

(Side A)

THE CHANGE ONLY CHRIST CAN MAKE

Spotlighting Events Surrounding The Conversion Of The

Philippian Jailer

Key Text: Acts 16:25-34

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Key Notes:

Because of Christ, He Changed From...

M _____ ***S*** _____, To ***M*** _____ ***S*** _____,
I _____ of ***P*** _____, To ***W*** _____ of ***W*** _____
Roman ***P*** _____, To Family of ***C*** _____.

-Gal. 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

-Romans 12:2 "...do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

(Side B)

THE POWER FOR THIS CHANGE

(Spotlighting The Messiah's Mission and Method - John 10:10)

WHERE IS THE POWER FOR NEW LIFE? → THE _____!

JN. 15:18 / Phil. 3:13; / Eph. 1:19 / Col. 2:13 / Rom. 8:35-37 / II Cor. 5:17 / Acts.2:38ff / Rom.8:9-11,29 /
Gal. 5:22-23; Gal. 2:17-20 / Mat. 4 / Rom. 10:17 / Jam 1:3-5.

I. BECAUSE IT HAS THE POWER TO:

1. ... C _____ My P _____."
2. ... C _____ My P _____."
3. ... C _____ My P _____."

"It's just like me to _____."

II. WHAT-WHO-WHEN-WHERE-HOW?

1. When I come to C _____ I am M _____ N _____!"
 2. You begin an ever-maturing R _____ with God!
 3. His welcomed presence/influence M _____ Y _____!"
 4. Accomplished by B _____ S _____ F _____!"
-
-
-

III. NURTURING THE FRUIT: A METAPHOR:

***AN APPLE TREE**

***A CHRISTIAN**

1. Must Have R _____
2. Must Have N _____
3. Must Have W _____
4. Endures W _____
5. Takes T _____

1. Must Have C _____!"
2. Must Have the W _____!"
3. Must steadily P _____!"
4. Endures C _____!"
5. Takes T _____!"

Acts, 7

Ref. → <http://www.resourcepublications.net>

TRUTH FOR TODAY

December 1995

Vol. 16, No. 7

ACTS, 7

by David Roper

CHANGING LIVES—
WITH THE HELP OF GOD
(16:13–40)

LOOKING FOR HONEST
HEARTS (16:40—17:15)

TURNING THE WORLD
UPSIDE DOWN (17:6)

HOW DO YOU SPELL
S-U-C-C-E-S-S
(IN THE LORD'S WORK)?
(17:16–34)

ONE OF THE GREATEST
SERMONS EVER PREACHED
(17:22–34)

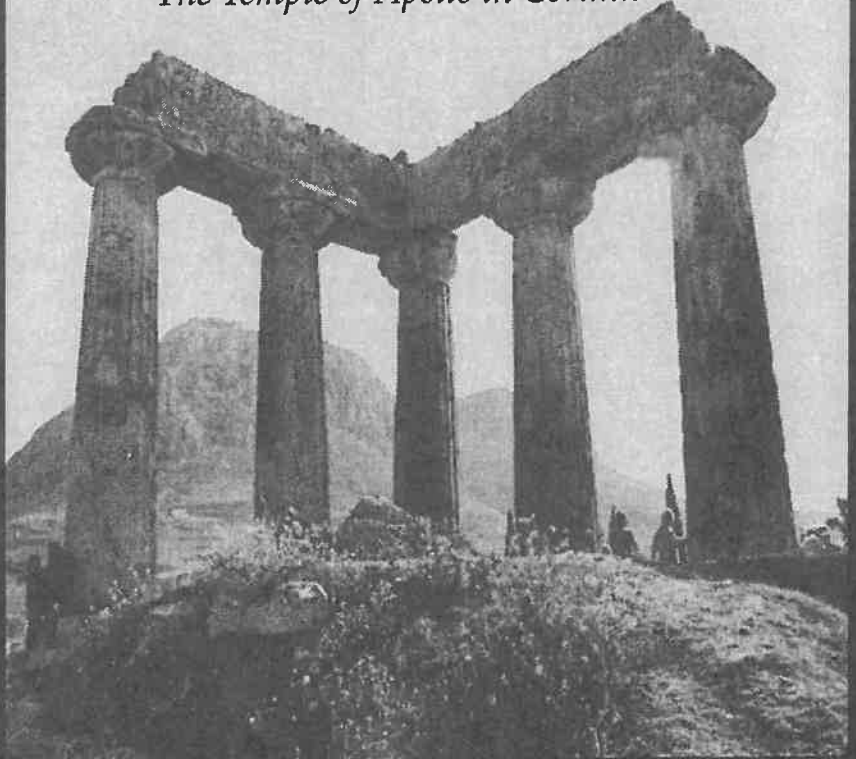
"DO NOT BE AFRAID
ANY LONGER" (18:1–11)

