

Salvation; Or, the Philippian Jailor

Streams of Refreshing · Acts 16

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Salvation; Or, the Philippian Jailor What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts 16:30, 31).

I desire to address myself especially to the unsaved. Many will read these pages who are not converted. Some know they are unsaved; their daily pursuits show it: they are conscious that they have not yet tasted the joys of redeeming love: others despise and discard the subject altogether. There was a time when every Christian in the world was unconverted; for we all . . . were by nature children of wrath, even as others {Eph. 2:3}.

What an awful condition it is to be unsaved! and yet how many are careless about it! The jailor at Philippi was unsaved; but when he felt the reality of the state he was in, he cried out for salvation, and found it, to the joy and rejoicing of his heart. One thing is certain, that all who would enjoy the blessings of salvation must have eternal life; for Jesus said, Ye must be born again {John 3:7}.

This is very plain and decisive. Many persons are really ignorant of the terrible danger they are in; they see not the precipice on which they stand; they perceive not the brittle thread by which they are suspended; they know not that they live on the very threshold of eternity; they feel not that they are distant from God, rebellious against God, guilty before God; therefore they cannot be anxious about salvation. They may think of outward propriety before men, of religious forms, ordinances, and the like; but they are not concerned about salvation from the wrath to come. The Bible, however, speaks to us of salvation. The grace of God brings salvation. The gospel is a message from God to men about salvation. Jesus Himself preached salvation. He said to a weeping woman at His feet, Thy faith hath saved thee {Luke 7:50};

and to a repentant publican, Salvation is come to this house {see Luke 19:9}

Paul exultingly exclaimed, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth {Rom. 1:16}.

Those who received the gospel in apostolic times felt that they were saved; they realized a present salvation; they regarded themselves and their fellow-believers as saved; hence we are told that the Lord added to the Church . . . such as should be saved

-- saved ones. Paul addressed the Corinthians, saying but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified {1 Cor. 6:11};

and that the preaching of the cross

unto us which are saved it is the power of God {1 Cor. 1:18};

and writing to Timothy, he said, Who hath saved us, &c. {2 Tim. 1:9}.

And so, also, the Old Testament taught; for the Israelite in Egypt, whose lintel and door-posts were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, was safe. When God's angry judgments were all around, he was perfectly safe, because of the sprinkled blood; he might feast on the roasted lamb, and rejoice, because he was sheltered by the blood. The fleeing man-slayer was saved the moment he entered the city of refuge. The avenger might seek to alarm him, but he was safe, because he was inside the city. Noah was safe as soon as he entered the ark, for God shut him in; though afterwards he was in the midst of destroying vengeance. Rahab the harlot, whose house was on the wall of the city which fell down flat, was safe; for the scarlet line was in the window. All these persons, I say, were safe -- their security was unquestionable. Whatever judgments happened to others, they were taught that they were perfectly safe. They so understood the matter, and the result confirmed it. And so now; God so values the death of the unblemished Victim -- the one perfect offering of His well-beloved Son -- that He pronounces a full, free, present, and eternal salvation to every sinner that believes; perfect safety, come what may, because he has redemption in Christ Jesus and through His blood. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus {Rom. 8:1}. "Happy Christian, God's own child, Called, chosen, reconciled: Once a rebel, far from God, Now brought nigh through Jesu's blood."

In considering these verses, I shall notice -1. The jailor's awakening; 2. The gospel preached to him; 3. Its effects. 1. THE AWAKENING. With regard to the Philippian jailor, we know but little of his former history. From the few materials we have, we may gather that he was diligent in his calling, and that he took no more interest in the apostles of the Lord Jesus than in the worshipers of the great goddess Diana. It is very likely that he had heard something of Paul's ways, if he had not of the conversion and baptism of Lydia and others. He knew also why Paul and Silas were imprisoned; and appears not only to have acquiesced in the propriety of punishing and restraining such men, but also of preventing, as far as possible, a recurrence of their preaching. They were brought to the prison, with a charge that the jailor would

keep them safely {Acts 16:23};

but that we might know that they had then no favour in the jailor's eyes, we are told that he thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks {Acts 16:24}.

