



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 16:16-40

Acts

"Prisoners of Philippi"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're in Acts chapter 16 and we're going to look at the remainder of the chapter, which is a lengthy section, and that is verses 16-40. So follow along with me as I read. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke are in Philippi, a city of Macedonian northern Greece, and they have preached the gospel and a small church has been established.

And we read in verse 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. 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.' 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.

"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, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, '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.'

"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. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

"But about midnight Paul answer Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 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." As I was reading over that text this morning, I thought, "What a picture of the gospel that is, the power of the gospel." These men are singing praises to God, no doubt singing the substance of the gospel and the earth is shaken and the doors of prisons are open and chains fell off. And that's exactly what happened spiritually with the gospel. The doors that imprison us are opened and the chains of sin that enslave us fall off.

So this great miracle occurs. Verse 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. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!' And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

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

"Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men.' And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.' But Paul said to them, 'They

have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now they are sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.' The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out and kept begging them to leave the city They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, again we thank You as we do every Sunday morning, for the privilege of being here together, to be able to open our Bibles together and read them, read Your inherent word, and then spend time considering the meaning of the text. And we pray that as we do that You'd bless us, that You'd open our minds to receive Your truth. We are each one responsible to seek to know the meaning of the Bible.

It's not all that complicated, but we are people who are affected by sin and so our minds are clouded. But You have blessed us not only with new hearts as believers in Jesus Christ, but a teacher, the Holy Spirit, who does instruct us, and we pray that His ministry would go unhindered this morning. We look to You to bless us in that way. We look to You to teach us build us up in the faith, to open our hearts to receive the truth, just as You opened Lydia's heart to receive the gospel so long ago.

You do that all the time. You do that every day throughout the world. You bring men and women, young and old alike, in various ways to faith in Jesus Christ, and so we pray that You would open our hearts to receive Your truth, to be ministered too, to be built up in the faith, and if there be any attending this morning who don't know Christ, who are outside of the family of God, that You would open their hearts to receive the gospel and make them Your children.

We pray for ourselves spiritually, but Father, You've made us not only spiritual people, but You've made us physical people and we are greatly afflicted in our bodies and we are a weak people. In fact, we're described throughout the Bible as dust, insubstantial dust, weak, and yet that is the way You've made us. We're dependent creatures and we know our dependency so of through the afflictions of life and we pray for those who are undergoing hardship. Encourage them; heal them.

We think of so many. We think of **Leana Grooms**. We pray You'd bless her. Give her health. Give her recovery. We think of **Ruth Ann Hooten**. We pray that You'd bless her and give her strength and recovery, and so many others, Father. We thank You for Your goodness and Your grace that gives us the health that we enjoy, but we are reminded by others and their experiences, that that can disappear so quickly. At a young age it can be taken from us. But as Your children, we are in Your hands and all that comes into our life is for our good. So give endurance, and if it please You, give healing.

We pray for our nation. We pray that You'd bless it. Give wisdom to the people of this land as we face the days of serious decision in the months to come, and we pray that You'd bless this land with good and wise leadership.

Bless us in this assembly. Bless us in this hour. Bless us in the hour to come. Bless the Sunday school classes. Bless those who teach. Give them great ability to proclaim Your truth. We thank You for the men and women that do teach in this church and for the time they put into their lessons. And we pray that they would see fruit from that.

We pray for our time this evening when we return. Bless our evening meeting. Bless us now. Bless us as we sing our final hymn and prepare our hearts to study together. We pray in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] At the east end of Lake Geneva is the Castle of Chillon, where the Swiss patriot and Protestant Francois Bonivard was for some years chained to a pillar deep in its dungeon. The story,

which is famous in Swiss history, so moved Lord Byron that he carved his name high on that pillar and he wrote a poem, "The Prisoner of Chillon," in which he gives a lyrical description of a prisoner who suffered for his faith. He describes the chains biting into the man's flesh, the hymns sung to give comfort, the loneliness and the gloom in the dungeon.

Which shows that when people suffer nobly, it inspires even the world. And when Christians suffer well, it is a witness to the world and encouragement to the church. And we see all of that in our passage with Paul and Silas, who became prisoners in Philippi. I've entitled the study this morning "Prisoners of Philippi," but I could just as well have titled it "The Greatest Question," because while in prison the two were asked, "What must I do to be saved?" That is the most important question a person can ask and it is the central theme of Acts 16, in which Luke singles out three people who were saved, each person very different from the others, each of their circumstances very different as well. And while Luke recounts what actually happened, the people and the circumstances seem chosen by him in order to show the power of God to save through the gospel.

