

Conversion and Character

Acts 16:22-23

1

22 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. **23** When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;

This is the occasion, in Philippi, where Paul and Silas have been beaten and thrown into prison where the jailer has been charged with their keep. You may already know this, but when a jailer was charged with a prisoner and that prisoner escaped, depending on the circumstances, that jailer could be liable for the sentence that the prisoner was under or even death. Note how the jailer responded to the charge given him...

Acts 16:24

2

24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The charge to him was specific and direct and he completely understood the import of it as well as the consequences if it wasn't kept.

Acts 16:25-27

3

25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; **26** 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. **27** 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.

This was the jailors reaction to thinking that Paul and Silas had escaped during the earthquake, he was going to kill himself so that he wasn't put to death by the authorities. He knew that suicide would be preferable to the way they would kill him.

The work of God at Philippi was being carried on very successfully by Paul and Silas. It was the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel in Europe...

4

“The city was renamed by Philip II of Macedon in 356 BC and abandoned in the 14th century after the Ottoman conquest. The present municipality, Filippi, is located near the ruins of the ancient city and is part of the region of East Macedonia and Thrace in Kavalla, Greece.”

5

This is where we are introduced to the first recorded convert in Europe, Lydia, the seller of purple. It is in her home that Paul and Silas stay while there...

Acts 16:14-15

6

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

For all intents and purposes the work of the Lord was going well here in Philippi, but, unfortunately, that doesn't fit Satan's goal and purpose. He wants to stop the Church from growing; he doesn't want anyone coming to God through Christ. This brings us to the occasion of why Paul and Silas had been thrown into prison.

Acts 16:16-18

7

16 It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. **17** Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." **18** She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, 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.

There are a couple of thoughts concerning this idea of "A Place of Prayer." One is that it wasn't necessarily a specific place but rather just a place where some would gather to talk about the scriptures and to pray together, kind of like what is seen in...

Acts 16:13

8

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

Well this is obviously not a building, but is a place that apparently had been agreed on or maybe was the local place for the women to gather and do laundry, we aren't told, but regardless, Paul went there to speak to the women. The other thought about this "Place of Prayer" is that it referred to a specific building. Christ refers to...

Matt 21:13

9

13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN."

So while Paul and his companions were going to this "Place of Prayer" they encountered this slave-girl who had a spirit of divination. This meant that this spirit that had possessed her was able to see into the future and predict things that would occur. When you look at the idea of divination you will find all sorts of speculations that have been made. The point is that we don't have a clue how this worked. Did she read tea leaves or bumps on the head, we don't know. What we do know is that this spirit came from Satan because Paul cast it out by the authority of Christ Jesus. The owners of the girl, who had been making a profit from her ability...

Acts 16:19-21

10

19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, **20** and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, **21** and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."

So regardless of the truth that they were preaching, the owners of the girl were so upset over losing their profit that they had Paul and Silas thrown into prison for proclaiming...

11 *Customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."*

Sometimes, when in the middle of the world's difficulties, it is very hard to see the benefit that can be gained from them. Sometimes things can't be judged by their outward appearance. We cannot always fathom the depth of the outcome of things. Note what the Lord had to say in...

Judg 2:21-22

12

21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, **22** in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk in it as their fathers did, or not."

Herein is the secret, if you will, of understanding how the difficulties of the world are, at the same time both a test and a comfort to us. It is the trials of the world that are the proof of our faith and obedience. It is in how we respond to those trials that we can find the comfort of knowing that our faith actually translates into the kind of obedience that God demands. When Paul and Silas were imprisoned, they didn't sit crying and whining about their situation. They didn't look to blame somebody else for their problems. They didn't excuse or justify, they turned to God in prayer and song, praising God, thanking Him for the opportunity to suffer for His sake. Servants of Jesus Christ should never be discouraged when they are opposed, but take from that opposition comfort and joy in knowing that they suffer for the Lord. Think about it for a moment; Paul and Silas were beaten, thrown into prison, and put into stocks, just so the Philippian jailor might be saved. Out of the adversity they faced, the circumstance they had no control over, they found reason to worship their God, in order to save one soul, and through him, his household. Was it worth it?