THE LORD ALWAYS KEEPS
HIS WORD! (18:9–22)

A PREACHER I CAN'T HELP
ADMIRING (18:24–28)

Truth for Today
is a monthly publication dedicated to
the exposition and application of the
holy Scriptures.

The Temple of Apollo in Corinth



"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:9, 10).

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Changing Lives— With the Help of God (16:13–40)

To help you appreciate the thrust of this presentation, picture in your mind what you consider "a perfect prospect" for the gospel. If you were looking for someone to teach, what would be the characteristics of that person? Perhaps you will think of some specific individual whom you hope to bring to Christ. How much is that "perfect prospect" like you? Probably your "ideal prospect" is much like yourself. When we look for someone with whom to share the gospel, we tend to look for someone of our own race, our own educational background, our own social standing, our own marital status. We feel comfortable with people like that.

AN IRRESISTIBLE BUSINESSWOMAN (16:13–15)

AN IRRITATING DEMONIC SLAVE (16:16–22)

¹Some translations insert the words “to you” into Philippians 4:15 (“when I first preached to you”), but “to you” is not in the original text.

moved immediately to an incident near the end of Paul's initial work in Philippi. Verse 16 says, "And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us,² who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling."

"The place of prayer" probably refers to the banks of the Gangites River (16:13), where they had met Lydia and the other women. Perhaps they were going there to pray; perhaps they were going there to see if they could find other honest hearts. As they went on their way, they met "a certain slave-girl." To move from the story of Lydia to the story of this slave-girl is to move from the upper class of society to the very lowest class of society. A slave was not considered a person; a slave was property—like your house, your furniture, your tools.

This particular slave had "a spirit of divination." The Greek text literally has "a spirit of a python."³ In Greek mythology, the god Apollo had slain the python, and the spirit of the python had then taken control of the female oracle at Delphi. Consequently, when people believed that a woman had powers similar to those of the Delphi oracle, they said she had "the spirit of the python."⁴ Luke's use of the phrase does not mean that he believed the superstitious tale; he was using accommodative language. The poor girl had an unclean spirit, such as we read about earlier in Acts 5:16 and 8:7;⁵ she was possessed by a demon.⁶ Apparently, demons instinctively knew some facts mortals did not know,⁷ and this unnatural knowledge impressed the crowds. Thus the demon-possessed girl was able to bring her masters "much profit by fortunetelling."

Although the spread of Christianity invariably wipes out many irrational beliefs,⁸ we have seen a revival of superstition in recent years. Fortunetellers, palm readers, crystal-ball gazers, horoscope interpreters, mediums, self-proclaimed psychics, and so-called "channelers"⁹ abound—and all of them prey on the ignorant and unsuspecting. Needless to say, a Christian shuns such people and their practices, encouraging others to do the same.

When the missionaries met the girl with the unclean spirit, they apparently tried to ignore her. The girl refused to be ignored. She followed them and "kept crying out, saying, 'These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation'" (v. 17). Her words remind us of the words of the Gerasene demoniac who called Jesus "Son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7). The demon that possessed the slave-girl knew who the missionaries were and their purpose for being in Philippi.¹⁰ James said that "the demons . . . believe, and shudder" (James 2:19).

Every day, wherever Paul and his companions went, this slave-girl was there, loudly proclaiming to the crowd: "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God." Luke said that "she continued doing this for many days" (Acts 16:18a). Finally, Paul could stand it no more. "But Paul was greatly annoyed,¹¹ and turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!' And it came out at that very moment" (v. 18b).

