

The First Sunday after Epiphany – January 10, 2021 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

**Acts 16:25-34** --<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**<sup>31</sup> They replied, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."** <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

In the name of Jesus, our Savior, dear fellow redeemed children of God.

As we read the pages of Scripture we find that frequently significant questions are asked. This happens especially at significant points in Bible history or to teach some great Biblical truth. Four questions quickly come into my mind. When God appeared to Moses at the burning bush in the desert of Sinai, Moses asked "Who are you? Whom shall I sent me?" The Lord responded Jahveh (Jehovah) which means I am that I am. Our eternal, unchanging God was talking to Moses from that bush. Not much more than a year later, when Moses had led the Children of Israel out of Egypt they complained about the lack of food, so God supplied them in a miraculous manner which continue until they entered the Promised Land 40 years later. When the Children of Israel looked out across the desert one morning they saw the ground covered with what look like frost and said "Manna", which means "What is it?" God showed his great providence to them and reminds us of his promise to provide for us what is absolutely necessary for the preservation of our life in this world. As we turn to the New Testament we hear Jesus asking his disciples, "What do you say? Who am I?" Peter responded on behalf of the disciples: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus is the Messiah promised from the Garden of Eden. A final question that comes to my memory is the question of Pontius Pilate at Jesus' trial: "What is truth?" What Pilate missed is what we know: Jesus and the salvation which he provides is the absolute truth.

Among the most vital of all the questions in the Bible is that of the Jailer of Philippi, "What must I do to be saved?" This morning this questions guides us to

### **Ponder the Jailer's Urgent Request**

We note that this is **A TIMELESS QUESTION** with **A PRICELESS ANSWER**.

This was not just a simple, academic question for the Jailer. No, his foundations were shaking. The Jail had been rattled. The doors were open. The chains were loosened. He was devastated. He was ready to leave his with a widow and his children fatherless. He knew that he would receive the punishment which had been decreed on each of the escaped prisoners. In his mind his best choice was to commit suicide. But now that amazing announcement of Paul that not one prisoner was gone had his whole being rattled. The miracle of healing performed by Paul on that servant girl on the day prior; the attack on Paul and Silas and their imprisonment; and the singing and giving of thanks of these two prisoners all told the jailer that these men has a message worth considering. So he asked that urgent question, "What must I do to be saved?"

This question is both urgent and timeless because by nature we are all lost and have no way of salvation. Our natural spiritual condition has no solid foundation, no hope for the afterlife. Not only that, but this that in the last ten months our societal foundations have been shaken to the core as we have endured this ongoing pandemic as well as a huge upheaval in with civil unrest and divisive politics. How well have you handled all of that? Did you worry about anything in 2020. It sure has been easy to do that, hasn't it? Our health, our finances, the well-being of our loved ones, the future of our country sure can lead us to worry. But what is worry? Ultimately is a lack of trust in the promises of our God. Worry is putting what I am feeling and thinking and what the world around me is telling me is more important than what God tells me and promises me in his Word. It is a sin against the First Commandment.

That is what makes the jailer's question so timeless and urgent. By nature we don't have an answer to that question. By nature we are a breath away from eternity. We don't know that length of our time on earth. It might be the 70 years that Moses talked about. It might be more. It might be less. The jailer had not time to prepare for this traumatic experience. You can see his anxious look by the torch he was holding. He was probably wearing his nightclothes; His hair was uncombed; Was he even walking about barefoot? His question is urgent because we probably won't have time to prepare. The Lord will come suddenly and unexpectedly.

The jailer's question is urgent and timeless because nothing else will matter when we stand before the righteous Judge of all people. Money, prestige, power, accomplishments, a trim and fit body all are impressive in this world, but they are meaningless to Jesus the Judge. The only things that will matter will be our relationship with our almighty and merciful God and that is what the jailer's question guides us to ponder. This urgent and timeless question has such a simple, yet urgent and priceless answer. Paul answered the jailer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household."

Paul didn't give him a list of things to do. He didn't have to make amends to any prisoners he had abused. He didn't have to do any great (or simple) works. Paul gave the jailer that simple answer and then because it was all so new, Paul sat down with the entire household and explained things more thoroughly. This simple priceless and urgent answer stands apart from all of the religions in the world. They all offer complex plans for how a person can work his way into heaven. This priceless answer points the jailer and us away from our works and points to Jesus alone and his free gift of forgiveness and salvation. His answer directs us to four truths of Scripture.

First, this answer shows us that salvation is God's doing, not our own. No one can save themselves because we can't produce the perfection that God demands and we can't pay for any of our imperfections. "You will be saved" teaches us that. Being saved is God's doing. That's why Jesus came to earth. He lived in perfection for us. He died to wash away the guilt of our sins. "By grace are you have been saved, though faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9). What great news this is! If salvation depended on us, then the best among us might have some hope of saving themselves, but the worst among us wouldn't have a chance. But since salvation depends on God, there is hope for everyone. We are too lost, too sinful for any human solution, thanks be to our loving God that he has supplied redemption through his Son, Jesus Christ.

This priceless answer to that timeless question shows us that salvation is a matter of believing, not doing. Paul didn't answer with something to do, but rather with someone to believe in. Believing is not a matter of human effort, but rather of ceasing from our efforts and relying on God alone. Paul would later write to the Corinthians: "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,'" except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3). Saving faith relies on Jesus Christ alone. Trusting him is all that we need to do to be saved.

Paul's priceless answer assures us that salvation centers on the person of Jesus Christ. Paul and Silas instructed the jailer and his household in the way of salvation through Jesus. Paul and Silas surely taught about the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. The jailer learned that Jesus is true God and true Man, the Redeemer of all people. As the jailer learned the truth about the way of salvation from Paul and Silas, so the world today needs to hear God's Word so that it doesn't perish in unbelief. Dear friends we have what our society, our country our world so desperately needs. We have the Word of God and through the Word of God faith is produced and lost souls learn the priceless answer to the timeless question. What a blessing we can be when we exploit every opportunity we have to share the message of salvation. "Faith comes from hearing the message and the message come through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Finally we note that when the priceless answer to this urgent and timeless question is heard and embraced, lives are change. Think of the jailer! From confusion, fear, and hopelessness come a spirit of joy and thanksgiving and an eagerness to serve. No longer was he on an insecure, shaking foundation. Now he had a solid spiritual foundation. He knew that the way to salvation was through believing in Jesus as his Savior. Now he is eager to serve God's people as we see in his treatment of Paul and Silas.

You know the priceless answer to the timeless question, most of us have known it since we were baptized as infants. Then our loving heavenly Father assured us, "You are my child in whom I am well-pleased!" God is pleased with

us because our faith rests on his Redeemer Son. The timeless question is still one to be asked – even in our hearts. The priceless answer continues to direct us daily to Jesus! 2020 was a confusing and challenging year but it was a year of blessing because every day we knew the priceless answer to the timeless question. 2021 will be no different. The challenges and events of the coming year will continue to unfold in front of us, but by faith we will always have that priceless answer. Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household.

Amen