

## “What Must I Do to be Saved?”

† **never enough (vv.25-30)**

† **Trust in Jesus to save! (vv.31-34)**

In the name of Christ Jesus the Son of God shining in grace for all nations, dearly redeemed:

One of the great joys in life these days is the privilege of hearing sermons by other preachers. Last Sunday Pastor Thomas Fox at Pinewood Lutheran, Burlington, MA, described New Year’s resolutions and so much of life as out of our control, but only one thing we can control. Maybe you missed Pastor Gawrisch’s New Year’s Eve sermon. It makes a fine evening devotion to watch the YouTube of that Compline service and see your destiny as a child of God proclaimed with a flourish.

On this Epiphany Sunday shining with THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD, we see destiny and complete lack of human control coming together in Acts 16. Paul tried on his Second Missionary Journey to preach in what is now western Turkey, but the Holy Spirit prevented him. Imagine falling asleep wondering, “Where does God want me to go next?” Then a vision of a man in Macedonia calling: “Come and help us.” Epiphany shows Christ shining as the Savior of all people – Africa, Asia, and yes, even Europe. We see a man losing total control, then finally asking, “**What Must I Do to be Saved?**”

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In these months of COVID seclusion, many have looked for good movies to watch. One favorite depicts Hugh Jackman as P. T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman*. He falls into disloyal greed for a while touring America with the famous singer Jenny Lind. It’s her song, “Never Enough,” that shows how shallow fame and fortune really are. But that’s also a good description of human efforts to please God.

In the New Testament the Romans exercised iron fisted control over an ever-expanding Empire. Legionnaires who survived long enough to retire received land around cities like Philippi in Macedonia. Apparently, there weren’t enough Jewish men for a synagogue, so Paul and Silas met Lydia’s family at a place of prayer down by the river. For several days a demon-possessed slave girl followed them around shouting until Paul commanded the demon in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. Her masters lost a fortune from fortune-telling, stirred up a mob, and had Paul and Silas severely beaten and thrown into prison with orders to the jailer for maximum security.

Imagine the jailer with two of his prisoners whom he had brutally beaten, but they keep praying and singing all night. Praising God, praying for conversions, a Christian’s cheerful attitude and faithful worship is a powerful witness. Yet unbelievers cannot appreciate God’s grace and forgiveness in these prayers until they come to faith themselves. The Holy Spirit caused His suffering servants to hold a worship service for a captive audience. Everyone listened closely to psalms and hymns, but the jailer fell sound asleep. No use for that! It’s **never enough!** Until...an earthquake rattled the foundations, shook off the chains and opened all the doors. What a rude awakening to think all your prisoners escaped. His senses were screaming in his head, “It’s over for you! End it!” So the jailer drew his sword to use on himself. Paul shouted, “***Don’t harm yourself, because we are all here!***” Realizing his own efforts were **never enough** to save him, ***the jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling in front of Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”***

This question is asked by all who have even a little fear of God. Yet, because it asks about what our deeds should be, it comes from the naturally self-righteous heart of sinful man. It’s like a sailor

asking, “What color shall I paint the deck?” of the *Titanic* on her maiden voyage when she sank. In a very real way this world is on her maiden voyage. The Lord has decreed it will also be her last. God has supplied one lifeboat with room for every soul. Her Captain is Jesus Christ. He pulls up alongside this “*Titanic*” every time His Gospel of forgiveness is proclaimed. Will you climb aboard and trust your entire weight for all eternity to the grace and skill of Christ? Or refuse God’s help and argue about colors for the sinking ship? Our good works are **never enough**. Your destiny is only secure when you...

### † **Trust in Jesus to save! (vv.31-34)**

The jailer and every soul made fearful by God’s lawful demands will always ask, “*What must I do to be saved?*” But notice the answer is to believe in what God has done through Christ: *They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.”*

That raises some questions, doesn’t it? Would his *household* be saved because of the jailer’s faith? Extended families in those days usually included several generations, including infants. Can infants believe? Many Christians insist they cannot, but Jesus talks about “*these little ones who believe in me.*” (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42) Who will you believe? Pastors and theologians with their opinions or your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? When Jesus commands His church to literally “*disciple all the ethnic groups by baptizing*” them, does that mean all ages? Only Jesus has the authority to limit the ages for faith and baptism if He wants. And here is one place in the Bible that the Holy Spirit could easily qualify, “...but not the babies.” If “*all nations*” does not mean “all ages,” the Holy Spirit has two opportunities to say so right here in Acts 16, with Lydia’s family and now the jailer’s too.

Instead God gives us an Epiphany present to go along with THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD. The dear Holy Spirit inspired Luke to emphasize with four verses in a row that the entire family was included in baptism for the jailer at Philippi. The whole extended family of multiple generations, servants, etc. with their little children and babies in his “household” were all included. And the jailer who had helped with their bloody beating and harsh imprisonment, now washed their wounds and fed Paul and Silas in his home. Everyone heard God’s Word. The whole family was baptized and everyone felt overflowing joy “*because he and his whole household had come to believe in God.*” Mercy beyond imagination!

Was this just raw emotion for an even greater showman? Take about 15-20 minutes to read Paul’s letter to the Philippians and imagine Lydia and jailer with their families listening to such encouraging words. A few more minutes will get you 2 Corinthians 8, 9, about the Macedonians: “*In a severe test of trouble, their overflowing joy and their deep poverty overflowed into an abundance of their generosity.*” (2 Corinthians 8:2 EHV) They were arguing with their pastors for the privilege to send gifts to poor famine victims back in Jerusalem. Forget fund raisers for other people’s money. We want to give!

This is where the beauty of Baptism shines in today’s Second Lesson: “*Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.*” (Romans 6:3f EHV) Connected with Christ by Baptism gives a whole *new life* to former enemies to become God’s family and friends with each other. Families are reborn, hope springs to life, generosity rules when you **Trust in Jesus to save!**

None of them could control the dreadful persecutions the Jews and then the Roman Empire would bring down on Christians in the centuries to come. But they did the one thing they could control which we’ve hinted at throughout this sermon. And coupled with their Baptism, that one thing empowered these poor Philippians to follow Paul around on his missionary journeys with their offerings. They did not see God as a stingy miser cutting a small pie into smaller and smaller pieces. They eagerly worshiped the God of generous grace in overflowing joy, with **Trust in Jesus to save!** So what’s the one thing in life we can control? For your health and happiness, that’s next week’s sermon. God grant grace for faithful preachers ready to proclaim and repentant hearts eager to listen and live in Christ alone. Amen.