This passage produces two questions: (1) Why was Paul annoyed when she was speaking the truth? Paul evidently did not want it to

²Luke continued to use the first person to indicate that he was present when these events happened. ³A python is a very large snake that coils itself around its victims and crushes them. ⁴According to at least one ancient writer, the term "python" was also used to refer to "a ventriloquist," and this fact is often pointed out by modern writers—but it is possible that they misunderstand the meaning of the term "ventriloquist" in those days. Today we use the term to refer to one who can "throw his voice," and that would have been a useful skill for a charlatan to have: He could have made it appear that images were speaking, that the gods were speaking from above, etc. However, the word "ventriloquism" literally means "to speak from the belly"; in Bible times, it probably referred to the superstition that spirits took over the bodies of the oracles and spoke from inside them (i.e., from their bellies). ⁵See the notes on those verses. ⁶See the supplementary article on "Demons" on page 50 of the "Acts, 3" issue. ⁷This is evident in our present story. Under the influence of the unclean spirit, she knew that Paul and the others were servants of the Most High God. Note that demons were *not* omniscient (all-knowing). It does not, however, take much to impress those who want to believe in fortunetellers. ⁸I refer to the Christianity revealed in the New Testament. Some forms of so-called "Christianity" have promoted superstition rather than discouraging it. ⁹"Channelers" claim that the powers and voices of powerful entities are channeled through them. ¹⁰The term "most high god" was also used by the Greeks to refer to Zeus. The Greek word translated "salvation" also had a variety of meanings. It is possible, therefore, that those who heard the girl misunderstood the full significance of her words; but since the New Testament indicates that demons were very aware of the true God and His servants, it is unlikely that she had pagan concepts in mind as she referred to Paul and the others. ¹¹The Greek text has "greatly troubled." The KJV says Paul was "grieved," which could indicate sympathy for the girl. The NASB translators thought Paul was "annoyed" by her repeated actions.

appear that the missionaries had some alliance with a demon-possessed individual.¹² Such an impression could reflect favorably on her and unfavorably on them. (2) If this was the case, why did Paul wait so long to cast the demon from her? Perhaps he anticipated the consequences (v. 19). The girl was valuable property. If he cast out the demon, in the eyes of the owners he would be destroying valuable property.¹³

Whatever Paul's thought processes were, he finally took pity on the girl. He commanded the spirit in the name of Jesus to leave—and it did “at that very moment.” Can you imagine how that girl felt? For years, she had been the prisoner of a dark spirit; now she was free! For years, her mind had been the playground of evil; now she was in her right mind (Mark 5:15)! I wish I knew what became of her. I would like to think that she acted on the truths that she had spoken earlier and became a Christian. Luke, however, immediately shifted the attention from her to her masters (v. 19). Nevertheless, we have seen *the change* that took place in her life.

Verse 19 begins, “But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, . . .” Luke used a play on words: In the original text, the word translated “came out” in verse 18 is also used in verse 19 where it is translated “was gone.” Luke literally said that when the unclean spirit left, their profit left. If you want to make a man your enemy, hit him in his pocketbook.

The owners of the slave-girl “seized Paul and Silas¹⁴ and dragged them into the market place before the authorities”¹⁵ (v. 19b). The “market place” was the city square, a large expanse of stone paving surrounded by stately columns,

marble buildings, shops, and temples.¹⁶ The Greeks called it “the agora;”¹⁷ the Romans called it “the forum.” On one side was a large marble platform used for speech-making and ceremonies. On this occasion, it served as the judgment seat.¹⁸

“And when they had brought them to the chief magistrates”¹⁹ (v. 20a), the slave-owners said nothing about the real reason for their citizens’ arrest of Paul and Silas: their financial loss. Instead they said: “These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans” (vv. 20b, 21). The accusers of Paul and Silas “pull[ed] three effective emotional triggers: (1) anti-Semitism²⁰ (‘These men are Jews’), (2) decency and order²¹ (‘They are upsetting our city’), and (3) nationalism²² (‘They are advocating un-Roman activities’).”²³

A trial in the market place always attracted a crowd.²⁴ The accusations had been calculated to agitate the listeners and they had the desired effect. “And the crowd rose up together against [Paul and Silas]” (v. 22a). To placate the mob, perhaps to avoid a riot, “the chief magistrates tore [Paul and Silas’] robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods” (v. 22b).

