

"WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:30-31.

Paul and Silas were well known on the streets of Philippi where they had gone to preach the gospel. There they encountered a slave girl who possessed an evil spirit by which she charmed and astounded the people. As a fortune-teller she made a lot of money for her masters. Repeatedly when Paul and Silas were on their way to the place where they conducted religious services, this poor girl followed them, crying out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show us the way of salvation." Being annoyed by her and being grieved at commendation from such a source, Paul turned and said to the evil spirit in her, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." Immediately the evil spirit left her, whereupon she ceased to tell fortunes and to be a source of large revenue for the vicious men that had been exploiting her.

When her managers realized that they were thus deprived of the hope of further financial gains, they were filled with anger. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the magistrates. They loudly and vehemently accused the apostles of being law-breakers and disturbers of the peace. To aid in getting rid of the preachers who had interfered with their profits, those degenerate rascals inflamed the people and organized a mob to attend the trial, scare the magistrates, and thus insure the punishment of Paul and Silas. There was no semblance of a legal trial, but merely condemnation.

At the command of the officers, the prisoners' clothing was torn to pieces and they were severely beaten and scourged. With painful welts and bleeding wounds on their backs, Paul and Silas were placed in the custody of the jailer who was instructed to keep them securely. This hard-hearted jailer, who apparently had no sympathy for these unfortunate men, violently thrust them into the lowest dungeon of the inner-prison which was reserved for the most desperate prisoners. To add to all other miseries, he thrust their feet into the stocks and left them without any attempt to improve their condition. Even the slight liberty of movement, which heavy chains would have allowed them, was rendered impossible.

As night advanced, silence reigned. The stars shone brightly, the moon sent forth its flood of light, the shadows darkened beneath the prison walls, and the long night throbbed on. Because their bodies were lacerated with the stripes of the lictors and their feet were fastened in the stocks, a device that spread their feet apart and held them in a vise-like grip, Paul and Silas could not sleep. Instead of spending those hours of physical torture in bitter imprecations on their enemies, they prayed and sang hymns of praise unto God. How their faces glistened as they sang! What wondrous joy in their souls as they sang in that dark, damp, cold, and filthy underground vault! While it was midnight without, they had sunshine within. Their bodies were fastened, but their souls were free. Their Christian experiences elevated them into regions of unrestricted liberty and unclouded light.

Their singing awakened the other prisoners, who listened to them with wonder and amazement. Doubtless they had frequently heard groans, curses, and threats echoing in those gloomy corridors, but never before had they heard prisoners praying and singing. As their prayers and songs of praise rang out upon the midnight air, they ascended to God, whose eyes are ever on the righteous and whose ears are open to their prayers at all times. While God was giving them songs in the night, another strange event occurred. Suddenly, God's power came down, and there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail began to tremble, the walls reeled to and fro, the iron bars were twisted, every door flew open, the chains on the prisoners were loosed, the

shackles were unfastened, the prisoners screamed, sprang to their feet, and rushed from the dangerous building.

Aroused from his midnight slumbers by the strange and startling occurrences, the jailer was frantic with fear and leaped from his bed. When he dashed out and saw the doors were open, he concluded that the prisoners for whom he was responsible had escaped. Terror and despair gripped him, because, according to Roman law, his life was the forfeit if any prisoners escaped. Thinking that only disgrace and death awaited him, and in order to avert the disgrace of a public legal execution, he decided to kill himself. In his desperation, he seized his sword and started to thrust it into his vitals.

Witnessing his movements and divining his suicidal purpose, Paul cried out from the darkened shadows in a clear and loud voice, saying, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." There was so much tenderness, love, and longing in that cry, and it touched the jailer deeply. Upon recognizing it as the voice of Paul, the servant of Christ, mingled emotions of fear, contrition, and hope struggled in the jailer's breast. In a sudden impulse he fell at the feet of those itinerant preachers and cried from the depths of a troubled and grateful heart, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

This is the greatest question he could have asked. He did not ask how to be handsome, decent, respectable, or rich, but how to be saved. His question was asked in an immediate, hasty, earnest and urgent way. It was a direct, personal, practical question of incomparable importance. It is a serious and timely question. It is a common question, yet it is never commonplace. It is one of those great questions which men ask age after age. It is new to every man because it is vital to every man. The deep longing of the universal heart was voiced by the jailer's question. Deep down in every breast this question throbs for utterance. Every person must face it for himself. One can better afford to be wrong on every other question than to be wrong on this simple question, "What must I do to be saved?" A more important question was never propounded by man to his fellowman. In comparison with this, other questions are insignificant. Upon its answer eternal issues are suspended. What a pity that so many wait until it is too late to consider it seriously and intelligently.

His earnest inquiry was not left unanswered. He was not told to do less than was necessary to gain the objective sought which was salvation. He was told just what to do, no more and no less. Evidently this jailer was under conviction of sin and had a yearning in his soul for salvation and was greatly disturbed about it. In reply to his memorable question he received a simple, plain, direct, and sensible answer. Nothing could be plainer, more direct and more positive than the answer he received. What did they tell him? Did they tell him to take a course in psychology? No. Did they tell him he needed a new philosophy of life? No. Did they suggest that he give up his bad habits and become respectable? No. Did they recommend that he let his conscience be his guide? No. Did they advise him to change his environment? No. Did they tell him to join the church, be baptized, and obey the commandments? Most assuredly they did not. Why not? For the simple reason that none of these, nor all of them, was the correct answer to this plain question. What then did they tell him? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." What does that mean? It means that one must do something if he is to enjoy the blessing of salvation. You must not imagine that you have nothing to do. If you do, you will not get saved. You must not mistake what you have to do. Your duty is very simple. Do not imagine that you cannot do what God requires. You must not wait for God to do what He has commanded you to do. He will never repent nor believe for you. You must not wait for anything or anybody, for you must live your own life, die for yourself, and appear at the judgment for yourself. Never imagine that you will have a more favorable time, because the obstacles will never be fewer.

If you are to be saved, you must be brought to the realization that you are not saved but need to be. If you have not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, although you may be moral and respectable and honest, you are still without God, without salvation, and without hope. Ever bear in mind that you cannot save yourself. Neither can another man save you. Nor can any institution or ordinance save you. Then, you must want to be saved. Jesus Christ is man's only hope of salvation.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy laws demands;
Could my zeal no respite know
Could my tears forever flow
All for sin could not atone
Thou must save and Thou alone."

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." It is not enough to believe in Jesus Christ. Millions of unsaved people believe in Jesus, just as they believe in Washington as a patriot or in Newton as a profound teacher of science. But they do not trust their souls to Jesus. They do not rest on Him for salvation. They do not build their hopes of heaven on Him. But when a soul lets go of every other reliance in the wide world and hangs entirely upon the atoning Jesus, that soul believes on Christ. The atonement of Christ is sufficient for the whole world, but it is efficient only to those who believe. It has in it merit enough for the salvation of this lost race, but God's provision is that only those who accept Christ are saved. The reservoir may contain sufficient water to supply all the city, but only those who drink have their thirst quenched.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." To believe on one is to put your confidence in him and trust him for what he can do for you. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ means to trust Him fully and depend upon Him solely to save your soul. The only way to be saved is to believe on Christ. In Him alone lies our hope. Trust yourself to Him now, and He will save you. He confess Him as your Saviour and Lord.