We met the first person earlier last work in our study, Lydia, a successful businesswoman, a woman of high character described as a worshipper of God, a Gentile woman who had been attracted to Judaism. She and some other women had gathered for prayer by the riverside when Paul and his companions joined them one Sabbath and began to teach. While Lydia listened to Paul speak about Jesus Christ, the Lord opened her heart, she believed, and she was baptized.

Well now we meet two other people, very different from Lydia, very different from one another. One is a girl, the other a man. One is a slave, the other a Roman. But grace changed both and united these people together, because the gospel does that. It changes hearts; it brings people into new relationship. In fact, the very best relationships.

Paul and his friends met the second of these three people while they were going to the place of prayer. Things had gone well for these men since arriving in Philippi. A small church had been established and they had been taken into Lydia's house. They'd been shown a great deal of hospitality. But the warm reception in Philippi came to an end when they were joined by a young girl on the way to the riverside.

Luke writes in verse 16 that a slave-girl "having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling." Literally in the Greek text, she had a spirit of Python, which is a reference to the snake of Greek mythology that guarded the temple of Apollo at the shrine of Delphi in central Greece. It was thought that Apollo embodied this serpent and that he inspired the female priest of his temple to speak his words to be his oracle. And this girl was thought to have that snake spirit. What she had was an unclean spirit. It was a demon that caused her to do unusual things and give involuntary, which people believed were the prophecies of Apollo. So she worked as a fortune-teller and made a lot of money for her owners, who exploited her unfortunate condition and took advantage of the superstitions of the people of Philippi.

People have always been anxious about the future and willing to pay a lot of money to learn it. And there have always been those who are willing to take their money, make money off people's anxieties. And so Paul would later write to the Philippians, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made unto." In other words, don't worry about the future. Don't seek help from others about the future. Go to God. The only one who knows the future, the one who controls the future, who has designed the future, He is the one who'll give you help and give peace to your soul.

Well, that's the way the church is to behave, but the world behaves in a very different way. Often it looks to the bizarre realm of the occult, to horoscopes, to fortune tellers, to palm readers, and things like that to learn about what lies ahead and to gain some kind

of help. A lot of people in Philippi did that. It was a superstitious place. It was a Gentile city. And the slave-girl was big business there.

Well, it wasn't long before she attached herself to the missionaries. She followed them through the city, crying out, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." Now that is not what we would expect to hear from a demon. But then if you remember from the gospels, that often happened during our Lord's public ministry, that possessed people would see Him. They would meet Him in a synagogue and they would cry out, "You are the Holy One of God." And so it seems that demons were compelled to confess the Lord when they met Him, or when they met His servants, and that may be the reason that this was happening in Philippi. But I suspect that there's something else occurring here and that what happened was really of a more devious nature. It was an attempt to cause confusion, so it's a diabolical kind of scheme to discredit the gospel by associating it with the occult. It was as if to say, "They and I are all one worshipping the same God."

It was unsolicited and unwanted publicity and it went on for some days before Paul finally became greatly annoyed and put a stop to it. Luke writes in verse 18 that he "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."

So in an instant this girl who had been enslaved by this evil spirit was delivered. She was free. And I think that we should understand that Paul then began to teach her about Christ and salvation and she believed and she was added to the church. It shows the power of God to clean up and give order to the worst of lives, to give freedom - did that with this slave-girl. It was a great moment for her, but it greatly upset her masters. They lost their income. Their business had just fled.

And so we read that they seize Paul and Silas and drag them to the authorities and said, "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 Roman." Now they knew they couldn't get a hearing by complaining about losing their business the way they had, losing their money, so they appealed to the people's patriotism and prejudice. These men are Jews and they're attacking Rome.

F.F. Bruce wrote that anti-Semitism was never very far under the surface in pagan antiquity. It really isn't very far under the surface in modern times either. And so they appealed to their prejudices and the scheme worked. The rulers stripped Paul and Silas, beat them, and threw them in prison, into the inner prison, verse 24 says, where the jailer fastened their feet in the stocks. Prison door was shut and they were left alone in the cold, dark, damp dungeon, bruised and bleeding.

If ever there was reason for discouragement, it was then and there. And if Paul and Silas were like most men, we might expect Silas to have turned to Paul and said something like, "You know, this trip has been a disaster. Everywhere we've tried to go we haven't been able to go. We've walked the length of Asia Minor. We followed a vision of a man to Macedonia where we met nothing but women. And the men we've met have beaten us and thrown us into the prison. If we ever get out of this place, we're going back to Antioch as quickly as we can. Oh, my back hurts. I think they broke a rib or something."

