying to this God that they believe in to deliver them from this situation. It's not just prayer. They're not just crying out to God. They're singing praises to God.

And that's what's remarkable about it. that they're singing praises in such conditions at such a time in these circumstances. And that was heard by the prisoners and by this prison keeper as well.

And then something happened. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately, all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

and it tells us when the jailer saw what had happened and woke, he saw the prison doors were open. He drew his sword and was about to kill himself. There was a great earthquake.

[7 : 39] You know, you never know what's going to happen as a result of prayer or an answer to prayer. Do we believe the kind of God we're praying to?

Let me take you to the Old Testament, into the book of Psalms. Psalm number 18 is in many ways a remarkable psalm, but it's remarkable in this way that it is, by and large, most of it, an answer to prayer.

Because David there in Psalm 18 begins by telling us that the Lord is one that he loves, that he's his rock, his fortress, his deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge.

And then he casts his mind back and thinks of the situation he had been in. The cords of death I call upon the Lord, he said, who is worthy to be praised and I'm saved from my enemies.

The cords of death encompassed 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.

[8 : 48] There he is telling us here was my situation, here was my difficulty, and I cried to the Lord out of my distress. And then what do you read? You read a series of verses that have to do with the immensity of God.

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 glowing coals flamed forth from him.

He bowed the heavens and came down. Thick darkness was under his feet. He rode upon a cherub and flew. He came swiftly on the wings of the wind.

He made the darkness his covering and his canopy around him. Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through the clouds.

And so it goes on. It's all in terms of this creator God. This God who has the power to create out of nothing the universe that he is now using in answer to prayer of this poor man who's cried out of his distress.

[9 : 59] Why does the Lord come with such power with such effectiveness? Why does the Lord come in such remarkable ways as the psalm says to David?

For this reason in verse 16 He sent from on high He took me He drew me out of many waters He rescued me from my strong enemy.

Can you imagine what that involves? There's an individual who in this world is in a predicament in a situation out of which he prays to God.

And what does God do? He actually puts the whole creation into turmoil so as to get to rescue this man. That's the God we pray to.

He doesn't send you just a little bit of a whisper. He doesn't just reply to your prayer in a way that just affects you in some minor way.

[11 : 04] Here he was in respect to the prayer of Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God and what happened? There was a great earthquake. Have we lost sight or do we lose sight from time to time of the kind of God we pray to?

Are we so used to prayer and to the forms of prayer that we used which have nothing wrong with them? But are we so used to the mechanics if you like of prayer that we just don't stop long enough to think who we're praying to and what we expect as an answer from him?

This is the God of earthquakes in answer to prayer. Now I know that we're all familiar with earthquakes and devastation happens and people lose their lives tragically through earthquakes.

but what this is telling us is that God answered the prayers of these people with an immense movement with a demonstration of his own power.

That's the power you and I need to be working in our life tonight. The power that brought this earthquake to Philippi the power that brought our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead as Paul put it elsewhere the power that is now at work in you people who believe.

[12 : 34] And the jailer realized he was in trouble because normally when anything like this happened or certainly when prisoners escaped as he thought they had he was really deeply in trouble.

He would have to answer for it and very likely the death penalty awaited him. It's a serious serious thing to actually be in charge of a jail out of which prisoners had escaped.

But here's something else remarkable. As he was just about to kill himself with his sword Paul cried with a loud voice don't do yourself any harm for we are all here.

Can you imagine what that must have been like? Would you expect a jail full of prisoners when a certain earthquake had broken their chains and opened the prison bars and made a way of escape for all the occupants of that jail would you actually expect them all to just stay where they were?

If any of the jails in our country tonight were disturbed in such a way that the cells were opened and everybody was in a panic and there was an obvious way of escape would you actually expect that every single prisoner would be accounted for and none had actually left that jail?

