

## A CHANGED FAMILY

Acts 16:22-34

Why do most people have trouble making decisions? When presented with two or more options in a matter, most of us agonize over what choice to make. This dilemma may express itself in deciding what to order from a menu to what car to buy. It can be seen in families deciding on what to do for vacation or where to send junior for college. Because of the difficulty that most of us have in making decisions most of us decide by default. Decision by default is what happens when we keep putting off a decision until all the choices except one disappear and we really have no choice in the end. This is what happens when we fail to make a will and the state decides for us how our estate will be distributed. This is what happens when we put off getting our car repaired and it breaks down out on the highway and we have to get it repaired at the nearest repair shop. This is what happens when people keep refusing to decide to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and death comes. It takes courage to choose, but choosing is part of being made in the image of God. We can choose and choose we must if we want to find the best that God has for us in life. Following the path of least resistance (failing to choose) always leads downhill.

There was a little-known man in Philippi of Macedonia who was faced with a life and death decision. He was employed by the government as a jailer and even though he was not in a position of importance as far as the world is concerned, he was faced with the same decision that every human being must face regarding salvation.

### The Situation – 16:22-24

<sup>22</sup> The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; <sup>24</sup> and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. Acts 16:22–24 (NASB95)

Paul and Silas had been arrested because they had ruined the business of some men in Philippi by giving deliverance to a young woman who had a spirit of divination or what we might call “fortune-telling.” The accusation against them was that “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.”

This was not the first time Paul had encountered riots from protesters to stop him from proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. When the missionary teams were in areas of “eastern thought” such as Antioch or Lystra the motivation for the protest was religious or ideological. Now that they had come to Europe and were encountering “western thought,” the protests against them were mercenary or financially driven. In other words they were hurting business. In both cases (eastern or western) the protesters made false accusations and then engaged in actions that were like what they were accusing Paul of doing.

Notice the similarity of what happened in Philippi with what goes on today when a speaker comes to a college campus to give a lecture on something that is contrary to the prevailing “approved ideology.” Protests breakout and people make false accusations and then use unlawful and fascists methods to prevent someone from expressing ideas that the protesters claim are fascist.

The city officials had them beaten and put into jail. This was before the time of the paradigm of being “innocent until proven guilty.” People were punished and then they decided what else to do to them. It seems that we almost come full circle in this idea of having to prove our innocence rather than the accusers having to prove our guilt.

### The Opportunity – 16:25-28

<sup>25</sup> But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; <sup>26</sup> and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" Acts 16:25–28 (NASB95)

How many times have we praised God and sang when we were hurting and in trouble? Usually we sing and praise God when things are perfect. Who was doing the singing? One of them was Paul. This was the same man that wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Paul really believed what he taught others. This is an example of people rising above their circumstances and being themselves in spite of the conditions around them. God is worthy to be praised regardless of our situation.

We are told that the other prisoners heard them. Our response to the problems that we encounter in life is the truest witness of our character and our relationship to God that the world will ever see. Sometimes we fail to realize this when we are going through difficult situations, but those who are observing how we handle adversity recognize what they are seeing.

This earthquake is one of those amazing coincidences that are recorded in the Bible. This was not the first time an earthquake had happened in that area and most people would not have had any reason to associate it with what was happening to Paul and Silas; however, Paul and Silas knew. We may have miracles happening in our lives that no one else will ever know about nor appreciate unless we tell them what God has done on our behalf.

What happened that night is somewhat of a picture of salvation in that when we are saved we find that the prison doors of our lives are opened and we are set free of things that bind us. The problem that so many Christians have is that they find comfort or pleasure in the chains or the stocks and they may lock themselves up again with the old habits and problems from which God has delivered them.

The jailer was asleep and the shaking and noise of the earthquake awakened him. He saw that the doors were open to the cells and was sure that everyone had escaped. He was faced with a choice. He realized that those in authority would hold him responsible for the prisoners being gone for which he would pay with his life. His only choice, as he saw it, was whether he would kill himself or let someone else do it. Apparently, he chose to take his own life.

This account is an excellent illustration of the importance of getting all the facts before making decisions. The jailer's decision was based on superficial appearances rather than on the actual situation that was prompting a decision. The "appearance" was that all the prisoners had escaped, but the truth was that all were still there and no one had left.

The earthquake and all the doors in the prison opening and all the chains on everyone being unfastened were certainly notable miracles. The fact that all those who were imprisoned did not immediately leave when given the opportunity to escape seems miraculous in itself.

Paul could apparently see the jailer and realized that he was about to take his own life. That prompted Paul to intervene and give the jailer a message of the truth of the situation he was facing so that he could avoid physical death.

Sometimes we think that our only choice is which way we will die and do not even realize that we have a choice that leads to life. This is why the gospel message is truly good news. We can choose life and do so by believing God and putting ourselves under His Lordship.

### The Conversion – 16:29-32

<sup>29</sup> And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, <sup>30</sup> and after he

brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”<sup>31</sup> They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”<sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. Acts 16:29–32 (NASB95)

The spiritual lessons for all of humanity seem to leap out of the texts in these verses. A significant need that the jailer had in order to know the truth was to shine some light on the situation. Much of the world is still in spiritual darkness because they will not allow the light of the truth of God’s word to destroy the darkness in which they have deliberately immersed themselves.