This is enough to show us the condition of his heart. He knew not, felt not, God's love; therefore his heart was destitute of that love to the brethren which always marks those who are born of God. He had very probably heard Paul and Silas praying and singing praises unto God at midnight; for we are told that the prisoners heard them. But none of these things seem to have moved the jailor. Like a thorough man of the world, he appears to have retired to bed that night with as much unconcern as on any other occasion. All that he heard and saw of the servants of the Lord Jesus were insufficient to awaken his dark mind, and arouse his conscience. But God had a purpose of blessing in store for him. God's eye was upon him for good. God's good pleasure was to glorify His own name, in making the wrath of man to praise Him, and hiding pride from man. The holy, godly testimony of faithful ministers

had not impressed his heart, therefore other means must be used to alarm his benighted soul. That jailor who had so cruelly thrust them into the dungeon, and chained them to the stocks, must yet be brought to fall down before them, and acknowledge them as the servants of the Most High; and Paul and Silas, who appeared to be interrupted in the faithful discharge of their gospel ministry, were also to prove that, like their Master, each step of cruelty and oppression turned out for the furtherance of God's purposes of grace, and only led them forward in the path of true service, and not out of it. Their midnight prayer and praise, too, seem to indicate that they were in the lively attitude of faith, and in full expectation of the blessing of the Lord. But there is something very solemn in this period of the jailor's history; for it seems to tell us, that if men reject the quiet, holy testimony of the servants of Christ, God has other means of bringing down man's lofty looks. God's power is unlimited, both in mercy and judgment. In this case it was to be made bare in grace. He who smote Saul with blindness, and brought him to the Savior's feet, could also bring the jailor there. That all-powerful arm might justly have been lifted up with the sword of vengeance, and, piercing the heart of that man who had dared to chain the feet of His dear servants, have at once hurled him to the pit of eternal destruction; but mercy rejoiced against judgment. In the darkness and stillness of the night, without any warning whatever, a tremendous convulsion threatened to rase the whole building to the ground, and to bury every inmate in its ruins. We are told that suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: . . . and every one's bands were loosed {Acts 16:26}.

This was God's way of showing that He is greater than man. This was Mercy's way of bringing salvation to that house, and of honoring the Lord's faithful, suffering servants. This was the very weapon that would arouse the hard and unfeeling jailor. He awoke out of sleep; his conscience owned it as God's dispensation. His first feeling was despair and self-destruction. When he saw the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had all fled, he drew his sword, and would have killed himself. His heart sank, terror

filled his mind; his imagination drew the most hopeless conclusion, and Satan's last effort with him was the foul suggestion, "Kill thyself." A loud voice, however, suddenly altered his judgment, and produced an instantaneous revolution in his mind. Are not all the prisoners gone? No. Paul cried with a loud voice, Do thyself no harm; for we are all here {Acts 16:28}.

This was the sweet and heavenly way that Paul took with his jailor. It was returning good for evil, and kindness to one who had treated him so cruelly. But more than this. His conscience is awakened, a crowd of solemn thoughts press upon his mind. The convulsion of an earthquake might have consigned him at once to a dark eternity; another shock and he may be called to give an account of himself to God. He is assured that Paul and Silas have that peace and joy to which he is a stranger, and that they are the servants of God. He feels now that he is an unsaved man; that if he die, he must go where hope and mercy never can come. His case is urgent, his danger imminent, his position most perilous; for he now knows that he had been sleeping on the edge of a fearful precipice. Not a moment then can be lost. A light! a light! he cried. His very joints are loose, and every fibre of his body seems to quiver. Salvation, salvation is the longing of his whole soul. He springs at once into the inner prison, and falling down

before these servants of the Lord Jesus, cries out, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? {Acts 16:30}

Here I would pause, and kindly ask the reader, what profit has the sweet voice of God's redeeming love been to you? You read of Jesus in this book; you have often seen His servants, and heard them testify of forgiveness of sins through His blood; but has it aroused you? Will you, by your indifference, compel God to visit you with some painful affliction, some distressing dispensation, before you consider your state before Him? Must He snatch away from your eyes the dearest object of your life? Must He lay you prostrate on a bed of languishing? Must He make the earth to tremble, before you turn to Him for salvation? It seems to me that these bitter ways are sometimes necessary, to alarm and incline men's hearts to come to Jesus. Oh, my reader! do consider how matters stand between you and God, and turn to Him at once for the salvation of your soul, lest, instead of an earthquake being sent to alarm your conscience and bring you to the Savior, a messenger be dispatched in judgment to hurl you into an eternity of blackness and despair! 2. THE GOSPEL PREACHED. It was salvation that occupied the jailor's whole soul, nothing less than salvation; not religious ceremonies, but salvation. What must I do to be saved? This, too, is the anxious enquiry of every truly enlightened soul; and we need not go to commentators or learned doctors for a correct answer to the question; for the Scriptures plainly tell us. The apostolic reply was, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved {Acts 16:31}.