The beatings would have been administered by the men called “policemen” in verses 35 and 38.²⁵ The word “policemen” is translated from a Greek word that literally means “rod-bearers.”²⁶ These men accompanied the magistrates and carried with them a bundle of wooden rods tied with red cords. These sticks were about a

¹²Jesus had not allowed demons to testify in His behalf (Mark 1:24, 25, 34). ¹³Personalize this for the area in which you live: Imagine someone taking a sledgehammer to the most valuable piece of property your listeners own. ¹⁴We do not know why they seized Paul and Silas and did not seize Luke and Timothy. It has been suggested that Paul and Silas looked more like Jews (Luke was a Gentile, and Timothy was half Gentile) (v. 20). The explanation is probably simpler: Paul was the one they were after, and Silas just happened to be with Paul when they grabbed him. ¹⁵The word translated “authorities” in verse 19 is different from the one translated “chief magistrates” in verse 20, leading to speculation that they were first taken before minor officials and then before the chief officials. The words, however, could just be two ways of speaking of the same men. ¹⁶For years, when I read the phrase “market place” in the Bible, I thought of a noisy bazaar filled with hawkers and shoppers. The biblical “market place” was more like the stately town square of a prosperous city. The forum in Philippi has been excavated. It is large, about half the length of a U.S. football field. ¹⁷The Greek word translated “market place” in verse 19 is *agora*. ¹⁸The Greek word for this platform was *bema* (see the notes on 18:12). The *bema* in Philippi has been excavated and is on the north side of the *agora*. ¹⁹Once more Luke used exactly the right political term to refer to the local authorities. ²⁰Jews were obviously not popular in Philippi. In chapter 18 we will notice that Jews had been expelled from Rome (v. 2). Perhaps that had already happened, and feelings against Jews were running higher than usual in Roman colonies. ²¹Maintaining public order was a prime objective of Roman law. ²²Remember: Citizens in Roman colonies were often more Roman than those in Rome itself. ²³Ken R. Durham, “Scenes at Philippi,” *Acts, the Spreading Flame* (Searcy, Ark.: Harding University, 1989), 189. ²⁴See notes on 17:5 on page 13 of this issue. ²⁵The KJV calls these men “sergeants”; the NIV calls them “officials.” None of these translations fully expresses the idea of their function. ²⁶The Romans called them “lictors.”

thumb's thickness. In the center of the rods was an ax.²⁷ This bundle served representatively as the symbol of Roman authority, and practically as the means of administering instant Roman justice. For years, this symbol could be seen on the back of the U.S. dime.²⁸

In Roman beatings, the clothing was stripped from the one to be punished. Always the back was exposed; often the victim was stripped naked and the rods laid on his body from head to foot. Jewish whippings were limited to thirty-nine stripes (2 Corinthians 11:24); the number of strokes in Roman beatings was at the discretion of the official in charge. Luke said simply that "they . . . inflicted many blows upon [Paul and Silas]" (v. 23).

It should be noted that it was illegal to beat a Roman citizen. Cicero said, "It is a misdeed to bind a Roman citizen, a crime to scourge him, almost parricide to put him to death."²⁹ Why, then, did not Paul and Silas inform the magistrates of their Roman citizenship (16:37) and escape the mistreatment? Perhaps they tried, but the authorities could not hear them; after all, the circumstances were chaotic.³⁰

Mark this beating; it has special significance, for it is the first persecution of Christians instigated by Gentiles.

AN IRREVERENT ROMAN JAILER (16:23-40)

Prison (vv. 23, 24)

After "they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely" (v. 23). We are thus introduced to the third person in chapter 16 whose life was changed by the Lord. It was the practice of Rome to send retired soldiers to populate its colonies, so some speculate that this jailer was a veteran of the Roman army. He represents the sturdy middle class in Philippi. I call him

"the irreverent Roman jailer," for there is no evidence of his having any interest in spiritual matters before he was awakened by an earthquake.

The jailer was told to "guard [Paul and Silas] securely." His excessive zeal in carrying out that charge may indicate that he had a touch of the sadistic in his nature. "And he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison" (v. 24a). The inner prison was without fresh air and light; it was for the most hardened and dangerous of criminals. Think of a dungeon—dark, dank, dirty, rat-infested—and you will not go far wrong. The jailer was not satisfied with that measure of security, however. He also "fastened their feet in the stocks" (v. 24b). Victims were seated on the floor, their legs spread apart as far as they could go, and then their feet fastened in the stocks. The foot stock was not merely a contraption to constrain; it was also a tool to torture. Whatever else the jailer had learned in the army, he had not learned kindness.