There are people who have committed themselves to the “politically correct” religious ideas of secular humanism and think that because of this commitment that they are not permitted to even listen to the truth that God has given to all mankind. This is somewhat like the statement that the accusers of Paul and Silas had made asserting that since they were Romans, they were not permitted (it was unlawful) for them to accept or believe what Paul was teaching.

Another spiritual lesson for us is seen in the account that the jailer “rushed in” once he had been given a glimpse of the truth that resulted from what the light allowed him to see. The jailer recognized that he was in a life and death situation and that urgency was needed because of the significance of what was happening right then.

A third lesson in the jailer’s actions is seen in his falling down before Paul and Silas in fear and trembling. That is the ultimate physical expression of humility. We are to approach God in humility rather than in pride. There are at least twenty-two verses in the Scriptures that reference God’s reaction to pride.

Considering the circumstances, the question the jailer asked seems just a bit strange. Why would he be asking these two Jews who had been beaten and thrown into prison about being saved? Skeptics of the account think that the question is highly improbable. However, if we briefly review those events that lead to their arrest, beating and imprisonment, we discover that the girl who was possessed by a spirit of divination had given testimony that Paul and Silas had come to “declare the way of salvation.” Combine this information with their out-of-the-ordinary response of singing and praising God while in prison, and toss in the supernatural occurrence of the prison doors being opened and the chains being removed and we can conclude that his question was logical.

Notice that the jailer’s question of what he needed to do to be saved was asked in a way that exposed the erroneous thinking of most people that we have to “DO” something for our salvation. I suppose that we could argue that “believing” is “doing” something. Paul said “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” If we emphasize the word LORD, this points out that it is only by accepting Jesus as the authority in our lives that we realize the benefits of salvation. We can emphasize the word JESUS to show that God’s means of salvation came through One who was truly human and yet was not subject to the Adamic curse. Since Jesus was the Son of God He was not in bondage to sin, not having a sin nature and since He did not sin, Satan had no authority in His life. If we emphasize the word CHRIST, we show that Jesus was the promised Messiah that was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit for power.

It is in crisis situations that most adults come to accept the claims of Jesus as Lord of all. This was certainly a crisis for the jailer. He was listening to the words of Paul and Silas as they explained God’s plan of salvation. The simple message that “all have sinned and need to have forgiveness and that God has provided a way for that forgiveness to be given in the person of Jesus (God’s Son) who died to pay the penalty for sin and rose from the dead to validate His claim” was given to the jailer and to his household.

### The Transformation – 16:33-34

<sup>33</sup> And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and

all his household. <sup>34</sup> And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household. Acts 16:33–34 (NASB95)

Paul and Silas had been accused of “exceedingly troubling the city” and later when they went to Thessalonica they were accused of “turning the world upside down.” The irony of a lot of what was happening is that the message they were bringing to the people could eliminate the real problems and troubles in the city and it could actually take an already upside down world and set it upright. Other strange or unusual things have already been noted in that a normally destructive event such as an earthquake set people free from their chains that bound them. A jailer, who literally had the power of life and death over his prisoners, wound up submitting himself to a prisoner. Prisoners whose physical lives were in danger and who were restrained by prison bars and chains were able to show the jailer how to find spiritual life and be set free from the power of sin.

One of the evidences of a changed life is compassion and love for others. The jailer started showing Christian concern for Paul and Silas. He was taking care of their wounds from the beating. The jailer used water to wash the wounds that would allow healing of Paul and Silas, and water was used to baptize the jailer and his household which was a testimony of the salvation they had received by trusting in the Lord. This salvation had the power to cleanse and heal those who embraced it. Another irony was that the jailer had his prisoners as guests in his home and fed them a meal while Paul and Silas had opened up a whole world of spiritual food for the jailer and his household.

Baptism was understood to be a testimony of a significant change in the life of person. The Jews baptized Gentile converts to Judaism. We know that John the Baptist called for people to be baptized as a witness of repentance. Many references are found in the history of the early church regarding new believers being baptized in testimony of what had happened to them spiritually. The jailer and his family were all baptized that night. Not only is baptism a testimony of significant change, it also symbolizes the death and resurrection of Christ.

Before the events of this night took place, the jailer had probably wondered what could explain the seemingly crazy behavior of Paul and Silas as they sang praises to God while in prison. Before it was morning, the jailer was praising God and rejoicing in his salvation. The morning was sure to come and Paul and Silas with the jailer returned to the prison to see what the day would bring.

The new day brought about a reversal of the decision of the previous day. After sleeping on the matter, the magistrates likely realized that they had been manipulated by the men who had lost their business. They really had no reason to have arrested, beaten or jailed Paul and Silas. They did what so many people do who find that they are wrong: they sent someone else to try to cover up the mess. The sergeants were sent to tell them that they could leave. Paul and Silas sought to make a point and instill some fear of the civil authority of Rome in these men who had broken their own laws. Both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and the treatment that they received was a violation of their civil rights as Roman citizens. Their accusers had said that Paul and Silas had done something “unlawful”; however, it was the city council which actually broke the law. Since Paul and Silas were publically humiliated, they wanted a public apology. I don't think that they were just being contrary but wanted to make these magistrates more careful about how they would treat other Christians who would be living in the area. The apology helped to restore the reputations that the unjust punishment had hurt. We should do all we can to maintain our good name as Christians since our actions reflect either negatively or positively on the body of Christ.