This was the gospel that Paul and Silas preached, and it was an echo of their Master's voice; for when He was asked the question,

What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent {John 6:28, 29}.

The gospel then preached to this awakened sinner of the Gentiles was salvation by faith. The jailor's thought, like many others, was that salvation was by works; what must I do? But Paul and Silas assured him that he could be saved only in the way of faith. They presented the Lord Jesus Christ to him as the object of faith, and His finished work, and God's acceptance of it, as the ground of salvation, and warrant for perfect peace -thou shalt be saved.

This is very simple, and commends itself to the confidence of an anxious enquirer. The gospel really excludes all idea of creaturedoing for salvation, because it testifies that Jesus, the Son of God, hath so completely finished the work of our redemption, so thoroughly purged our sins, that He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, the rightful Lord of heaven and earth, and that all who believe on Him have at once an eternal interest in that blessed work. The Lord Jesus having magnified the law by bearing its curse, put away sin, abolished death, burst the bars of the grave, and triumphed over Satan, hell, and the grave, has entered into heaven itself with His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us; the resurrection and glorification of Christ being God's public testimony of His acceptance of the Savior's allsufficient work. What is then to be done for salvation? Nothing; it is done already, and we have the warrant of God's word to receive and enjoy it by faith -Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved {Acts 16:31}.

Faith reads the lessons of redeeming love in the death of the Son of God upon the cross; and those who can say, We have known and believed the love that God hath to us

have peace; they see that God's love has brought salvation to them, even when sinners, in the cross of His Son, and knowing He is now risen from the dead, they approach God with confidence; they know that He declares them saved by grace, through faith. What, I would ask, can exceed this boundless love? What else could have really met us in our low estate? What could so redound to the glory of God? And who so thoroughly reject the gospel, display self-ignorance, and despise the unsearchable riches of Divine love, as those who talk of doing for salvation? Where is boasting?

said the apostle. It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:27, 28).

Blessed gospel for a sin-convicted, heavy-laden sinner! 3. THE EFFECTS. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and when received into the heart it brings forth fruit. It is God's means of begetting new creatures. Of His own will,

says James, begat He us with the word of truth {James 1:18}.

It also gives liberty and peace -the truth shall make you free {John 8:32}.

All this we should expect, when a sinner is brought to know that he is saved. Who so grateful, so dutiful, so happy, so free! Some hear the truth of the gospel, and the only apparent effect is, that it hardens them. This was not the case with Lydia, for her heart was opened, that she attended to the word ministered by Paul; and so the jailor, for his whole soul was filled with anxiety; he, therefore, received the truth at once in the love of it, and its effects were most manifest. What could be so sweet to such an one as the story of the Savior's love! With what intense interest the trembling jailor must have listened to those servants of the Lord while declaring to him the way of salvation! and what grateful surprise must have filled his heart at hearing that the way, was so simple, so free, so full of blessing, and so suited to a lost, helpless sinner! It at once engaged his attention, and made him long to hear more about such glorious tidings; and soon all his household were brought together, though at midnight, and were attentive listeners to Paul and Silas, while they further opened up to them the riches of Divine grace. The energetic, determined jailor, who only a few hours before had so rudely thrust them into the inner prison, regardless of their lacerated backs, now sat like a little child as an anxious enquirer at their feet, and gathered others to partake also of the blessings of the gospel -They spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house {Acts 16:32}.

