

Acts 16:30

He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’

Christians at Philippi gathered for Sunday Service

- That in itself was a remarkable fact for Jews worshipped on a Saturday
- The day of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus

Where would they have met?

- Perhaps at a place of prayer
- To have a synagogue the Jews needed ten male heads of household
- A place of prayer was normally a cool, shady place by some water
- Or perhaps, as in other cities, they met in the home of a more prosperous member

What would they have done?

- They could well have sung a hymn (Paul quotes from what might be a hymn Phil. 2)
- Someone would read from the Old Testaments
- There might have been a letter from Paul the Apostle to read

Who would have been there?

- The obvious answer is that we do not know
- But Acts 16 gives us information about three members

Lydia

- It is obvious to us but the fact that Lydia was a woman is significant
- She is a business woman from Thyatira, a seller of purple cloth
- Coming from Thyatira (Turkey) she could be more Asian than European

Slave-girl

- At the other end of the social scale is the slave-girl
- Probably in her teens, she would not have been highly valued in the ancient world
- Also a woman, she was at the other end of the social spectrum from Lydia

The prison jailer

- Probably an older man, a retired soldier, perhaps, left the army and in security
- His responsibility was to do what he was told
- Many soldiers had been moved into Philippi from other parts of the Empire

So here we meet three very different people

- With something very special in common
- their lives had been changed by Jesus

In the book that we call ‘Acts’ Luke recounts the travels of the Paul and the Apostles

- Paul has been following an ancient Roman Road, the Via Sebaste,
- Through Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch
- And was no doubt expecting to end up at the capital of the province of Asia, Ephesus
- God’s hand was over the whole enterprise for he was kept from entering Asia
- And therefore continued to travel throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia

When Paul had a vision of a Macedonian asking for help – Paul changed direction

- The Christian work went westward towards Europe and to Philippi
- It seems that Luke was actually with Paul on this part of the journey (uses ‘we’)
- Philippi was the site of a great battle in 42 B.C. (cf. Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*)
- And after the war many Roman army veterans settled there
- So that the city was designated a Roman colony

When Paul arrived at Philippi

- He found a group of women at place of prayer
- Perhaps there was no synagogue in Philippi
- One of the women, Lydia, was a dealer in purple cloth
- The dye for purple cloth was extracted by crushing shells, an expensive process
- Consequently purple was the colour of kings, nobles and wealthy people
- The designer label of its day

Lydia was at the place of prayer

- She was undoubtedly religious, the Bible calls her a ‘God-fearer’
- But Luke reminds us that evangelism is not just the work of men – God is at work
- As she listened to Paul, her heart was opened, for she needed to respond to Jesus

Luke recounts the account of Paul’s preaching to the slave-girl

- Although there is a possibility that Lydia is simply named after her home town
- The slave-girl is not important enough to be named – no one has heard of her
- Psychologically and spiritually her needs are great
- She has the spirit of a python
- Probably a reference to the mythical serpent that guarded the oracle of Apollo
- In any event, by this evil spirit she foretold the future
- And like the demon possessed who met Jesus (Mk 1:24; 3:11; 5:7; Lk 4:34, 41; 8:28)
- She knew the message and the identity of the apostles
- Following them around and shouting
- ‘These men are servants of the Most High God
- and are telling you the way to be saved.’
- Luke adds the observation, ‘she kept this up for several days’
- Until at last she was touched by the power of Jesus

The jailer was just a man doing his job (‘upon receiving such orders’ v. 24) - jobsworth

- He put Paul and Silas in the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks
- As they were not violent men his reasons for doing this are unclear
- Perhaps it was because of their reputation for supernatural works
- In any event, at about midnight they were praying and singing hymns
- Though they had been wrongly imprisoned and suffering
- The apostles resorted to a time-tested method of responding to suffering
- As there are times when we must resort to singing from memory
- It shows that what we learn through what we sing is important
- Again Luke adds the observation, ‘and the other prisoners were listening to them’
- You wonder how much choice the other prisoners had
- When a violent earthquake opened the doors and loosed the chains (at the wall)

You might recall that when Peter was delivered from prison that guards were executed

- When the doors are open the jailer knows that he would be severely punished
- And is ready to kill himself

But Paul calls out:

- ‘Don’t harm yourself! We are all here’
- The jailer comes to Paul and Silas and asks: ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’

It is the vital question, the \$64,000 question, the £1m pound question – it’s more than that!

- It is the all-of-life question – what must I do to be saved?
- It is a question that Lydia, wealthy, religious woman could have asked
- It is a question that the slave-girl, at the bottom of the social pile, could have asked
- It comes at the climax of a passage explaining the good news of Jesus is for all

The gospel, the good news of Jesus, was for Jews, like Paul, right enough

- But now we are at the stage in Acts where the gospel is being preached to Gentiles
- Paul, a pious Jew, had prayed every day to thank God that he was not born
- A Gentile, a slave or a woman
- But now, this same Paul is preaching the gospel to Gentiles, slaves and women
- And is the apostle who will write that in Christ
- There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female
- Here the Gentile, the slave and the woman are saved by Jesus
- So the Philippian jailer’s question is a question for us all

Some people have wrongly suggested he wanted to be saved from the authorities

- The prisoners were all there so the jailer had no worries on that score
- But he had no fear from the authorities, in fact he should be in for a commendation
- Even in an earthquake his prisoners were still in their cells
- His question is about a much greater issue – eternal salvation

There is no doubt that the New Testament and this book of Acts

- Is about the message of Jesus and the spread of the Christian message of salvation
- Salvation was a common term for the Christian message
- And yet not as much as it used to be and the reason it is not so popular
- Is that many people, even in church, seem to have abandoned the message
- Of lives changed (saved) through preaching the message of Jesus

The whole teaching that ‘Jesus saves’ has been ridiculed

- Ridiculed by a world which finds its failure hard to face
- Ridiculed by a society that finds its failure hard to face
- Ridiculed by individuals who find their failure hard to face

Does the world need saving? Do individuals need saving?