[13 : 52] Of course you wouldn't neither would I but that's what happened and that's surely something else that struck this man as quite remarkable he wasn't dealing with ordinary events with ordinary things he was dealing with a power greater than himself he was meeting with something that he couldn't explain he was meeting something so remarkable that it just confounded him all the prisoners together in these circumstances yes says Paul we are all here so the jailer called for lights and he came in and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas he singled them out he knew there was something about them quite distinctly different and said sirs what must I do to be saved now we'll deal with the question under our second point how did the gospel meet his need but look at his anxiety because that too is important for us here was a man who wasn't easily scared these jailers were actually tough experienced very often ex-soldiers in the Roman army they had seen it all before they had seen people executed they had probably killed many of themselves you didn't scare this man easily and even an ordinary phenomenon if you like to call it ordinary like an earthquake something like that he probably experienced before because

Philippi was in a place where earthquakes were not all that not all that uncommon but it wasn't just this earthquake it was what he had seen and heard about these men at midnight despite their conditions it was the way that nobody had escaped from that jail and Paul had taken command of the situation it was something so remarkable that he must have concluded this is a power greater than myself this is indeed the God that these people were singing to and praying to and he fell down trembling with fear this was a spiritual fear this was something moral something that really deeply affected his soul he had probably been scared in battle many times gone into battle fearful perhaps he would never return from it all the thoughts that people have going into battle but he had never come across anything as remarkable as this anything to cause such trembling and fear as this before in his life he came before Paul and Silas trembling with fear and you know that tells us something tonight about how we should think of

God because in our western society and even in our western Christianity to a great extent we have lost sight of this this aspect of God's being the tremendous holiness of God the unrivaled authority of God the way that we are answerable to this God and of course the reason for that is that people have so much been given to changing what they view the Bible as and they say well you know we're not in these days anymore we know better now it's almost as if people would say to you if only I was able to reach out into the Old Testament or read back into the Old Testament and reach out there to the likes of Moses and Jeremiah and Daniel and these people and Gideon of which the

Bible says they trembled before God if only we could reach back and in time and give them a copy of the New Testament they would have a different view of God they wouldn't be trembling before God anymore they would understand God differently but this is the New Testament and this is the God that Isaiah and Jeremiah and Moses knew and they were not wrong to tremble in his presence because they understood that God is always like this it's not comfortable to live with God even when God brings forgiveness to us it doesn't change his holiness for what it is it changes our relationship to him so that we are his friends instead of being at enmity with him but it doesn't change what our view of his holiness ought to remain after all it was Peter who fell down in the presence of Jesus as a man of God as a disciple and who said depart from me

Lord for I am a sinful man and let's not be taken in by any of this supposed progression in theology that doesn't see God as holy anymore or at least not holy in the sense in which the Bible presents him to us in reading through a book on Judges by Dale Ralph Davis I came across this statement a couple of weeks ago and this was in regard to Gideon when he trembled and fell down before God or before the angel of the Lord this is what he said Dale Ralph Davis nothing there is nothing amazing about grace as long as there is nothing fearful about holiness there is nothing amazing about grace as long as there is nothing fearful about holiness because detached from the holiness of God grace is not the grace of the

[20 : 14] Bible we only understand something about grace and appreciate grace when we have come to appreciate that this God is holy that it is as Hebrews says a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God and that's why it's so precious that God has prepared for us a refuge in Jesus Christ a refuge from what a refuge from his wrath a refuge from the burning intensity of his holiness against sin your sin and my sin that's why this man was afraid it wasn't just an earthquake that caused his fear it was this sense of eternity this sense of being in the presence of something divine something bigger than himself something he couldn't fathom out something that had to touch his moral consciousness and make him feel guilty that's how he came to know his need that's how you and I come to know our need to some extent it's true of every one of us that comes to know our need that we come to it in the light of God's holiness now we may not have any tremendous sense of overwhelming sense of

God's holiness yes but there has to be some measure of it and realize that as sinners I am guilty before this God and this God in his holiness is so consistent that he will not accept an offering from me instead of the one that he's offered himself in the person of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection and woe betide me if I come to God or end my life coming with my arms full of my own works and a sense of my own worth but if I come carrying this Christ in my arms if I have faith in him as we'll come to see in a minute that's where my security is that's where my need is met so let's look secondly at how the gospel met his need here's this great question what must I do to be saved well is there a greater question than that for us human beings surely not what must

