

## What Must I Do To Be Saved?

✠ **Quaking hearts** (vv.25-30)

✠ **Rejoicing souls** (vv.31-34)

In the name of Jesus, the joy of heart and home, dearly redeemed believers:

**“What must I do to be saved?”** Most people see no need to ask the question. This was true of a young man who marked yesterday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, as a turning point in his life. You and I have never met him, but we know his type well, mostly from movies of really evil people. This boy left home at age 11 and used his teen years to become a disgrace to his father. He was disgusting to hardened sailors for taking his pleasure with captive female slaves until he was forced into the British Navy. Then he deserted, was arrested, stripped and flogged, and somehow sold to a slave trader in Sierra Leone, West Africa. His master turned the tables on him by giving him as a toy to his cruel mistress. After a year of torment, he escaped on a ship for Britain. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, bored with sailing, he read a Christian book until he slammed it shut. The question flashed: “What if this is true?” He did not want to think about it.

That night he had no choice. Imagine waking up with the ship floundering in heavy seas. Water pouring into your cabin. You rush to help man the pumps and avoid a watery grave. Later he wrote: “I expected that every time the vessel descended into the sea, she would rise no more. I dreaded death now, and my heart foreboded the worst, if the Scriptures, which I had long since opposed, were true.”<sup>1</sup>

✠ **Quaking hearts** (vv.25-30)

We don’t know whether it was March 10<sup>th</sup>, or what day it was when the jailer at Philippi was forced to ask the question. We do know he was as indifferent as that sailor many years later. The jailer thought he had the full authority of the Roman government to be as cruel as he wanted. But earthly authority fails just when you need it most. Eventually the proud always end up with **Quaking hearts**.

Before I ask another question, I know how some of you will answer. We’ve been talking about this. But everyone think about it now: Do you remember a time when you were really working hard to do the right thing, but someone got super upset? Now imagine getting arrested for it – not breaking the law, but angering some powerful people. Worse yet, you’re stripped in public, brutally beaten, then thrown deep into a dungeon where stocks on your feet hold tighter than chains. Your crime? In the name of Jesus Christ you delivered a poor slave girl from a demon. Her masters are upset. No more money!

Personally, I’ve been down in the dumps for far less. If my parents had allowed me to have “pity parties” as a kid, I’d really be in trouble. Feeling sorry for yourself comes so naturally. We get bent out of shape, twisted like a pretzel, stuffed up and pressed down by angry looks at times. Or a word not spoken when maybe we thought someone should commend us? Here is where your proud waves stop, O human heart. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. As the writer to the Hebrews said, **“In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”** (12:4 NIV84)

If you had visited the prison that night, you would have heard singing. Loud and clear! No whining, no complaining – just singing and praying by Paul and Silas. All the prisoners were listening. But the jailer? He had no use for such foolishness. He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

How stubborn have you been when God tried to get through to you? Do you worry so much about people you think may not have heard that you miss the Word that God is giving you to tell them? Do you think maybe tomorrow would a better day to repent – as if another sunrise is guaranteed?

<sup>1</sup> Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. © 1997 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) Available: [www.Laridian.com](http://www.Laridian.com)

Friends, maybe you've heard the story of a man treading water when a jet ski pulls up. He waves him off, "God will save me." Same with a helicopter, then a fishing boat. Finally, the man drowned. Facing God in judgment he asked, "Why didn't you save me? You promised!" "I tried," said God. "I sent a jet ski, a helicopter and a fishing boat." Imaginary story, but you know God did far better when He sent His Son to suffer and die for slave traders and slaves, rebellious teens and absent parents, disengaged citizens and cruel rulers. The blood of the Lamb washed away all our sins. Now God sends His Word and sacraments to the rescue. But how many get more excited about another iPad than the mercy of God?

Not a helicopter, jet ski or boat, God sent that jailer an earthquake. His sleep was shattered to see prison doors wide open and everyone's chains fallen off. If one prisoner escaped, he was dead under Roman law. Only one way to escape disgrace. He was looking at the edge of his sword when Paul the prisoner shouted: ***"Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*** So close to self-destruction, the jailer rushed into the cell and ***"fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'"*** You can tell by his question that **Quaking hearts** still don't get it. You can no more stop an earthquake than you can save your soul by what you do. God demands perfection. ***"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."*** (Leviticus 19:2) We need to be rescued.

### ✠ **Rejoicing souls (vv.31-34)**

His happy prisoners did not tell him what he should do. They told him what God wants each of us to hear loud and clear: ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household."*** No way can we achieve the perfect holiness God demands by what we do. Only God's perfect Son could shed the innocent blood that washed our sins away. Only the Holy Spirit can give the faith to receive such a great salvation. God's miraculous grace in Word and sacrament brings it all home for **Rejoicing souls**. The jailer showed love for God and his neighbor by washing the wounds of his prisoners.

Talk about **Rejoicing souls!** For years I have looked for one Bible passage that says infants cannot believe. Instead at least twice in the Gospels Jesus speaks about ***"these little ones who believe in me."*** (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42) I have searched for one Bible passage that limits our Lord's command to literally, "Disciple all the ethnic groups..." first of all "by baptizing them..." This 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Acts already had one prime spot to say so. Instead the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write about Lydia, ***"She and the members of her household were baptized..."*** (16:15) Now with the jailer we have four verses in a row where God could say, "But not the babies." Instead, the Holy Spirit includes the entire family: ***"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 family 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 family.*** (Acts 16:32–34 NIV84) Don't you love how God includes us all?

The jailer and Lydia's families kept growing in faith until Paul held them up as an example of the ***"grace of giving"***: ***"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."*** (2 Corinthians 8:2 NIV84) No one won the lottery. They were won over by God's amazing grace. They were **Rejoicing souls** because they believed what God did to save us all. Nothing could stop their thanks and praise to God with offerings that came from grace-powered hearts.

Maybe you already figured out who slammed the Christian book and nearly drowned. Looking back on his life, he wrote: "That tenth of March is a day much remembered by me; and I have never suffered it to pass unnoticed since the year 1748 – the Lord came from on high and delivered me out of deep waters." The penitent was John Newton. His hymn we sing again today, not about what we have done to save ourselves. God's Good Book strips away our pride and tells the true story. No need for shipwreck or earthquake. Stay awake and listen. God grant us **Rejoicing souls** like in the jailer's family and Lydia's too. "Not what these hands have done." "Your works, not mine, O Christ." (CW 401) "Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound – That saved a wretch like me!" (CW 379) Amen.