- I would have thought the answer was obvious
- From the news, from the papers, in the streets around us
- And in our own experience

We hear people saying that they are free and talking about liberty

- Yet these seem people are trapped in a world of drugs and alcohol
- Caught up in the disintegration of family life
- Where the elderly have made their homes fortresses against a hostile world
- And parents keep their children indoors fearing abuse, kidnap or worse

Where people's aim seems to be to get away from it all in escapism

- Escapism into a mythical world created by the media
- Wall to wall television (54 channels with nothing on) videos, DVD, virtual reality
- A world of gratuitous sex and violence
- To the hypnotic, repetitive noise of modern music
- Best enjoyed through headphones, with a baseball cap pulled over your eyes
- To the obsession with texting – trying to be with people you are not with
- As a counterbalance to the people that are right there
- Of fast cars, and fast-living – and all that's well-packaged but spiritually dead

Or before those of us with pretensions become smug, escapism that is

- The best of worldly culture
- Where people no longer go to Cornwall for their holidays, but to Bali or Bangkok
- Where ordinary people talk about art, and concerts and fine recordings
- Of gourmet foods and foreign wines – and all that is fine and refined
- But spiritually dead

Or people who are determined to escape

- Through sport or achievement, following the team, worshipping the sportsman
- Through career, attainment and status; money, wealth and power
- The multimillionaire Sir John Paul Getty was asked,
- 'How much money do you need to be really happy?' His reply – 'just a little more.'

Or people who are determined to escape through relationships

- who is sold the picture of the unattainable woman or partner
- a person who probably having been airbrushed and digitally enhanced does not exist
- if you cannot have her in person you can own her in print, or on DVD
- the trouble is that the ordinary people we meet are not like that
- but now there is cosmetic surgery – not for things that seriously need putting right
- but things that no one worried about before but have now become 'must-haves'
- if that were not bad enough people are sold a world of relationships and experiences
- that in all reality do not exist – they become discontented with their marriage partner
- they become discontented and disillusioned with themselves

The Philippian jailer was probably a retired Roman soldier

- if that is the case then he is not a weak man, he is not looking for a prop
- he is not looking for an escape – he is looking for reality
- 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' he asks
- it is a question Lydia could have asked
- it is a question that the slave-girl could have asked
- it is a question that we must ask

In our pride we may not choose to ask the question for ourselves

- but let's not kid ourselves about our failures
- let's not kid ourselves of the need to face the question
- of our need to know the answer – the most important question of all
- “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”

If the Philippian jailer was a failure

- he could nonetheless have a future in Jesus
- When the apostles told the jailer to believe in Jesus
- The did not simply mean believe that he existed – thousands who met him did that
- But believe in him in the sense of trusting him

It is clear that the jailer did believe in Jesus and trust him

- He began to show that change within minutes
- He listened to the apostles preach and teach about Jesus
- He was willing to put right what was wrong
- He involved his family in everything and joined the Christians by being baptised
- He shared with the apostles in a new joy, that came through Jesus
- He may have been a failure in all kinds of ways
- But now he had a future of joy and hope in Jesus his Saviour

If people could only grasp that the Church and Christianity

- Are not really about religion
- Sometimes if I am travelling on the train and someone asks me what I do
- They say to me, so you're religious then – I always reply, 'I hope not'
- Religion has to do with rules and regulations – trying to find your way to God
- But trusting in Jesus is about a relationship
- It is a relationship where I bring my failures, my needs, myself – to Jesus

It is a relationship where Jesus comes to me

- in the world which was made through him
- in the Bible which was given through him
- in person which is the story of Christmas Day
- completely on the cross which is the story of Good Friday
- alive, which is the story of Easter Day
- by the presence of his Spirit, which is the story of Pentecost
- and one day face to face, which is the Advent hope

The condemned Roman prisoner was forced to carry his own cross to the place of execution

- my failures, my needs, my guilt, my brokenness
- are the cross of death I carry
- but Jesus is the one who takes it from me, carries it and dies on it for me

This is the Christian message

- whoever you are, 'believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved'

There is no reality in saying 'we do not need a saviour'

- we all need a saviour, the world needs a saviour, our society needs a saviour
- I cannot answer for them – but I can answer for me – I need a saviour

A saviour from the past

- From failures, from needs, from guilt, from brokenness

A saviour from the present

- From powerlessness, from worthlessness, from fear, from captivity

A saviour from the future

- From purposelessness, from death, from judgment, from condemnation

What must I do to be saved?

- Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved
- A belief that is expressed in trust and commitment
- A belief that acknowledges Jesus as Saviour and Lord

We seem to live in an age where people hide behind saying that they are not sure

- If it were about religious rules I could understand it
- But it is about a relationship of trust and commitment

Jesus changed the lives of

- Lydia, the seller of purple cloth from Thyatira
- The slave-girl
- The city jailer

He still changes lives today

- The whole dynamic of our lives can be changed by one thing
- A positive response to the message of Jesus
- Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved

Christians at Philippi gathered for Sunday Service, on the day of resurrection

- Perhaps at a place of prayer, or in the home of one of their members
- They probably sang a Psalm or an early Christian hymn
- They read from the scriptures
- We don't know exactly who would have been there on any given Sunday
- But we know the congregation included
- Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free,
- People of different backgrounds, different ethnic groups, different ages
- Peoples whose lives had been changed – by Jesus