Well, that's what we might expect, but that's not what we hear. These were no common men. They were uncommon men. They knew it was God's will that they be there and they knew that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

You profess Jesus Christ publicly, you can expect rejection. You might even be beaten. Well, that's happened many times. Paul and Silas understood that. Their faith in Christ remained firm. As a result, late that night the prisoners heard sounds that had never filled the dungeon before. Instead of the sounds of groaning and cursing, they heard the sounds of men praying and singing, rejoicing as Paul and Silas praised God with hymns. And Luke writes, "The prisoners were listening to them." I can just hear them singing, "Through many

dangers, toils and snares/ I have already come/'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far/And grace will lead me home." "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound/That saved a wretch like me/I once was lost but now am found/Was blind, but now I see."

I know they didn't sing that hymn, but something like that. a cappella, without instruments, probably like I sing, a bit off tune, a lot off tune. But no one complained. The prison was quiet as the other prisoners listened and learned about salvation, heard things that they had never heard before, about Jesus Christ, about the cross, about forgiveness, about the life that He gives. So through their affliction Paul and Silas were able to have a ministry, able to have a greater ministry to those men in prison than anyone else in the world could have. They were right where God wanted them. Sometimes, as hard as it may seem to us, God puts us in hard places and He puts us in hard places for a good reason.

And so they sang. And there are many stories like that. the experiences of the apostles can be seen all the way down through the church in the lives of many different saints. The Huguenots loved hymns. They were the French Calvinists of the Reformation. Men and women of whom the world was not worthy. There is one account of a nobleman, the Prince of **d'Elbeuf**, who was arrested for his faith and imprisoned in the Bastille. He was not allowed visits from friends. He was fed bread and water. Sometimes he was kept in an iron cage. The only thing that he was allowed to have was his lute, which is an old-fashioned guitar, on which he would accompany himself as he sang Moreau's hymns, which were the psalms that the French poet Moreau composed while he was in Geneva.

The prince was sentenced to death. The prince died bravely, but he had encouraged himself all through that time with those great hymns that he sang. In fact, the Huguenots did that. They found great encouragement from Moreau's hymns. In fact, that hymn book was so influential among the Huguenots that the king of France passed a law forbidding the use of it.

Well, as I said, there are many stories like that. In Romania, **Shabon** and I sometimes visit a man who is a friend of Shabon's, a friend of a number of the Christians there in Bucharest. He lives north of the city, but he was a man who was in prison for his faith during the Communist era. He suffered greatly, suffered for many years, many years of imprisonment. And during that time he composed hundreds of hymns without pen or paper. He did it through all in his mind, and after he was released, he wrote these hymns down. But on one occasion at least, maybe more than one, but on one occasion during the winter he was made, along with the other prisoners, to lie on the concrete floor without any clothes, lying naked on a cold, prison floor for hours, and it was in that time and in that place that he composed a hymn in his mind and he began to sing it. It encouraged him greatly, but a hymn like that doesn't arise in a person's mind in order to encourage them. It arises because they are encouraged. They're encouraged by their faith in Jesus Christ and who He is and what they know of Him and what they know He is doing and will doing through all of their tribulations. And so he sang.

That's what Paul and Silas did. With their broken, bleeding backs, they praised God through their hymns and they filled the prison with peace. The prisoners were listening to them and a calm came over them, a peace that lasted till midnight when the prison was suddenly jarred by an earthquake that so shook its foundations that all the cell doors opened and the prisoners' chains fell off. It was no ordinary earthquake. God shook the prison, one for one purpose: To wake up the jailer for his divine appointment.

Awakened, he rushed to the prison. When he saw the prison doors opened, he assumed the worst. Thinking everyone had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself. Roman law required that a guard who let his prisoner escape was liable to the penalty the prisoner would have suffered. And so to escape that terrible end, that ignominious and painful death, he was about to fall on his sword when he was stopped by the voice of Paul shouting from the darkness, "Do

yourself no harm, for we are all here!" The jailer dropped his sword, he grabbed a torch, he rushed trembling into their cell. He brought the men out and asked the greatest question that he or anyone could ever ask, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

I don't know how a pagan man like this could know to ask such a sharp and penetrating question as that, but he may have heard the hymns. Perhaps he lived just above the prison and heard the hymns that they were singing and the prayers that they prayed as they sang about salvation and heaven. Or maybe he heard the slave-girl the day before cry out, "These men are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." That's certainly possible. Philippi was a small town.