Among the first effects, then, of the jailor's reception of the gospel of Christ, we may notice his love for the truth, a child-like enquiring mind, and concern for the spiritual welfare of others. The good news of salvation by Christ had been so applied to his conscience by the Holy Spirit, that it came to him as cold water to a thirsty soul, and he was immediately like a dead man raised to life. He was born again of the incorruptible seed of the word, he was a new creation, old things had passed away, and all things were become new; he therefore had an ear to hear, a mind to understand, a heart to receive and love, and desire more and more, the sincere milk of the word, and such a sense of its value, that he wished

others to receive the same blessed gospel. The next thing we may notice among the fruits of faith, is his love to the Lord's servants. He is begotten by the word of truth, and is thoroughly changed in his ways; he has passed from death unto life, therefore he loves the brethren. A few hours before, he saw nothing more in Paul and Silas to call forth affection and sympathy than in the other prisoners; but now he views every thing with new eyes. Having received the word of truth, the gospel of the grace of God, he loves not only Him that begat, but them also that are begotten of Him; hence we are told that he took Paul and Silas the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; . . . and . . . brought them into his house, he set meat before them {see Acts 16:33, 34}.

This was blessed. This was a fine example of the fruit of the Spirit, and it proved the sincerity of his profession; for it was not love in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. Love is a vital point. Religious profession, without a loving heart toward Christ and His members, is like a sounding brass or a tinkling

cymbal. The apostle John declares, that whatever any man may profess, he that loveth not his brother abideth in death {1 John 3:14}.

But in the jailor's case the entrance of God's word had given light; it had given understanding to the simple; it had by the Spirit quickened him when dead in sins. He thus had Divine life; therefore there was Divine love, fruit in season, self-denial for the sake of Christ's servants.

satisfaction apart from God and Christ. Is it so? Is it possible that you are going on to eternal ruin without desiring salvation, without once anxiously crying out, What must I do to be saved? {Acts 16:30}.

Is it true that you hear of salvation by Christ, and heed it not? that you know there is a fountain open for sin and all uncleanness in the Savior's blood, and wash not? that the glorious sound, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved {Acts 16:31},

But more than this, he carried out the mind of the Lord -he was baptized {see Acts 16:33}.

This Paul and Silas had doubtless set before him, and it came with authority to his conscience, because the love of Christ constrained him. His heart was full. His whole soul was influenced with the atoning death of Christ, and the power of His resurrection. He knew that he was saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, that he had redemption in Christ through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace; it was therefore not arduous, but a sweet privilege to attend to an ordinance in which he would realize so personally what it was to be buried with Christ. Faith does not argue; it simply believes and acts on God's word. Nor was the jailor alone in this; the whole congregation, even all his household who had heard the preaching, had no doubt received the gospel too, were happy in the Savior's love, and were also baptized. (See Acts 16:33.) Hence we see that there was not merely a confession of faith; but the obedience of faith; not only an attentive ear to listen to the word of the Lord, but grateful response in doing the will of the Lord. And yet further. There was not only love and peace now animating the jailor's soul, there was joy also -He rejoiced, believing in God with all his house {see Acts 16:34}.

This seems to complete the picture. There was now nothing wanting to show forth the true workmanship of the Spirit in this new-born soul. It was indeed bringing forth good fruit. He could clearly see that there was only a short space of time between him and pleasures for evermore, so that he could rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He could look for the Lord's coming with unhesitating confidence, because he believed that all his sins had been atoned for, all his debt had been cancelled; and now being united by the Holy Ghost to Him who is Lord of heaven and earth, and seated in Him in the heavenlies, he could survey the future with a hope and confidence blooming with immortality and glory. We are told that he was believing in God {Acts 16:34};

how could he then fail to rejoice? for "Who have such reason to be glad As those redeemed to God?"

Thus we have traced, in the narrative of the Philippian jailor, the various workings of the Holy Spirit in awakening one dead in trespasses and sins, giving peace through the gospel of Christ, and its blessed power in giving life and salvation, and bringing forth fruit to God. But the thought crosses my mind that perhaps my reader is unconverted, still dead in sins, still seeking ease and

rings in your ears, and you put it far from you? Oh, my friend! beware, lest the Savior have to say to you as to them of old, Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life {John 5:40};

and How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! {Matt. 23:37}.

DEAR READER! ponder the Lord's awful words, YE WOULD NOT! "Ye sinners, seek His grace, Whose wrath ye cannot bear; Fly to the shelter of His cross, And find SALVATION there."