I do to be saved some people suggest he wasn't meaning saved in the sense of saved in a spiritual sense maybe he was thinking people will say of being saved from these authorities from having his life taken from him doesn't appear like that in the context at all and especially in the light of what Paul actually said to him what must I do to be saved and you know the Jews at one time asked Jesus a very similar question in John chapter 6 what must we do to work the works of God that's how it always is to begin with with you and with me as well as it is always what must I do what must I do to be saved what must we do to work the works of God and Jesus answer to them was almost identical to Paul's this is the work of God that you believe in the one whom he has sent and this is

Paul's answer to this man's question believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved you and your household he didn't say to him there's nothing at all you can do there's nothing at all you need to do but he is drawing him away from any idea of doing something by which he will earn the favor of God and safety with God because he's drawing his mind to a person and he's saying and he's saying believe in the Lord Jesus it's not about your work it's not about what you yourself must do in order to be saved it's all about accepting what's already been done for you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ what are you trusting in tonight yourself what is the ground of your hope with regard to your life now with regard to eternity with regard to meeting with

God when you and I will meet him face to face what is the ground of your hope is it anything at all to do with your own doing if it is get rid of it because the gospel that met this man's need is the same gospel that you hear tonight in this service the gospel that says believe in it's actually literally believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ set your trust upon him cast your weight upon him put your person and your burdens and your fears and your needs entirely into his hands leave it all to him as the savior of sinners because that's what he is that's what the gospel sets out and it's so important that they were directed to a person Paul didn't say to you see he didn't say to him well you know you have to get to learn reformed theology or you have to actually come to follow a set of rules or you have to become religious if you want to be saved you've got to become religious or you've got to follow the ten commandments or you've got to do this and do that no he's brought him to think of a person nothing wrong of course with reformed theology it's vital we have it but that's not what saves us believe in the

[26 : 23] Lord Jesus Christ and he did say the Lord Jesus to him not just Jesus why did he emphasize the Lord Jesus well because he wanted this man to know that whatever idols he had and whatever sense he had of sufficiency in himself he had to submit it all to the Lordship of this Christ and he had to think of salvation in terms of coming under the Lordship of this Jesus so that every single aspect of his life was brought under this Lordship of Christ and now that seems somewhat severe doesn't it really when you maybe first hear it that you have to give absolutely everything over to the Lordship of Christ Christ but then when you analyze it and when you look at it you then realize well if

I don't give everything over to the Lordship of Christ to some extent I'm trying to keep some measure of control of my own life my own control my own thoughts my own aspirations my own sense of what's right and wrong where does that get us if we're under the Lordship of Christ willingly and we've given ourselves to him desiring that every aspect of our life will be ruled by him under his Lordship that's where we're safe because you can trust this Lordship you can be absolutely sure of this Lordship you see when you're coming to trust in a person that person has to be known to be trustworthy you don't trust yourself to a person unless you know something of that character you don't give your wallet to somebody in the street just because he's got a nice face or because he assures you that he has a genuine need and he'll bring it back to you tomorrow person has to be trustworthy and more than anybody else above everybody else the

Bible presents us with the trustworthiness of Jesus the trustworthiness of this Lord Lord who in his Lordship takes care of the whole of his people's needs that's how the gospel met his need because the gospel brought him face to face with Jesus the gospel met his need having come to know his need through all the things that happened when you accumulate them together and Paul very simply said believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved I know it's a big blow to our own pride isn't it it doesn't feel right to ourselves that we do nothing to earn our own salvation and acceptance with God but as we mentioned Gideon already one of the things

God made clear to him after he fell down before God and after God had dealt with him and then spoken to him afterwards one of the things that he said to him was get rid of your idols you cannot serve me unless you've put your idols out of your life and out of your devotions and that's essentially what this is saying believe in the Lord Jesus the simplicity of the gospel makes it such as many people say this is just too good to be true no my friend it's too good not to be true believe and you will be saved put your weight your entire person all your needs your eternity as well as your needs and time unto this Jesus and thirdly how his conversion was proved genuine just very briefly they spoke the word of the