Maybe they spoke to him earlier. Maybe when they were first in his custody, they explained the situation. They explained what they'd said. They explained why they were in Philippi. At any rate, he knew that they had an answer, and they did, a very simple one. Verse 31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

What can be simpler than that? What can be less complicated than that? Not believe and do some great work, make some great sacrifice, or believe and wait for some confirming sign, some jolt of power, or some strong feeling of emotion. It's simply believe. Trust in Christ.

Now, it is necessary to believe correctly, to believe the right thing, to believe that Jesus is Lord. That is, He is God, God the Son, who became a man and died for our sins. It was a spiritual as well as a physical death, an infinite death. He suffered hell on the cross for sinners. The very judgment of God fell upon that God-man as he hung on the cross, and He died and was laid in a grave. That actually, literally happened. But He did not remain in the grave. God raised Him from the dead. He raised Him not only from the grave, He raised Him up into heaven itself and seated Him at His right hand.

We have a living Savior. We have a Savior who died for sinners, a Savior who lives for sinners. That's the good news. That's the

gospel. It is the simple news of the gospel. God has not given us a complicated way of salvation. He has done everything for us through His Son and He invites us to believe in Him. Everyone who does, without exception, is saved at the very moment of faith.

A few weeks ago I spoke Sunday evening and told the story of a Scottish boy named James. His family called him Jamie. It's a true story about his conversion and his short life. It happened many, many years ago. His mother died of fever. When he was young, he too caught the fever, which left him weak and sickly. But he came under the conviction of his sin and the influence of the gospel early on. He heard it preached every Sunday in the church of Robert Murray M'Cheyne, and it made him to struggle in his soul. He knew that he was a sinner. He was just a boy, but he knew that even as a boy he'd sinned and he knew his sins and he knew his heart, and he was grieved by it. Sometimes he would even weep in church and come home and weep about his condition, but he didn't believe.

Finally he came to the place where he asked his sister, who was a godly young lady. He asked, "Have I only to believe that Jesus died for sinners? Is that all?" She told him, "Yes, that is all." "Well," he said, "I believe that Jesus died for me, for I am a poor, hell-deserving sinner." He was saved, and in a short time he grew remarkably spiritually while he declined physically. And he was able to welcome death when it came.

God has made the way of salvation simple enough for a child to understand and take. It is a narrow way. It is the Lord Jesus, God's Son, as our sacrifice, as our Savior. But it is also a straight way, an uncomplicated way. It is faith alone, in Christ alone.

The Philippians jailer was put on the way. He believed in Christ. He was converted, and so was his entire household. Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household," which meant, "If you believe, you will be saved. If they believe, they will be saved." Paul was not promising that when one person in a household is saved all members of the household will be

saved. Salvation is not in that way at all. A father or a mother's faith cannot count for the children's faith. There's no such thing as salvation by proxy or faith by proxy. It is an individual act by each person.

Now, what often happens is that God calls one person in a family and through that person God brings the others in the family. But we must all exercise personal faith in Christ Jesus for salvation. That's Paul's meaning. Now that happened in the jailer's household. The gospel was explained to them and all believed. All rejoiced. All were baptized, we read in verses 32 and following. "And they" - that is, Paul and Silas - "spoke the word of the Lord to Him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."

The Philippians were an hospitable people. They opened their homes to these missionaries. They cared for them. Lydia did that, and here we read the jailer fed them and washed their wounds. It was an evidence of a changed life. This man who clamped them in the stocks is now feeding them and washing their wounds. That's a evidence of the new birth, just as their baptism was a testimony to their faith in Christ. Those who are saved are changed people. They do good works. They are obedient. They are baptized and they take the Lord's supper. But they are not saved by their good works and they are not saved by the sacraments. They're not saved by being baptized and taking the Lord's supper.

A few months ago one of our deacons gave me a tract that criticized Billy Graham's preaching of the gospel. The criticism that was made was that he didn't require people to be baptized, which the authors of the tract argued is a necessary part of the gospel. They state that there are four steps of salvation: repent, believe, live for Jesus, and be baptized. And against Dr. Graham, they cited Galatians 1:6-10

where Paul condemns what he calls a different gospel, which is very surprising, because what Paul calls a different gospel, a **heteros** gospel, a false gospel is one that requires a ceremony plus faith. In that case, the ceremony is circumcision.

