

(title) Salvation has been found in many unlikely places. People have obeyed the gospel in third world countries, frigid areas of the tundra, populous metropolitan areas and rural country. The young have been saved on university campuses and the old in nursing homes. Many have been drawn to the Teacher of Nazareth from anywhere. One can even be converted in prison such as the case in Acts 16. Normally when we consider what we call “jail house conversion” we find an inmate being converted but in our story today, the inmate converts the jailer.

In Acts 16 we read about Paul and Silas being imprisoned (vs 22). One of the things impressive about this episode is that they had opportunity to escape, but didn't. They stayed where they were, and that decision ended up saving a man's life both physically and spiritually.

Paul and Silas ended up in prison because they were being followed by a slave girl possessed by a spirit. She earned money for her owners by fortune-telling. Even though she was stating truth regarding Paul and Silas, and others with them, Paul was put out with her and cast the spirit from her in the name of Jesus Christ. *Acts 16:18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.*

Her owners were angry because they lost their ability to make money off the girl. They seized Paul and Silas and brought them before the authorities claiming they were Jews and advocating customs unlawful for Romans. Even though Paul had a Roman citizenship, he didn't argue and try to use a 'get out of jail free' card. They were stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison where our jail house conversion took place. This conversion began with an earthquake. Awakened and seeing the doors open, the jailers first thoughts were of the prisoners. He assumed what any jailer would: They've escaped! *Acts 16:27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.*

His second thought was of consequences. They were not of the there-goes-this-year's-bonus or no-promotion-for-me-now variety. It was far more serious. Guards who let prisoners escape were executed. He knew how this would play out. An interrogation would find he had slept at his post. Disgrace, beating, and execution would follow.

Hopeless, he decided to save the embarrassment and would fall on his sword and that would be that. When they found the empty prison, they would also find a dead jailer. They would fill out the paperwork, chase down the prisoners, and appoint a new jailer.

How Paul knew what was going on outside his cell and inside the jailer's mind is unknown (perhaps by miracle), but his voice called out of the darkness at just the right moment. To this suicidal man at death's door, he said, "***Do thyself no harm: for we are all here***" (16:28).

Startled, perhaps the jailer must have thought: Who said that? Is this true? Why would criminals stay in a prison with open doors? Yet this was exactly the case. This jailer almost died. How close was he to falling on the sword when he heard Paul's voice? Ten seconds? Five? Three? He stood on the brink of the eternal chasm with his toes over the edge. That horrible place is described as a lake of fire (Revelation 21:8) that is never quenched (Mark 9:46).

Any person can be on death's cliff at any time. There is but a step—a car accident, a heart attack, a stray bullet—between any man and death any day. We are wise to prepare—and stay prepared—to proceed to the next world on short notice (1 Samuel 20:3; Luke 12:20; James 4:14). He was as close to a hopeless judgment as any man has ever been, yet there, in that Philippian jail, he was rescued from hell.

From a Biblical perspective the jailer was a man of few words. We know of only twenty-three words he ever said, but among them is this question: "***Sirs, what must I do to be saved?***" (vs31) The Bible contains about 3,300 questions, but this is the greatest of all. No poet, philosopher, or scholar has surpassed this short, simple

question. It is the greatest because it addresses our deepest need. God's brief answer to man's deepest question has two parts: (1) A blessing: You will be saved. (2) A condition: Believe on the Lord Jesus.

"What must I do to be saved?" is asked three times in the book of Acts: (1) By the Jews on Pentecost (2:37); (2) By Saul of Tarsus (9:6); (3) By the jailer (16:30). Surprisingly, each time a different answer was given. Combined, there are three answers: (a) Believe; (b) Repent; (c) Be baptized.

To the Jews: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you" (2:37–38). To Saul: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (9:6; 22:16). To the jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31). Three different answers were given because the people being taught were at different levels on their spiritual journey. The Jews at Pentecost already believed so they were told to repent and be baptized. Saul believed and had repented, so he was told to be baptized. The jailer however knew nothing as Philippi was a long way from where Christianity was being taught. He needed to start at the beginning; so he was told to believe. **EVERYONE MUST MAKE THE SAME TRIP; SOME ARE JUST FARTHER DOWN THE ROAD THAN OTHERS.**

Suppose you were on the road to Philippi and asked a passerby, "How far is it to Philippi?" He says, "Three miles." A mile farther you ask, "How far to the city?" The answer: two miles. You keep walking: "How far?" "A mile." The same question received three answers but all were correct.