Paul and Silas sat in the oppressive darkness, their feet imprisoned, cramps starting up their legs, unable even to lay back because of the deep bloody gashes on their backs (v. 33). The discomfort and distress were etched on Paul's soul. He later wrote of being beaten with rods (2 Corinthians 11:25³¹) and of his suffering and mistreatment in Philippi (1 Thessalonians 2:2).

Slowly, so slowly, the hours crept by. When nighttime came, the jailer went to sleep, his slumber undisturbed by any remorse over the mistreatment of his prisoners.³² After what would have seemed an agonizing eternity to Paul and Silas, the midnight hour arrived.

Praise (v. 25)

What if you and I had been in that inner prison, our backs in shreds, our feet in stocks—what would we have been doing at midnight?

²⁷I saw this symbol—a bundle of sticks with an ax in the middle—in statuary in several parts of Europe. ²⁸It was also the symbol used in Italy during World War II by Mussolini, as he tried to capitalize on the mystique of the long-gone Roman Empire. ²⁹Quoted by J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing Co., n.d.), 107. ³⁰Some have suggested that Paul waited until verse 37 to speak of his Roman citizenship so the fact would carry more political weight. It seems more reasonable that Paul would have tried to identify himself as a Roman citizen when he and Silas were beaten, but for some reason he was either not heard or not believed. It is possible that the magistrates pronounced the sentence and then immediately left to get away from the ugly scene. ³¹This beating at Philippi was only one of the beatings he had to endure. ³²The fact that the jailer apparently had his sword on his person (v. 27) indicates that he was probably asleep on duty (fully dressed) inside the prison. It is possible, however, that he was asleep in his living quarters nearby, perhaps on the prison grounds, and grabbed his belt and scabbard on his way out of the apartment.

Crying? Complaining? Luke wrote, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God"³³ (v. 25a). Do not think that Paul and Silas sang because their bodies had ceased to cry for relief. They sang in spite of their circumstances.³⁴ Anyone can sing God's praises when things are going well; it takes faith to sing praises to God when everything is going wrong.³⁵ Paul later challenged Christians in Ephesus to sing "to the Lord; *always giving thanks for all things*" (Ephesians 5:19, 20; emphasis mine). Paul demonstrated that quality in a prison cell in Philippi.

Luke noted that the other prisoners "were listening to them" (v. 25b). The other prisoners had doubtless heard cries and curses from the inner prison; never before had they heard prayers and praise.

Power (vv. 26–30)

The midnight concert was suddenly interrupted as "there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken" (v. 26a). Philippi was located in earthquake territory.³⁶ I do not know what this earthquake would have registered on the Richter Scale, but one that could shake the stone foundations of the prison had to be "great" indeed. The earthquake was so violent that it sprung the doors and cracked the walls, releasing the bolts that held the prisoners' fetters. "And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened" (v. 26b). The earthquake may or may not have been a natural phenomenon,³⁷ but no one in the prison would have doubted that it was sent from heaven in response to the songs in the night.

The quake jarred the jailer out of a sound sleep. He sprang to his feet and in the dim light could see the gates ajar. "And when the jailer had

been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped" (v. 27). If one had charge of a prisoner and allowed that prisoner to escape, Roman law decreed that the one in charge must receive the punishment the prisoner would have received.³⁸ Apparently, one or more of the prisoners in the jail had been sentenced to die. If they had escaped as the jailer thought, he would be executed in their stead. Deciding to take what he considered "the honorable way out," the warden commenced to commit suicide.

Understand that this was a pagan philosophy, not a biblical philosophy. Suicide has never been "the honorable way out" for God's people. Psychologists tell us that people commit suicide because they believe that every door has been closed to them except the door of death. Children of God know, however, that no matter how bad their situations become, God will always provide a "way of escape" so that they "may be able to endure" their pain (1 Corinthians 10:13).