Now, aside from being a different ceremony, what is the difference between saying that a person must believe and be circumcised to be saved and saying a person must believe and be baptized to be saved? There is no difference. It's faith plus a work. A work of righteousness, but a work. Both are a different gospel from Paul's gospel. Now I know that Peter says in 1 Peter 3:21, "Baptism now saves you," but he's not talking about water baptism. In fact he qualifies that. He says, "Not the washing of dirt from the flesh." Not water baptism at all, but a change of heart, faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, it's what Paul describes in Titus 3:5. "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness," such as baptism, "but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." That's what Peter is talking about - regeneration, the washing of regeneration, the internal washing and cleansing and faith that joins us to Christ, baptism into Christ. That's the baptism that's saved, not water baptism.

What did Paul tell the jailer? Believe and be baptized? No, Believe and you will be saved. When the jailer and his family rejoiced in verse 34, why were they rejoicing? Well, Luke writes, they "rejoiced greatly, having believed in God." No mention of baptism in either verse, only faith, because it is faith alone, in Christ alone, that a person is saved. Good deeds are important. Baptism is not an option. The Lord's supper is not an option for the believer, and a believer will do these things, not to be saved, but because he or she is saved. Saving faith is obedient faith. Obedience to the Lord's commands is an evidence of salvation, but not the cause of salvation. Salvation is through faith.

God promises that. Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life - whosoever believeth. That's what He says.

And to question that, to doubt that in our minds - a person can believe and say, "Yeah, I believe, but I'm just not sure I really believe. I'm not sure it took. I'm not sure He saved me. I don't feel anything." That's to question the inherent word of God. That's to call God's integrity into question. And to add something to what God says is a complete error and a false gospel. Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

These Philippians had believed. They have trusted in Christ. They had everlasting life and they were rejoicing. So the small church in Philippi was growing, along with Lydia, the businesswoman, and the unnamed slave-girl, there was now the Roman jailer. It was all a work of grace.

John Stott had a good observation in his commentary. He wrote that the head of a Jewish household would use the same prayer every morning, giving thanks that God had not made him a Gentile, a woman, or slave. But here were representatives of these three despised categories, redeemed and united in Christ. And then he quotes Paul's words in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." That's what the grace of God does. It takes all kinds of people and joins them together in a new society with the new relationships which make for the very best of friends. Thought of that this morning, the friends that God has given me, many of them in this church. The best friends anyone could have - genuine friends and friends that are eternal. Death may separate us for a little bit of time, but just for a bit of time. We are joined together forever in a new society of redeemed people through God's grace.

Well, the chapter ends with the vindication of Paul and Silas. The next morning the magistrates decided to release them from jail. When the jailer told Paul the news, I'm sure the jailer rejoiced, "Isn't this great? God had released you." And Paul said, "No, indeed." He and Silas were Roman citizens. They had been treated unfairly under Roman law and demanded satisfaction. The city of Philippi, as we said

last work, is a very Roman city and it took great pride in the great pride of being a Roman citizen, valued that highly. And so when the magistrates learned that they had beaten Roman citizens, they were fearful and they were humbled and very apologetic.

Paul did leave town in peace without pressing the issue, but these men did have to come. They did have to publicly lead them out. They did have to make a demonstration that they were wrong before the public. And so what that indicates, at least in one sense, is that there's a place for standing up for what is right, legally, and for condemning what is wrong in society, doing that.

But probably Paul made his complaint not simply for that reason, not primarily for that reason, but for the sake of the church. By putting the authorities in a difficult position, putting them on notice that they had violated the law that they were to protect, he was seeking to protect the church from future illegal harassment.

The chapter ends with the missionaries going to the house of Lydia and Luke writes in verse 40, "When they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed." So Paul leaves Philippi and leaves this little church that many people feel was probably his favorite church. I don't know that we can say that, but as you read his letter to the Philippians, he certainly loved these people very much and it was a very interesting church, a church made up of all kinds of people - a wealthy businesswoman, a slave-girl, a Roman jailer, their families, and maybe a few inmates from the prison.

God saves all kinds of people and saves them in all kinds of ways. There's only one way of salvation - that is Jesus Christ. But God brings us to Christ in many different ways. Lydia was peacefully sitting by a quiet riverside when she heard the gospel and believed. The jailer was brought to despair by an earthquake in order that he would believe. But God brought them all to the same Savior, which shows both His wisdom and His power in changing lives. He doesn't work in just one way. There are many ways in which God works to bring His people to Himself. He brings people in different ways, in

different times of their lives. Some He brings with great distress and emotion. Some He brings very calmly. But He brings them all to the same Savior and He brings them all in the same way, through faith and faith alone.