A senior asks, "What must I do to obtain a PhD?" Her advisor replies, "Finish high school. Get a college undergraduate degree. Then get your master's degree. After that apply to a doctoral program." A college graduate who asks this is not told to "complete high school, and enroll in college." He has done these. One with a master's degree gets an even shorter answer. The same is true regarding salvation.

Those on Pentecost believed (2:37), so they were told to repent and be baptized. Saul had believed and repented (9:5–9), so he was told to be baptized. The jailer had done none of the three.

Believe was the first thing he had to do, so Paul told him that. When his household arrived, Paul taught “*the word of the Lord*” (16:32), explaining who Jesus is and what He requires. We can surmise what he taught by observing what they did.

Between midnight and sunrise they completed the same three requirements as the others—believing (16:34), repenting (indicated by washing stripes, 16:33), and baptism (16:33), resulting in salvation, service, and rejoicing (16:34).

HE LEARNED AND OBEYED THE GOSPEL IN A SINGLE NIGHT. The jailer went from pagan to Christian in less than six hours. That might be the all-time record. In some ways, his is the most remarkable conversion in the New Testament. Pentecost was larger with some three thousand baptized, but conversion was a natural progression for Jews looking for the Messiah. Once convinced that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 2) they responded. The conversion of Cornelius, although he also was a Roman, is less surprising, for he had been exposed to Judaism and was sympathetic to the true God (Acts 10). Saul of Tarsus was a more noteworthy turnaround; but a devout person turning to pursue a better religion is not unheard of (Acts 9).

Yet this Roman jailer would never have read Jewish prophecies. Back up in verse 21 it tells us that it was unlawful for the Romans to receive or teach the Jewish customs. Unlike Cornelius, this jailer was not a devout man looking for a life path. Instead he was a man that desired salvation enough to make a drastic change literally overnight.

The jailer was baptized “the same hour of the night,” which was sometime after midnight. *Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.* The church would probably meet in Lydia’s house the next Sunday (16:40), but he did not wait a few days. It would be easier after daylight, but he did not even wait until sunrise. This decision reflected his wisdom in taking advantage of his opportunity *Ephesians 5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* Paul would be released and move the next day.

The jailers response is consistent with other conversions. In Acts, as soon as one knew the gospel, he obeyed it—whether after a Sunday sermon, midweek, or midnight.

- The three thousand on Pentecost were baptized the same day (2:38–41),
- As were the Samaritans (8:12),
- And Lydia (16:15).
- The Ethiopian was baptized as soon as he found adequate water (8:35–38).
- Saul was told not to delay, and obeyed as soon as he knew what to do (9:18; 22:16).

HE WAS INTRODUCED TO THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD BY THE CHIEF OF SINNERS. What would it have been like to hear Paul preach about Jesus? The chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) speaking of the One who saved him by His grace? The jailer likely never knew how blessed he was to have had this man assigned to his watch.

Consider how unlikely it was that this Roman would ever become a follower of Christ. After all Jesus had lived, taught, and died in a distant land. This jailer had nothing in common with Jesus. They spoke different languages, wore different styles, ate different foods, and held far different worldviews. Jesus' death by crucifixion was at the hands of the jailer's own national army. Romans despised the Jews (Acts 16:20), Jesus' nation.

Decades had passed. The gospel had only recently arrived in his area. He had no interest in it. He had just locked up the only preachers of it. None of his family or friends or acquaintances were Christians. In fact, Lydia from Thyatira was only Christian family on the whole continent—and he likely didn't know her. Yet—somehow—he still became a Christian. That “somehow” is power of the gospel. ***Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.***

Salvation is beyond us; it lies in Him. It is not of achievement, merit, works, or worth, but of trust, submission, obedience, and faith. Our trusting obedience makes a way for Christ to save us thru grace. ***Hebrews 5:8-9 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; (9) And being made perfect,***

he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

Jesus is the hero in all conversions. He came to earth. He lived among us (John 1:14). He died for us (Romans 5:6). He longs to save us (2 Peter 3:9). He lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). ■ Jesus wants to rescue you. Have you believed, repented, and been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins? Remember, you can go to heaven from wherever you are.