

CONVERSION STUDIES

CONVERSION OF THE JAILOR

Example eleven of thirteen

Having received the "Macedonian Call" at Troas, Paul and his companions travelled to Philippi. His work there was first peaceful and productive of good as Lydia and her household were converted. The calm however was soon broken by a storm of persecution instigated by pagans. Events began with Paul's curing a slave girl possessed by a spirit who proclaimed Paul and Silas "servants of the Most High God" (Acts 16:17). Her presence and testimony grieved him as he didn't want the gospel supported by unholy means. "Paul...turned and said to the spirit, I charge thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very hour" (Acts 16:18). A promise of Christ to the apostles was fulfilled. "And these signs shall accompany them that believe: in my name shall they cast out demons..." (Mark 16:17).

Since the girl was profitable to her owners as a soothsayer, they lost their source of wealth and were embittered. Many today hate preachers of truth when truth interferes with ungodly practices and/or money making. In retaliation the men falsely accused the preachers. "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city" (Acts 16:20). A few were hurt but they said the whole city was troubled. Nevertheless, they got their desire. "And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison" (Acts 16:23). Out of the darkest hour of suffering comes the brightest light. They were in the inner prison which was dark, damp, and deep. In addition, they were in stocks which prevented any comfort or rest. Yet there was joy in their suffering.

They spent no time crying over misfortune but found reason to praise and thank God. Could we? We complain so much in more favorable times, could we rejoice in more severe times? They sang midnight melodies. The secret of their ability to sing was in their faith. "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4). The audience was God and their fellow prisoners. It is hard to tell whom we will influence with our

life. Earthquakes are not rare in that part of the world, but songs of praise in midst of pain are rare anywhere. Still this sudden earthquake was a miracle as can be seen in its results.

The effects were that the jailor thought the prisoners were released. Thus he sought to take his own life as he was responsible for their being kept. Paul made no effort to escape and cried to save the jailor's life. Why did the earthquake come? God sent it. It was not to save the jailor as the plan of salvation was not made known to him by it. It was to vindicate the preachers who would continue to preach Christ, including to the jailor. The jailor's conversion begins with a question. "And he called for lights and sprang in, and, trembling for fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:29,30).

Some think he may only have been concerned with his physical life, and Paul uses his question to speak about his soul. If he means salvation from sin, he probably had heard something about Paul's preaching (Acts 16:17). Paul applied the question to spiritual salvation and we will not go astray by doing likewise. The question about salvation has been asked before. "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). The answer is always the same. Emphasis is put on faith in Christ. "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Faith is not in a dogma or a practice, but in a person - Jesus Christ. Our faith is not in the church, or in baptism, but in Christ. The answer is brief, simple, plain, and accurate. Not only could he be saved through faith in Christ, but his entire household could be saved. In fact, everyone in the world could be saved on the same terms.

This answer is often used in an attempt to teach salvation by faith only. Does it? No! Is Paul saying, "All you have to do to be saved is to believe"? No! The context shows that faith only is not true. Every "faith only" adherent tries to make the

verse say, "Believing the Lord is all there is to salvation." The faith that saves, however, is a faith that obeys. It is often argued that the jailor had nothing to do but believe on the Lord. If one understands that believing on the Lord includes believing everything He says, then such is true. But if one thinks that merely believing without obeying the Lord's commands will result in salvation, he is mistaken.

Consider that the words "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved," are Paul's opening. Before the man can believe he must be given information about Christ because "faith comes by hearing." Thus "they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house" (Acts 16:32). The preaching was the same as every other case of conversion. The jailor's response to hearing reveals what he was taught. "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he all his, immediately" (Acts 16:33). While no mention is made of repentance, it is obvious by his washing their stripes and his being baptized. He obeyed immediately. Furthermore, he was baptized that very hour. He didn't even wait until daylight. If baptism is not necessary, why the eagerness? He wanted forgiveness then, not later. After his baptism he took care of the preachers by setting food before them.

To complete the story, Paul demanded his rights as a citizen to keep his name clear from unjustified imprisonment, and was released by the authorities.

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