

Acts #29
Trouble In Jail
Acts 16:1-40

The great Jerusalem council was held about AD 52, only 20 years after Pentecost. The question was settled concerning the Gentiles being under the Law of Moses, and being circumcised. The council agreed that salvation for the Gentiles did not require circumcision and was not by keeping the Law, but was given by grace.

As we come to Paul's second missionary journey we are able to see how God works in his life.

Look at Acts 16:1-5, "Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Timothy was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

Can this be true what we have just seen? Did Paul actually circumcise Timothy because he was afraid of the criticism of the Jews? Can it be possible that this is the same Paul who had everywhere preached salvation by grace plus nothing? Unbelievable, but all too true.

Think of it. Paul had just come from the Jerusalem Council where it was decided once for all that the believers did not have to be circumcised. And here in Derbe he compromises the very position that he has fought so hard to establish. There must be a reason, but what could it be?

Timothy's circumcision was neither an act of disobedience nor did it have anything to do with salvation. Rather, it was to remove a stumbling block from the Jews to whom Paul and timothy would be seeking to minister. We are able to see this in 1 Corinthians 9:20, "And unto the Jews I became a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law." **Being the son of a Gentile father and Jewish mother, Timothy did not have to be circumcised, but being a child of God, he wanted to do nothing that would cause the Jews to stumble.** There was no limit to how far Paul would go to reach the Jews for Jesus.

Verses 6-10 give us the record of Paul's vision to go to Macedonia, and the rest of Acts 16 (verses 11-40) give us the account of Paul and Silas' arrest, jailed, and release, "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from there to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony; and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a riverside, where prayer was accustomed to be made; and we sat down, and spoke unto the women which resorted there. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain maid possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates tore off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison;

and now do they thrust us out privately? Nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.”

Paul opened his European ministry by attending a ladies prayer meeting. Lydia was probably a well-to-do merchant who had turned from pagan idolatry to worship the God of Israel. The fact that Paul baptized these new Gentile converts is evidence that he was fulfilling the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

Paul and his company lived at Lydia's house and went to prayer meetings with her. Soon a slave girl, that was demon possessed, began to follow them around everywhere they went, saying with a loud voice, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who show unto us the way of salvation.” You will notice that her words appear to be friendly, but in actuality she was making fun of these men and their message.

After a few days of being “bugged” by this strange girl, Paul turned around and cast out the evil spirit, and the girl was made well. Now, this did not go over too good with the men who were using this girl as a “fortune teller,” for they were making good money from her talents.

These men went to the “City Council” at Philippi, and told them that Paul and Silas were causing the people to have trouble with the Roman religion. The Romans worshiped the Emperor, for they were supposed to be the sons of Ra the Greek god of the sun. The politicians wanted to keep in good standing with Rome, so they proceeded to throw Paul and Silas in jail, and charged the jailer, “to keep them safely; who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”

In those days, they had what they called an “outer jail” and an “inner jail.” (Paul was in the “outer jail” while in Rome and could talk to those people that passed by.) The “outer jail” was for those people who had done nothing really bad, but those people in the “inner jail” were hardened criminals. The “inner jail” had no windows, and had no floor except the bare ground, and a person could be there for years and not see the sunshine.

And Paul and Silas were thrown into the “inner jail” where they were surrounded by people whose chains were rubbing sores on their legs and were dying from disease and wounds. Paul and Silas have been beaten and are

probably still bleeding, and are still half naked. And the smell of death and body waste must have been unbearable.

But in the midst of their circumstances, around the mid-night hour, verse 25 says, “Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them.”

In the midst of the sobs, prayers, groans, and hallelujahs, an earthquake happened. The chains fell off, the doors swung open, and the prisoners were all loosed and set free.

The jailer knew it would mean certain death for him if the prisoners had escaped, and suicide was prettier than the cross or some other method of death, but Paul cries, “Do thyself no harm, we are all here.” The jailer grabbed a light and ran into the ramshackled jail and cried to Paul, “What shall I do to be saved?”

Now I realize that this passage of Scripture has been preached in many different ways, but I doubt very seriously this man was thinking about Jesus Christ, but about his life!

But Paul turned the situation into an opportunity to tell the Good News of Jesus, as he replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved, and thou house.”

Look with me for just a moment at the lessons of this passage of Scripture found in Acts 16:31:

1. We are told the *Person of salvation*. It is the “Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 4:12 says, “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Salvation is not some church, it is not some kind of experience, it is not simply doing the best you can, salvation is a Person. The Psalmist said, “The Lord is my salvation...” You cannot be saved apart from simple child-like faith in Jesus Christ!

2. We are told the *plan of salvation*. It is “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word “believe” here is more than just to know something or someone, it is to have the faith to trust Him to redeem you. We call this being born again.

3. We are told the rewards of salvation. It is, “thou shall be saved.” The greatest reward of salvation is salvation itself.

But, what are we saved from? There are at least two things that we have been saved from.

1. We are saved from a fearful life. 2 Timothy 1:12 says, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

Salvation is knowing that you have committed your life into the care of the Master. Salvation is much more than just a spiritual matter, it involves the whole man: body, soul and spirit.

2. We are saved from a fatal eternity. John 14:1-3 says, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

Death for the child of God is simply a transition from this life into the eternities with Christ!