

To God Alone Be The Glory

The jailer of Philippi asked the most important question anyone can ask: **WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?** You heard part of the story. Let's back up to the beginning.

Missionaries Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke walk into Philippi, a Roman colony with lots of retired Roman soldiers. There aren't many Jews in Philippi, not even enough have a synagogue. When Paul evangelizes a town, he likes to start with the synagogue because most Jews are waiting for the Messiah, and Paul can point them to Jesus. With no synagogue Paul pivots. He finds out about a small, mixed group of Jews and Gentiles awaiting the Messiah. Every Saturday they gather by the river to pray. So the Christian missionaries start with them.

The work progresses. After a while Paul and Silas are met by a slave girl who is possessed by an evil spirit. In a loud and obnoxious way she follows them around shouting, ¹⁷*“These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved.”* As a child I thought the evil spirit was pretty foolish to tell the truth. But when I finally understood what it means to be obnoxious, it became clear how the crafty evil spirit was trying to make the good news look ridiculous, tainted, suspicious. See how much the devil believes in God's Word? He'll do anything to stifle the good news about

Jesus. He doesn't want any of us sharing Jesus with the people he's planning to take to hell. Look how tough it is for us to be practicing, witnessing Christians. Who of us enjoys being called outmoded because we won't set aside any of the Bible's teachings? But we're not going to turn our backs on our Savior from sin. Jesus wants us to tell everyone about him and not let Satan stand in our way. So Paul, very much troubled by the slave girl, turns to her and says to the evil spirit, ¹⁸*“In the name of Jesus Christ (that is, with Jesus' authority) I command you to come out of the her.”*

Now you'd think the slave girl's owners would appreciate what Paul did. You'd think they would rejoice that a fellow human being has been delivered from demon possession. The only problem is that the evil spirit was enabling the girl to predict the future, an activity that was bringing these owners a substantial income. The slave owners are not happy. They drag Paul and Silas into court, whipping up the observers into an uproar, so that the magistrates quickly decide to teach Paul and Silas a lesson. After brutalizing and humiliating these missionaries of Jesus, they throw them into prison, without a real trial, on misleading accusations (verses 19-24).

What would you do if you were beaten for telling someone about Jesus? Would you be done with Jesus, or at least done with mission work? Or maybe instead you would start praying and singing

hymns to God. Yes, because faith in Jesus refuses to be quiet about him.
²⁵*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them* as their prayers and hymns echoed softly through the dungeon. I don't know if Paul and Silas were consciously trying to witness to the other prisoners by their hymns, but the Greek word here for "listen" paints the picture that the prisoners had their ears pressed up against the doors of their cells. *See, you never know who is listening to you, so be sure what you say is true and loving. Praise the Lord at every turn, good or bad. Just imagine if you were at work or with friends, and you made fun of someone at your church. A person who doesn't go to church might have their ears pressed up against your air space, picking up on the juicy morsels of nastiness you spew. And what if one of your listeners is looking for a church home? They may decide your church isn't for them because of you. *If you're sorry you've bad-mouthed someone else, you're forgiven for Jesus sake. Now follow Paul and Silas' example of praising God in every circumstance, if for no other reason, then because someone who needs Jesus might be listening.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The floors shake and the doors fly open and everybody's chains fall off (v 26). Let's say you're the jailer. Your job is to keep the prisoners from escaping, and if they

escape, you get to endure their sentences. The first thing you see when the earthquake wakes you up is 'doors hanging open.' You're a Roman and in your unbelieving culture, it's better to off yourself than be executed for failure of duty. But as you're automatically drawing your sword, one of the prisoners shouts, ²⁸*"We're all here! Don't do even one thing bad to yourself!"* Hey, that sounds like one of those crazy inmates you heard singing earlier as you went to sleep. "Lights!" you demand, "Bring me some lanterns!" Your head is still spinning from sleep and from the earthquake. How could all the doors fly open and the chains fall off? Is this divine intervention? Lantern in hand, filled with fear, you burst into the cell of the singing prisoners and fall down onto the ground in front of them. Then you bring the singing prisoners out of the jail, and, in private, you ask them the most important question in the whole wide world, ³⁰*"Sirs, WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"*

And they answer, "First of all, you have to confess every sin you ever committed. Then you have to prove that you're really sorry. Then you have to ask Jesus to be your Savior. Then you have to take these beads and say a prayer for each bead. Then you have to prove that you're really committed by giving 10% of your money to us." And you say, "Wow that sounds like a lot in order to buy off your God, but I'm scared out of my brains and I'll do it. Are you sure I'm

doing everything I have to do in order to be saved?” *I hope you realize: this whole paragraph has been false. But there are Christian churches who teach things just like this: that you have to **do** something in order to get right with God.