As the jailer raised his sword to plunge it into his chest, "Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!'" (v. 28).³⁹ The jailer was incredulous. He "called for lights"⁴⁰ and rushed in" (v. 29a) to see for himself. To his amazement, Paul's words were true.⁴¹ The Western text says the jailer quickly "secured the other prisoners." Then, "trembling with fear," he returned to Paul and Silas and fell down before them (v. 29b). His soul had been shaken more violently than the prison. When Paul and Silas had been put in his keeping, they had been minor nuisances, petty criminals to be taught a lesson. Now, the dramatic sequence of events convinced him that these men controlled a Force mightier than any he had ever known.⁴²

³³If I had felt like singing at all, it would have been "the blues," but they sang praises. ³⁴Does the fact that Luke mentioned their singing at "midnight" mean that Paul and Silas had to work on their attitude awhile before they could pray and sing? I do not know. ³⁵Faith in God is the key. God remains the same. If He is worthy of our praise when everything seems to be right in our lives, He is also worthy of praise when everything seems to be going wrong. ³⁶Wherever I went throughout Turkey and Greece, I saw evidence of massive earthquakes of the past. ³⁷One way or another, angels were probably involved—as they were in two previous divine releases from prison (Acts 5:19; 12:7, 10, 11). ³⁸See Acts 12:19. ³⁹How could Paul see the jailer and the jailer not see him? How did Paul know that no one had escaped? Since these details were not pertinent to Luke's story, he did not tell us. Perhaps Paul's eyes were better adjusted to the darkness than the jailer's eyes. Perhaps God gave Paul supernatural knowledge of the situation. ⁴⁰This indicates that other guards were on duty, or at least were nearby. ⁴¹Why did the other prisoners not escape when they had a chance? Perhaps they were momentarily stunned by what had happened. Perhaps Paul asked them to stay and they were afraid not to comply with his request. Perhaps God kept them where they were by His power. Again, this detail is not pertinent to Luke's story, and he did not tell us. ⁴²At least, he thought that they represented deity of some kind.

He "brought them out" of the prison (v. 30a), apparently into his own living quarters (v. 32), and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v. 30b). His words raise many questions: For instance, exactly what did the jailer mean by "saved"? Did he know enough about scriptural teaching to use the word "saved" as we do; or was this simply a desperate cry by a pagan, fearful of the Power at the missionaries' command, who desired to be saved from the consequences of how he had treated them?

Further, if the jailer did happen to have a proper concept of salvation, why did he think Paul and Silas could supply the answer? Had news of their preaching reached his ears earlier? Had the ones bringing Paul and Silas to the prison told him that the slave-girl had said they were "bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming . . . the way of salvation" (v. 17)? Had Paul and Silas said something to him as he put their feet in the stocks? Did he simply know instinctively that these men could help him? We cannot give certain answers, but this much is clear: This irreverent pagan was shaken to the core. He had stood on the brink of death, looking into its inky darkness, and what had he seen terrified him! "Sirs," he cried, "what must I do to be saved?"

Preaching (v. 31)

Whatever he meant by the words, they provided the perfect opening for Paul and Silas. "And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household'" (v. 31). Standing before the Council, Peter had stressed that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ, "for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (4:12). If the jailer was to be saved, it would be through Jesus.

Sometimes people wonder why the jailer was not given the same answer the Jews were given on Pentecost when they asked what to do (2:37): "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy

Spirit" (2:38). Some may ask why he was not given the answer Saul was given in response to his question "What shall I do, Lord?" (22:10): "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (22:16). Look again at the answers given to the Jews on Pentecost and to Saul: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38; emphasis mine); "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (22:16; emphasis mine). To do something in the name of Jesus, or to call on the name of Jesus, presupposes that one knows who Jesus is and believes in Jesus. The jailer did not have that knowledge; he did not have that faith. If he had been told to do something "in the name of Christ," like the blind man, he would have had to ask, "And who is He, . . . that I may believe in Him?" (John 9:36).

Pardon (vv. 32-34)

Paul and Silas soon rectified the jailer's lack of knowledge. "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house" (v. 32). "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). "The word of the Lord" probably included a "word" about the true God (v. 34). It certainly included a "word" about Jesus and the cross. That it also included a "word" about how to benefit from the sacrifice of Jesus, plus a "word" about the life that should follow, is evident from the verses that follow. "And [the jailer] took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household"⁴³ (v. 33). The fact that the jailer responded immediately⁴⁴ was proof of sincerity; the fact that he washed their stripes was proof of sorrow; the fact that he was baptized was proof of submission.