Well, a final thought: Much of Paul's and Silas' ministry in Philippi was in prison, not in terms of time, because this is only one day or night. But Luke gives a great deal of attention to this one episode in Philippi. It was unpleasant, but it was where God put those men for a good purpose. As a result of that imprisonment, a man and his family were saved. There are all kinds of prisons in this world and not all of them are made of hard stuff, like stone and iron. Some are made of hard circumstances and maybe some of you find yourself in that kind of prison. It may be a chronic health problem. It may be a hard relationship, a difficult marriage, a trying situation at work, a struggle of some kind, and it goes on and on and you don't see an end to it and you must endure.

Paul has advice for you and his advice for you is seen in his example, there in the jail of Philippi and in what he later wrote to the Philippians church. Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!" Paul did that. He did that in the prison in Philippi. And he wrote those words of rejoicing from another prison, a prison in Rome where he was again rejoicing, where he was again a witness for Christ. He wrote in his letter to the Philippians that his circumstances, which were hard - chained up in Rome - had turned out for the progress of the gospel. He wrote Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian guard and everyone else. And at the end of the book of Philippians, he sends greetings to them from the household of Caesar. You know that must have delighted the Philippians jailer to hear that other Romans and other military people such as he were now Christians, believers in Jesus Christ.

So through Paul's imprisonment the gospel spread throughout Rome. It spread into the Imperial guard. It spread into the very household of Caesar. Caesar's family members even were saved. God

uses prisons and He will use you in the one where you are. He knows your situation. His providence has placed you there for a purpose, just as it put Paul in the dungeons of Europe. It gave him a unique opportunity to give the gospel and to be an encouragement. And Paul was that, in part because those around him - his guards, his friends, others who came to visit him - saw his demeanor, saw his response to hard circumstances, saw his joy and his confidence in the midst of trial. He endured well. And God will use you in your prison. People see you, they know your circumstances, they know your situation, they watch your response to trials, and are affected when you endure well, endure with joy and confidence in the Lord. It will help them to endure when they go through trials.

Now, it's easy to say, I know, and it's not easy. It is, in fact, impossible, apart from grace. But God gives grace. He's the God of all grace and He gives help and He gives strength as we look to Him. But it may be that there are some people here this morning without Christ, who have not looked to Him for help of any kind. The apostles' message to you is not "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!" It is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Salvation the God offers is by faith plus nothing. That's the good news. But it is hard news for many to believe. They want to add something, some work of their own. That is the nature of man. He has to add something to what God has done.

I once saw on the news a film about a peasant approaching the cathedral in Mexico City crawling on his hands and knees with a big burden of dry sticks on his back. It didn't serve any purpose at all, other than to make his journey to the cathedral hard and difficult, and he crawled on his hands and his knees with that burden for miles and miles. People will do that. They will go to any measure to gain forgiveness. But when they are told to simply believe, they won't do it. It's too simple. Their pride demands a hand in their salvation. But God's way is not our way. God's way is not the way of boasting. It's not the way of pride. It's just the opposite. It is faith in Christ, who's

done it all - faith plus nothing. You can't bring your dead sticks to God. He won't accept them.

So if you're here without Christ and you think that you must do something, something painful, something difficult, something hard, something magnanimous, whatever, do something great for God to be saved, you cannot do that. You can do nothing. You can only believe. So put off your bundle of dry sticks, put off your so-called good deeds, your works, and put your faith in Christ.

The moment you do that, you will receive from Jesus Christ the forgiveness of all your sins and life everlasting. You will receive salvation. May God help you to do that and help those of us who have done that to rejoice in the Lord always, and again rejoice. We have every reason to do so. We have life everlasting, life that can never be taken away. And may God help us to witness to that grace in whatever circumstance of life we may be in. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, and we see it demonstrated so clearly, so well in this 16th chapter of Acts, where you give us the example of salvation in three different people - saved in different ways, different kinds of people, saved in different circumstances, but saved in the same way in that they all came to Christ by your grace alone, through faith alone, in the Savior alone.

We thank You for such a simple gospel. If it were complicated, we would never arrive at salvation. But we arrive because it's all of You. It's by grace You bring us. Thank You for that. May we live lives that please You. We pray in Christ name. Amen.