Lord to him and to all who were in his house because this is something that followed on the teaching that they gave followed on from the answer to his question and he the same hour took them and washed their wounds and he was baptized at once he and all his family and he brought them up into God it's not the same man is it well it is in a sense the same individual but very different very different to the man who got up that morning very different to the man who received and saw these people being thrown into jail very different to the man who first heard them singing praises to God and hearing them praying to God around midnight he's a changed man his outlook is different his attitude to these prisoners is different he treats them so differently because he is now characterized just remember who this is this rough ex-Roman soldier in all likelihood having this job of looking after the prison where he needed to be really tough and able to look after himself and yet here he is and he's marked by amazing kindness and concern and compassion and he brings them up and he gives them food in his own house you know it was said in one of the

[32 : 11] Welsh revivals where the revival spread and actually affected many mining communities in Wales it was said that even the ponies the ponies were then employed or used in the pits down below ground that's where they spent the whole time and even the ponies saw a change in all of these men when they were converted why because they were no longer beaten they were no longer starved they were no longer abandoned they were no longer just thrown in a corner and forgotten about for the night they were well treated they were well fed they were watered they were combed down they were shown compassion that's what the gospel does it changes rough people into people who are very different marked by different characteristics and it changes even decent living people which we may all be tonight it changes even decent living people into people with a very different outlook on life different priorities new priorities a new way of seeing things a new understanding of

God of sin of eternity that's what Jesus does that's because he alone is the saviour and that's why he's one who was pointed out by Paul as one in whom we believed and his conversion was proved genuine not just by his care of these prisoners but also by his rejoicing his rejoicing he and his house rejoiced and that too is important isn't it people are desperate for contentment for security for satisfaction in life you listen to everything on the news about people and their situations and very often this is what you will find that people are trying to find stability looking in all the wrong places trying to find lasting satisfaction maybe it's in just living a worldly way of life maybe it's in a total denial of the gospel but it's all about this at the end of the day whether it's perceptible to themselves or conscious of it themselves or not but human beings are made so that we need satisfaction and our only satisfaction is from

Christ that vacancy in our souls which took place at our fall in the garden of Eden that vacancy can never adequately be filled by anything or anyone else but by the Savior himself and that's what gives us to rejoice his whole family benefited from that day on there was a light in that house there was joy in that house God was in that house and it all came about through first of all dealing with these prisoners and through the witness of these men of God in that terrible prison they had found he had found this precious precious thing he had found Jesus Christ the

Savior now go back to where we began tonight how did you come with what mind did you come to church this evening was it just with an expectancy that things would just be as every other Sunday night or Sunday morning going through the motions of a service well even if it was please consider this man and the change in his life put it to yourself ask yourself am I the same now as I leave this house as I was coming in we should not be any of us converted or otherwise the same as we were coming in as people of God as converted people we should know something more of God we should have had an experience of God through the gospel and if we've come not yet saved we should be leaving at least with the question and knowing the answer what must

I do to be saved believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be let's pray almighty God we ask that you would bless your word to us once again we pray especially that you would enter our hearts and show to us more of that way of salvation and take us away from any sense we have of our own efforts being sufficient to meet with your requirements help us Lord to understand more fully how comprehensive that salvation is in Jesus Christ how fully our needs are met in him and grant tonight to seal all of these benefits to our hearts for his name sake amen we'll sing now in conclusion from psalm number 28 psalm 28 in the sing psalms on page 33 psalm 28 verses 6 to 9 on page 33 these three stanzas praise to the

[38 : 31] Lord for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made he is my strength he is my shield I trust in him who sends me aid and so on to the end of verse 9 let's stand to sing praise to the Lord for me has heard the plea for mercy which I made he is my strength he is my shield I trust in him who sends me in my heart uplifted each for joy my thanks to him

I gladly sing the Lord God is his people strength a saving fortress for his name Lord save your people you don't love be pleased your heritage love to bless he there to shepherd carry them forever in your faithfulness I'll go to this side door the end door here this evening I don't think I've been to that one yet so

I'll do that one this evening and we'll also ask a blessing on the food for the fellowship so let's pray Lord our God we thank you for all the provision that you make for us for our daily and bodily needs as well and we pray that you bless to us the food and the fellowship and the fellowship itself one with another help us there we pray to know your presence with us and your blessing upon us and now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always Amen