We do not know where the jailer and his household were immersed. It may have been in some nearby pool, or they may have gone outside the city to the River Gangites.⁴⁵ After the baptism, the jailer "brought [Paul and Silas] into

⁴³Some attempt to prove infant baptism by the fact that the jailer's "household" was baptized. Note, however, that all those in his household who were baptized (v. 33) were first taught (v. 32) and believed (v. 34). For further discussion on this subject, see the notes on pages 48 and 49 of the "Acts, 6" issue. ⁴⁴It would probably have been two or three a.m. when the jailer and his household were baptized. ⁴⁵A pool may have been located inside the prison, but there was no problem with the jailer's taking them outside the prison. His charge had been "to guard them securely," not to keep them locked up.

his house and set food before them,⁴⁶ and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household" (v. 34). He had been saved twice in one night, first from physical death and now from spiritual death! His soul had been imprisoned by sin more securely than the bodies of Paul and Silas had been imprisoned by stocks in the inner prison, but now he was free!

Note that the word "believed" in verse 34 is used in the comprehensive sense, taking in the totality of the jailer's response.⁴⁷ He had been told that if he believed, he and his household would be saved (v. 31). He had been taught the Word of the Lord. After he had repented and been baptized, then it was stressed that he *had* believed.

It is not uncommon for denominational preachers to quote the jailer's question in verse 30, then the answer in verse 31, and to stop there as though that were the end of the story.⁴⁸ As J. W. McGarvey said, They "leave the jail too soon."⁴⁹ When the story of the jailer's conversion is examined in its entirety, it will be found that he was saved from his sins like all the other examples we have studied: He was taught the gospel; he believed in Jesus; he repented of his sins; he was baptized.

Protest (vv. 35–40)

The conclusion of the story has a touch of wry humor. "Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen [to the jailer], saying, 'Release those men'"⁵⁰ (v. 35). The officials probably thought the beating and a night in jail was sufficient to teach these troublesome Jews their place. The jailer, apparently in the company of the officers from the magistrates, "reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace'" (v. 36). Since he told Paul and Silas to "come out," they had

apparently returned to a cell in the prison at the end of the night to avoid embarrassing their new brother. The jailer was probably glad the ordeal was over.

Paul did not budge from the cell, however. He faced the officers (remember that the original language indicates these were the rod-bearers who had beaten them) and "said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans,⁵¹ and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out'" (v. 37). We noted earlier that it was a major crime to beat a Roman citizen. If news of their conduct reached Rome, at best the magistrates would lose their jobs, at worst they would lose their heads.

The policemen quickly returned and "reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they [personally] came [to the prison] and appealed to them" (vv. 38, 39a). The RSV says that "they came and apologized to them." The NCV says that "they came and told Paul and Silas they were sorry." Then, "when they had brought them out [of the prison], they kept begging them to leave the city" (v. 39b). Try to picture these important officials on their knees, sweat popping from their brows, as they pleaded with Paul and Silas to leave the city with a minimum of fuss!⁵²

Before leaving this scene, we should stress that Paul did not insist on his rights as a Roman citizen to spite the rulers of the city (Romans 12:17, 19). Rather, he desired to set the record straight for the sake of the young Christians he would leave behind. They would have enough problems (Philippians 1:28–30) without the added embarrassment of having to explain why their founder had been arrested, beaten, and thrown in jail—and then had suddenly left town

⁴⁶Paul and Silas would not have had anything to eat since their arrest. Once more, Christian hospitality is stressed in Acts. ⁴⁷Compare the conversion of the jailer to the conversion of Crispus: The statement that Crispus believed (18:8) included his response of baptism (1 Corinthians 1:14). ⁴⁸The argument goes something like this: "Acts 16:31 does not mention baptism; therefore, baptism is not essential to salvation." If this argument were valid, then repentance and confession would also not be essential to salvation, since they are not specifically mentioned in Acts 16:31. If one responds, "But repentance and confession are included in the word 'believe,'" then why cannot baptism also be included in the word "believe"? ⁴⁹J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing Co., n.d.), 103. ⁵⁰At least one ancient manuscript indicates that the magistrates were upset by the earthquake and decided they had made a mistake in their mistreatment of Paul and Silas. Since, however, the textual evidence is against this addition to the text, we do not know if this was the case or not. ⁵¹Apparently, Silas had Roman citizenship just as Paul did. ⁵²If you live in the U.S., your listeners will understand the phrase "Please, pretty please, leave!"