This brings us to the main part of our discussion for this lesson; the Philippian jailor...

13 1) What sort of man was he

First off, he is a remarkable example of the power of the Gospel to change a man's heart. Now that's not to say that he was what anyone would necessarily think of as a monstrous sinner, there is no evidence of that at all. I don't think that that is what is seen at all. He was, like each of us, just as full of sin and iniquity as are we. The jailor's conversion is an instance of the grace of God saving someone who has an open heart and mind and is willing to listen to truth. The jailor exhibits the kind of character that hears and responds to the calling of the Lord. He was obviously a man who had worked his way up to a position of authority; he was, after all, a guard in a Roman jail. He understood the chain of command. He understood how to take orders as well as give them.

Secondly, he also understood accountability for ones actions. Even though he had absolutely nothing to do with the earthquake, he was prepared to take his own life. I believe that it is this idea of accountability that helped to move the jailor to obey, just like understanding our own accountability helps move each of us to obedience.

Luke 8:8

14

8 Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

15 But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

Ultimately, the only conclusion we can be sure of is that the jailor had an honest and good heart.

The next thought that comes to my mind is...

15

2) What was the condition that occasioned his conversion

There is never anything magic or miraculous about someone being converted to the truth. It is ever always a matter of the truth of God's Word working in the heart and mind of a man.

Heb 11:1

16

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen

Peter tells us that an obedient response to the truth is motivated by faith working in the heart and the conscience...

1 Peter 3:21

17

21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

What we see with the jailor is his response to what he saw in Paul and Silas. He had put them into stocks in the heart of the prison to make sure of their captivity. He felt the earthquake that opened the gates and released them from their shackles and was preparing to take his own life when they told him to stop, that not one prisoner had escaped. He went from despair unto death to such a relief of life that it moved him to seek what they had, what they were doing. The real key is that he was moved to listen. He made the choice to hear what they had to say. And that is where faith comes from, Rom. 10:17.

The last thought about the jailor is...

18

3) What kind of convert was he

You see all types of people who come to God through Christ. Some respond to their upbringing. They were raised by parents in the Church and it was just the thing to do to be baptized, even being encouraged by those who find it the thing to do to say to some young person, "Well when are you going to be baptized?" Some respond to the love of their lives, knowing that that love has made it a goal of their lives to find someone of like precious faith to marry and go through this life

with. Which, by the way, is admirable, it is beyond admirable, that is a statement of faith and understanding about what influence can do in someone's life. Some respond out of a sense of duty to their children. You have heard them; well we need to get our children into Sunday school, so they start bringing the kids and to show them that all of this is OK. Now, it might be said that whatever the motivation that brings someone to obedience it is good, and that is very true, but the point is what the Hebrew writer says faith is to do for us, give us a...

19

“Conviction”

Whatever the motivation that brings someone to God, without conviction, it probably won't last. Or at the least, the obedience won't be from the heart.

Eph 6:5-6

20

5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; **6** not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

The difference between going through the motions of obedience and this idea of...

21

“Doing the will of God from the heart”

The difference is “Conviction.” It is at this point that our friend the jailor begins to leave the picture. We see him treating Paul and Silas with kindness...

Acts 16:31-34

22

31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."
32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. **33** And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. **34** And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

But then the jailor fades from the narrative and we don't read of him again. So, while we don't know if he continued to be faithful in his life, we do see in his actions and from what we can surmise about who he is that he had that honest and good heart, that he had the kind of faith that is the conviction of a good heart. This idea of conviction comes from a Greek word...

Elegmos (legmo NT:1650)

23

"a reproof" (akin to B), is found in the best texts in 2 Tim 3:16 (some mss. have elenchos, which denotes "a proof, proving, test," as in Heb 11:1, "proving," RV marg., "test"). Cf. elenxis, "rebuke," 2 Peter 2:16 (lit., "had rebuke").

Conviction is proof, conviction is what we do, and conviction is who we are. As much as faith is the evidence of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word of Truth, it is also the evidence of how that faith is working in and being manifested by us in our lives.