The Baptism of our Lord Acts 16:25-34
January 10, 2021 737*-89-294/709**-299
*CW-S – "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It"
**CW-S – "Christ, Your Footprints Through the Desert"

"What Must I Do to Be Saved?"
I. The all-important question.
II. The amazing answer.
III. The life-changing results.

Dear Christian friends,

While working on this sermon I tried coming up with a CATCHY THEME – one that would stick in our minds. **Unfortunately** nothing came to **my mind**. But then I had an **"epiphany"** – a revelation – it's PRETTY OBVIOUS that **these verses** are all about the jailer's question, ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** That question may NOT BE CATCHY but it should stick in our minds. ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** is 1)the all-important question. It has 2)an amazing answer **with** 3)life-changing **results**. So let's look more closely at that question – "WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

I. The all-important question.

I hope that we all agree that ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** IS the all-important question. ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** goes TO THE HEART of our personal relationship with our **Creator**. It determines where we will SPEND ETERNITY – **with the devil** in hell's eternal punishment or **with God** in heaven's eternal glory and rest. NOTHING can be more important that CORRECTLY ANSWERING this **all-important** question!

Unfortunately for many people this is NOT the **most important** question in their life. MORE IMPORTANT – more pressing – are **questions like** – WHAT'S for supper? – what time is the game today? **What's** the stock market doing? **Where** can I find a job?"

"What must I do to be saved?" was probably not the FIRST QUESTION **on the minds** of these prisoners in the **Greek city** of Philippi. More likely it was "HOW can I get out of here?" FOR THIS JAILER at first his BIG CONCERN was not ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** but "HOW can I keep these prisoners from escaping?" He had been ***"ordered to guard*** (Paul and Silas) ***securely."*** So he ***"threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks."*** With that taken care of he could turn his attention to MORE PLEASANT things like, "What's for supper?" God, **however**, was about to SHAKE THINGS UP in his life!

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken." This was no ordinary earthquake. GOD was obviously answering Paul and Silas' prayers and hymns. ***"Instantly all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose."*** ALL the prisoners were free to escape. The jailer assumes they **all have** escaped. What prisoner WOULDN'T TRY to escape **under these circumstances**?

Under Roman law when **prisoners escaped** the jailer received their sentence. **If the prisoners** were sentenced to life in prison the jailer was sentenced to life in prison. If the

prisoner was sentenced to die the **jailer was sentenced** to die. ***"When the jailer woke up and saw that the prison doors were opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, because he thought that the prisoners had escaped."*** Paul shouts to stop him – he assures the jailer, ***"We're all here."*** Nothing is MAKING SENSE to the jailer. He ***"called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling in front of Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'"***

We're not told what ALL LED to the jailer asking this **all-important** question. Paul took it as an HONEST question. God had gotten the **jailer's attention** and the jailer would soon get **God's** AMAZING ANSWER.

"What must I do to be saved?" IS the all-important question and GOD IN LOVE still works to get people's attention. **Sometimes** God needs to use a **2x4** on us – a devastating illness – a **terminal diagnosis** from the doctor – a crippling **car accident** – financial ruin, a PANDEMIC, etc. SUDDENLY our priorities in life **change** all around. ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** becomes the ALL-IMPORTANT question.

"What must I do to be saved?" is a very personal question AND an honest confession. It's PERSONAL – I'm not asking, "What must THEY do to be saved?" but "What must I DO to be saved?" It's also an honest confession – "I NEED to be saved! I'm in BIG TROUBLE with God and I don't know how to MAKE THINGS RIGHT with God."

"What must I do to be saved?" becomes the **all-important** question when I take an honest look at MYSELF – **my** heart – **my** life – **my** attitude – **my** thoughts, words, actions – **my** desires and **feelings** – TAKE AN HONEST LOOK at myself in that mirror of God's law – those 10 Commandments. I'm not guilty of **making** a FEW MISTAKES or some POOR CHOICES. I have ignored and defied my Creator's **clear will** for my life. With my choices and actions I have bluntly told **almighty** God I DON'T CARE what He says or wants – I'll do whatever I want. I've done that COUNTLESS TIMES - EVERY DAY of my life. ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** HOW can there even be any hope for a sinner like me?! Ah, hear…

II. God's amazing answer.

"They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.'" What an AMAZING answer! It's NOT a you might – you probably – there's a good chance you **could** be saved. ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you WILL BE saved."***

"Believing" is not OUR DOING something **for God** but OUR RECEIVING **from God**. ***"Believing"*** is trusting – relying on – putting **our confidence** – NOT IN OURSELVES – **not** in how sorry we are for our sins – **not** in how sincerely we want to **do better**. ***"Believing"*** is trusting - relying on – putting our confidence – ***"IN JESUS."***