under a cloud of suspicion.⁵³

Through the years, when I read this story, I was puzzled. Why did these officers take Paul's word regarding his Roman citizenship? Apparently, they did not ask Paul for proof.⁵⁴ If proof was not required, why didn't everyone claim to be a Roman citizen to escape punishment? Further research gave me tentative answers: Falsely claiming to be a Roman citizen was a more serious crime than mistreating a Roman citizen. "Death was the penalty for making a claim to Roman citizenship when it was false; seldom did anyone make a false claim because of the severe penalty."⁵⁵

Paul and Silas were probably ready to move to a new field anyway, so they agreed to comply with the magistrates' request (much to the officials' relief, I am sure). They did so, however, without haste and with dignity. "And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia" (Acts 16:40a), which had served as their base of operations and perhaps even their place of meeting. On this occasion, a number of brethren had gathered there; perhaps they had been having a prayer meeting (see 12:12). "And when [Paul and Silas] saw the brethren, they encouraged them" (16:40b).⁵⁶ The two evangelists were the ones who had been mistreated; yet their concern was not for themselves, but for these vulnerable babes in Christ. Finally, having said their farewells, they "departed" (v. 40c). Thus was a congregation established—a congregation that grew more precious to Paul with every passing year (Philippians 1:3–8; 4:1).

CONCLUSION

As we think back over our text, many lessons come to mind regarding the changing of lives: (1) Lives cannot be changed without the help of God. (2) However, we can *cooperate* with God, specifically by preaching the gospel. (3) Understanding that God is our coworker, we can always proceed with confidence. There is, how-

ever, one major lesson I want to impress: *No situation is hopeless*. If you and I had been picking people in Philippi who could be changed, our list would probably not have included a half-crazed slave-girl and a sadistic Roman jailer.

Daniel Boorstin in *The Discoverers* tells the story of Cape Bojador. It was just a small piece of land along the African coast jutting out in the Atlantic, but in the fifteenth century, no ship dared to sail past it. Cape Bojador was no more dangerous than many other capes, but terrible rumors had circulated about what lay beyond it—perhaps even the end of the world. It was for the navigators of that day, says Boorstin, simply a "barrier in the mind."⁵⁷

When you and I look for lives to change, let us have no "barriers in the mind." Let us share the gospel with all!⁵⁸ ♦

SERMON NOTES

Bruce White preached a separate (unpublished) sermon on the story of the demonic slave-girl, centering on the greed and covetousness of her owners. He noted that (1) covetousness demeans integrity (the way the girl was treated), (2) covetousness deters the truth (the lies the owners told about Paul and Silas), and (3) covetousness demands injustice (the way Paul and Silas were treated). We do not hear enough preaching on covetousness, so you may want to consider this.

Paul and Silas' singing and praying at midnight has inspired many sermons on "Songs in the Night." Rick Atchley has suggested that we, too, can "sing in the night" of trouble if we (1) put our troubles in perspective, (2) put our treasures in heaven, and (3) put our trust in God. (These ideas are from "Singing in the Pain," Sermon preached at the Southern Hills church of Christ, Abilene, Tex., 20 September 1986.)

Many sermons have also been preached on "The Greatest Question of the Ages" (Acts (See CHANGING on page 16)

⁵³Since Paul went to the trouble to set the record straight, he was later able to return to the city without repercussions from the previous visit (20:1, 2, 6). ⁵⁴The indication from secular documents is that one had simply to cry *ciuis Romanus sum*, "I am a Roman citizen." Paul would have been registered as a citizen in Tarsus; but he probably did not carry proof with him, and it would have taken time to send for a certified copy of the registration. ⁵⁵H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1976 reprint), 268. ⁵⁶Coffman called this "one of the grandest statements in scripture" (James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Acts* [Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1976], 325). The evangelists needed encouragement, but instead they encouraged others. ⁵⁷Durham, 192. ⁵⁸If this lesson is used as a sermon, the invitation can stress that God can also change the lives of the listeners—if they will only respond in faith as the jailer did.