But what does the Bible itself say you have to **do** in order to be saved? Trust Jesus. That’s not really doing anything, is it? ³¹“*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*” **Faith alone saves.** If you could do something to save yourself, how would ever know that you’ve done enough or done it well enough or done it with a pure enough heart? Now some people would argue that trusting is doing something. But faith lays hold of Christ only because the gospel offers Christ as a free gift. And everyone who has hold of Christ by even a simple, child-like faith, has hold of eternal life. No action is required of you. **Faith alone saves.**

If faith existed in a vacuum, we could end the sermon here. But the Scriptures have more to say about saving faith. You see, although faith alone saves, saving **faith is never alone.** It immediately begins producing fruit that is pleasing to the Lord. Look at Paul and Silas: it was their saving faith in Jesus that prompted them to tell others about him. It was their saving faith in Jesus that motivated them to travel wherever the Lord directed. By faith in Jesus’ name, they cast out the demon from the slave girl. Because of saving faith, instead of

cursing the magistrates for having them beaten without a trial, . . . instead of chewing out the jailer for putting them in the stocks, they praised God and sang hymns. It was saving faith in Jesus that gave Paul the oomph to shout out, ²⁸“*Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!*” even though it might have satisfied his desire for justice to let the jailer do himself in. Faith prompted Paul and Silas to speak the Word of God to the jailer and the members of his household, even though the jailer had been extra cruel to them earlier.

And look at the fruits of faith the jailer immediately produced. He could have said, “Now that I have eternal life, it’s time for you two to get back into your cell.” But what does he do? The jailer brings these two prisoners home. Imagine his wife objecting, “Don’t bring those jailbirds into my house!” So Paul and Silas explain the way of God to the family members and servants out in the yard. After a bit the jailer has water brought out, and he washes their wounds. Such compassion from a jailor! See? Although faith alone saves, **faith is never alone.** Now imagine Paul and Silas, clean and dry, looking at each other and smiling? They have water right there. Can you hear them suggesting that they wash the jailor? Can you hear them explaining that baptism offers another assurance of forgiveness and seals the Holy Spirit to us? **Faith alone saves.** Not just the jailor but his whole family is baptized and receives

eternal life through faith in Jesus.

But the saving faith of the jailer and his family isn't done yet. They now see these prisoners as fellow believers in Jesus. So the ³⁴“jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had been brought to faith in God—he and his whole family.” In people who are new to the faith like the jailer, fruits of faith can come popping out quickly. Oh, there's still plenty to struggle with, but growth in faith is rapid as long as they keep hearing and studying God's Word.

But what about all of you who were brought to Christ a long time ago? Does it feel like your faith isn't producing much fruit anymore? What must you do to get back on track? Do you have to pull yourself up by your own spiritual bootstraps? No. “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*” Just as the missionaries then spoke the Word of the Lord to the jailer, have someone speak the Word of the Lord to you. Or read the Bible for yourself. God's Word is what gives and strengthens the **faith** that **alone saves**.

But **faith is never alone**. It wants to work at overcoming our sinful tendencies just to thank Jesus for completing our whole salvation. Faith wants to work at showing itself in our attitudes and behaviors and conversations. And it's hard work, especially if you have given in to a sin, and the sin has gotten its

hooks in you. Some of you are trying to overcome your fear or your anger. And you have seen how much the Holy Spirit is helping you through God's Word. Some of you may have had to struggle with yourself this morning in order to get up for church, or to go out into the cold so you could attend in-person worship this morning. But you want God's help, and you know that church is where God loves to help people love what he loves. Others of you have to bite your tongue a lot in order not to make fun of people who don't seem to have any sense. But you're tired of letting pride have a home in your heart. Still others of you are praying for patience in order to get along with a troublemaker at work, or on the bus, or in the neighborhood, or in your own house. Still others of you fight the battle to control excessive working or eating or smoking or gaming or sports betting. And with God's help you're doing better. Sometimes our faith succeeds in showing that it is not alone, because God, who completely saved us by faith in Jesus, also gives our faith the strength to produce fruit. But no matter how poorly we do or how well our faith succeeds, when we come back to the most important question—what must I do to be saved—the answer remains the same: believe in the Lord Jesus. God's unchanging promise to you is: “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Joel 2:32).