

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and You Shall Be Saved”
(Acts 16:31)

The Gospel, the good news about how we can be saved from our sins and brought safely to heaven, is really very simple. The Lord made it that way so that we don't have to be highly educated to understand it. We really only need to understand a few things: the dangerous situation we are in, what Jesus Christ has done to save sinners, and what we must do in order to receive what Jesus has done. It's really that simple. It's so simple that the early apostles were able to communicate it quickly and effectively to those they were sent to preach to, and the Spirit of God was able to use it powerfully in the lives of God's elect. This is what we see in our text this morning.

In our passage, we have read a little bit about the second time the apostle Paul went out to do the work of missions. He went out with Silas to bring the decision of the Jerusalem Council to the churches that were affected by the controversy over circumcision. But as they continued to travel through Asia Minor, they were told by the Holy Spirit to go to Macedonia, to the city of Philippi. When they arrived, they met a woman named Lydia, who was converted to Christ, along with her whole household. They also met a slave-girl who was demon-possessed. She had an evil spirit living in her, giving her the ability to do things that a person couldn't normally do. After she had followed them for several days, telling everyone who Paul and Silas were, Paul finally turned to her and by the power of God's Spirit, cast that demon out. But her owners didn't like this. Now they couldn't make any more money with her, and so they had Paul and Silas thrown into jail. But it was while they were here that the jailer asked them that most important question: How can I be saved? Now he didn't just come up and ask them when they first arrived there. He may not have been very aware of the fact that he needed salvation. Yes, he did have a conscience, just as everyone does, and his conscience was telling him that he had sinned, that he had broken God's commandments. And yes, he also had the knowledge of God that comes through nature – those things we see in the world all around us which tell us that God is – which was constantly telling Him that God was very real and that He was going to hold him accountable for all those wrong things he had done. But like everyone else, he also had a built-in defense mechanism that fought against everything he saw about God, because he didn't want to live with the feeling that he was really in trouble. He kept telling himself: God is merciful; it's His job to forgive; and everyone goes to heaven, as long as they don't do really bad things. And so like most people, he thought that he really didn't have anything to worry about. As long as his good deeds outweighed his bad, he was on his way to heaven, whatever that is.

But God, very mercifully, changed all this. He woke this man up to his dangerous situation. While Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns in the middle of the night, while the jailer was sound asleep, a great earthquake shook that place. At the same time all the doors opened and the prisoners' chains all fell off. When the jailer woke up, he reached for his sword to kill himself, because he knew that if even one of his prisoners escaped, he would have to give his life in his place. But Paul and Silas stopped him. Besides the miracle of the doors opening and the chains falling off, the Lord also

performed the miracle of having all the prisoners stay right where they were. This, along with the earthquake, had the effect of waking the jailer up – I don't mean from his physical sleep, but from his spiritual sleep. Suddenly, the things he knew about God from the world around him became more threatening. Suddenly, the voice of conscience became louder. Suddenly, he was concerned about his soul. And so trembling with fear, he called for lights and hurried into the cell where Paul and Silas were and fell down before them and asked them this question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Well of course Paul and Silas told him the answer. They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (v. 31).

What I would like to do this morning is explain to you what Paul and Silas meant by these words. I want you to see first, why it is everyone needs salvation, what it is that they need salvation from; second, what we must do to be saved; and third, why it is that salvation must come in this way and can only come in this way.

First, let's consider for a few moments what it is that everyone needs to be saved from. I told you that the jailer must have understood something about his need for salvation, but wasn't concerned enough yet to do anything about it until God woke him up. What was it that God woke him up to? He woke him to what the Bible says is true about every single person who has ever been born and ever will be born into this world, excepting only Jesus Christ, to what is true of us when we come into this world – we are all guilty of sin, guilty enough to be punished forever for our sin in a lake of fire. Now I know that none of us likes to hear about hell. We'd much rather that hell didn't exist, because if it didn't, it wouldn't be there to threaten us. But that's not the case. It's real, and because it is we need to take it seriously. The Bible says that the God who made this world, the God who made us, the only God there is, perfectly loves everything that is good, but perfectly hates everything that is evil. It also tells us that God is just, and that He will justly punish everyone who does anything wrong. He has to or He would be guilty of sin Himself, the sin of not being just. Now to justly punish anyone who sins against Him, means that He must send them into the eternal fire, into hell, because every sin committed is against an infinitely holy and perfect God. And a sin committed against an infinitely holy and perfect God is an infinite sin, and only infinite punishment can pay for this. But since no one can suffer that much, that suffering must go on forever. That's why hell exists. This is why sin is so dangerous, and why we are all in danger if we don't find some way to get rid of our sin, to be saved from it – because we have all sinned. The apostle Paul wrote, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Even if we didn't have the Bible, we would still know that this is true. God gave us a conscience to tell us. It speaks to us every time we do something wrong. It tells us that we deserve to be punished for our sins. But so often we don't listen to it, because it gets in the way of our having fun. But we need to listen to it. It's telling us that we need to run, to get away from God's judgment. But where are we to go?