"They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to everyone in his home." A person can't believe in Jesus if he hasn't heard about Jesus. ***"Faith comes from hearing the message."***

The facts are SO SIMPLE – so FAMILIAR to us – but may they ever be AS PRECIOUS to us as when this jailer and his family **heard them** for the FIRST TIME **from Paul** and Silas. Jesus is God Himself – the eternal Son of God **born** our flesh-and-blood brother. Jesus took our place under God's law and took care of **everything** for us to be saved. We owed God a WHOLE LIFE of **perfect love** for Him– perfect **obedience** to His will– perfect **trust** in His ways.

We can't even live **two minutes** of such a perfect life. Jesus actually did live that perfect life and He gives us **all the credit** for it. We deserved death and hell – to be forever ***"forsaken"*** by God – because of our sins. The **sinless** Lord Jesus took the blame for the sins of the whole world and was punished in our place. Jesus endured the death and hell we had coming. Jesus was ***"forsaken"*** – we are **forgiven**. Just don't leave Jesus dead and buried! Jesus rose triumphant from the dead on Easter morning. Jesus lives – ***"nevermore to die."***

"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." What an AMAZING answer! God doesn't have DIFFERENT ANSWERS for different sinners and **different sins**. WHOEVER the sinner – WHATEVER the sins might all be – ***"believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."*** Trusting in Jesus and all He's done for us we can BE ABSOLUTELY SURE that God has forgiven **all** our sins – that we are reconciled with God – that we are going straight to heaven when we die.

"Without delay, he and all his family were baptized." Today we remember what a PRECIOUS GIFT from God Holy Baptism is. Baptism is not us opening our **hearts and lives** to God. Baptism is God entering our hearts and making us Christians.

The word ***"baptize"*** simply means to "wash – use water." Yet as Luther put it **so clearly** in the catechism, "Baptism is not just plain water but water used by **God's** command and connected with **God's** Word." Through this ***"washing of water and the Word"*** God gave us ***"rebirth"*** – brought us to trust in Jesus as our Savior – God ***"washed away"*** sins – ***"clothed"*** us with Jesus' perfect life – adopted us as His children – promised us eternal life in heaven. Oh treasure your baptism! LIVE your baptism – YOU are a child of God – an heir of heaven!

Now SEE that God's amazing answer to this **all-important** question has…

III. Life-changing results.

We see these LIFE-CHANGING **results** in Paul and Silas. They knew God's **amazing answer** to that **all-important** question. They just had to share God's answer with others. **If** they had just kept their mouths shut they would have saved themselves SO MUCH trouble and hardships. But no – they HAD TO SHARE their Jesus with others. They just couldn't hide their **Christian faith**.

So they came to Philippi. They were falsely accused of ***"throwing the city into an uproar."*** Their civil rights as Roman citizen had been **violated**. WITHOUT any investigation or trial they were ***"stripped – severely flogged – thrown into prison with their feet in the stocks."*** What would YOU HAVE DONE **under such circumstances**? What language would **you** have been using? See the LIFE-CHANGING results of the gospel! Paul and Silas were ***"praying and singing hymns to God"*** and doing so so that the other prisoners could hear them. No foul language – no bitterness – **anger** – resentment. No keeping quiet or being ashamed of the gospel. YEARS LATER **as a prisoner** once more Paul wrote to this jailer and the other Christians in Philippi, ***"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"***

See the LIFE-CHANGING results in the jailer. HOURS EARLIER he was despairing and SUICIDAL. Now ***"he rejoiced, because he and his whole household had come to believe in God."*** TRUSTING in Jesus as his Savior he now had God's love – forgiveness – peace – promises – presence. HOW could he not ***"rejoice"***?

Before his ONLY CONCERN was that Paul and Silas **not escape**. That their backs were bleeding and **in shreds** from the flogging – that the stocked caused their **aching legs** to cramp – that they were hungry – TOO BAD – TOUGH LUCK! Now he ***"takes them to his house – washes their wounds – feeds them."*** Touched by GOD'S LOVE how could he not show **such love** to others – especially to Paul and Silas? Saved by **God's grace** how could he **continue to live** a SELFISH, SELF-CENTERED life?

See the LIFE-CHANGING results in your life! You see them, don't you? Others can see the DIFFERENCE JESUS MAKES in your life, right? Knowing **God's** AMAZING ANSWER to that **all-important** question of ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** – how can our lives NOT be totally changed around? Amen.

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