This brings us to the second point, what we must do if we are to be saved. The jailer wanted to know how he could escape God's wrath. This is what Paul and Silas told him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved." It is only through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ that we can ever be saved from this judgment. Now what does it mean to believe in Jesus? Well faith, biblical faith, really requires three things. It first of all requires that we know what we are to believe. I think that's pretty obvious. We need to know the facts. In this case, we need to know who Jesus is, what He has done, and what

we must do to benefit from what He has done. Well, who is Jesus? He is God, the second person of the Triune God, who became a man to save sinful men, to save those who would believe in Him. What did He do? He actually saved those who believe in Him by keeping God's Law perfectly and by dying on a cross to pay for their sins. And, finally, what must we do to receive the benefits of His work? We must believe in Him. These are the things we need to know first, if we are to have any hope of salvation. Second, biblical faith requires that we believe that these things are true. It's one thing to know about them, but it's quite another to believe they are true, that they really happened. We need to be convinced that the Bible is not a book full of myths and legends. It is a history book full of facts. We must believe everything it says – not only that we are sinners in danger of God's judgment, but also that God has sent a Savior to us, the Lord Jesus Christ. If we don't believe these things, we'll never do what the Lord tells us to do. Finally, biblical faith requires that we trust in Jesus Christ to save us. This is what saving faith is all about. We must not only believe that Jesus is able to save us, we must also really trust in Him to save us. Unless we do this – actually trust in Jesus – the other two parts of faith won't do us any good at all. There are people who know the facts of Christianity, but who won't be saved by them. Why? It's because they don't believe them. The fact that they know them will only make things worse for them on the Day of Judgment, because they can't plead ignorance. There are also those who believe the facts about Christianity but who won't be saved by them. Why? It's because they didn't trust in Jesus. They think that all God requires is that we just believe the facts, but believing the facts isn't enough. The devil believes they're true. The demons believe them. Those who are in hell right now know that these things are true. But they're not saved. Why not? It's because they never trusted in Jesus to save them. They didn't like what they knew, and so they never trusted in Jesus to save them. If this describes you this morning, you need to realize that you must do more than simply believe the facts. You must actually trust in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins. You must put your hope and confidence in Him alone, because He is the only One who can make you acceptable to God.

But there's one last thing I want us to look at. We know now why we need salvation – we're all sinners and under God's just condemnation for our sins – and we've seen what we must do to be saved – we must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Lastly, I want you to see why this is the only way of salvation. Very simply put, this is the only way God has provided. The apostle Peter once said, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (4:12). We've already seen that we can't save ourselves. God requires that we be perfect to enter heaven, and we're not perfect. Paul writes, "There is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). We were guilty when we came into this world. We were even guilty at the time of our conception. David writes, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). Some think that we can be saved by doing good works, by keeping God's Law. But He never gave us a Law that could save us. He did give us one however to show us that we are sinners. Again Paul writes, "For if a law had been given which is able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal. 3:21-22). The only way we can be saved is through faith in Jesus Christ. He has done

everything that God requires to enter heaven. He is the only One who has. He is also the only One who has died to take away the guilt of sin. His sacrifice is the only one God will accept. And so if you want to be saved from God's wrath this morning, if you want to have your sins washed away, if you want a perfect obedience that God will accept, you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You must turn from all your sins and trust in Him. God has very graciously and mercifully provided this way of escape for you. If you turn away from Jesus and try to come in any other way, He will not accept you. But if you come in this way, you can be sure that He will.

If the Lord has opened your eyes this morning, as He did the Philippian jailer so many years ago, if He has shown you your sin, if He has shown you your danger, if you sense your need of Jesus Christ, and want to receive Him as your Lord and Savior, then do so now. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do, you will be saved. It's only by God's grace and mercy that anyone's eyes are ever opened. If yours are open now, if He has awakened you out of your false security, then run to Him. He will not only save you from the consequences of your sin on the Day of Judgment, He will also give you the power to overcome your sins right now. Today is the day of salvation. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. Amen.