

ONE TERRIFIC QUESTION

The Main Point: Of all the things we desire and need to know, of all the questions we could ask, there is nothing is more critical to us overall than knowing the answer to the question asked by the Philippian Jailer.

The history of the world, to a very large degree, has been driven by questions; by a need and desire to learn and to know. That natural, God-given inquisitiveness has led to all sorts of things. Some of those have been incredibly good and some that have been incredibly bad. Men have wanted to know what is over in that next valley, or on the other side of the mountain, or across that sea, or what's on the other side of the moon. We have wanted to know how things work, and why. We have been driven by a desire to unlock the mysteries of life, how to make things bigger or better, or easier.

Sometimes, however, the questions that make the most difference to us have been those that concern more basic, fundamental issues. We need to know how to get fix this leaking faucet; what to do now that the car won't start; how do we repair a broken relationship? Sometimes the questions that have pressed us the most are even more crucial. I remember the immediate aftermath of brother Mike Chapman suffering his brain hemorrhage. What are his chances? What kind of life will he have if he does live? What, if any, side effects might he suffer? I can tell you for sure that those were the questions that consumed Christina's heart and mind. None of the other matters about which they had been so concerned about just hours before, or that filled the newspapers mattered much at all. Suddenly their world boiled down to just a few basic questions.

When you think about it, a question is a wonderful and powerful and very necessary thing. Someone has said that *"a good question is worth a thousand facts!"* That is why a really good study sometime is to take a look at some of the questions that are asked in the Bible. You have, for example, Pilate's question found in **John 18:38**. He asked, *"What is truth?"* Is that a great question or what? Or what about Jesus' two questions found in Matthew **16:26**. He framed the question in two different ways. *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"* A few weeks ago I presented a lesson on the question asked by the rich young ruler in Luke 10:25. He asked, *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* I like his follow-up question as recorded for us by Matthew, in the parallel account found in **19:26**. After being told what he needed to do, namely keep the commandments. He asked, "Which ones?" and Jesus told him, and then he said, I've done all of that since I was just a youth, "What lack I yet?" Isn't that a great question? What lack I yet? We could spend the rest of the day thinking about that one, couldn't we? Really, the rest of our lives!

This past week, we read what is truly a terrific question. It is the question the Philipians Jailer asked in Acts 16:30. For my lesson this morning I would like for us to spend some time thinking about his question, but first let's take a look at the context in which that question is found. In Acts 16 we read where Paul was on a second mission journey. He and a co-worker named Silas

had picked up a young Christian by the name of Timothy in Lystra, one of the cities of Galatia they had visited on the first mission effort. It was there, you may recall where Paul was stoned and dragged outside of the city and left for dead. He didn't die, of course, and now he was back. While in that region, Paul had a vision in which he saw a man in Macedonia, which was a region in the European continent, and this man was calling for him to "*come over and help us.*" Paul concluded that was God calling them to go to Macedonia, and in a few days they found themselves in the Macedonian city of Philippi.

Apparently there wasn't a synagogue in that city, and so on the Sabbath, Luke tells us that they supposed that there would be some Jews worshipping together down by the river, so they went there and found the opportunity to share the gospel with the ladies who were there. One woman, a businesswoman by the name of Lydia opened her heart to their message and became obedient to the gospel. Then she invited them to use her home as a place to stay and work from while in that city.

Then one day while they were returning to the river for the purpose of praying together, they began to be followed by a slave girl, in whom there was a spirit of divination, which involved telling people's future. She would do that and the men who owned her received a price for the fortunes she told. It was a lucrative trade, as far as they were concerned. As she followed them, she began crying out, "*These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.*" Now, what she was saying was very true, but considering where it was coming from, there was a danger that the message of the gospel might become linked to evil spirits. So after several days of this, Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. This of course was a really good thing for her. But the men who owned her realized that without that spirit in her, they were out of business, and it made them very hostile. They somehow were able to seize Paul and Silas and drag them into the market place where there were some officials. They began accusing Paul and Silas before these men, saying that they were teaching things that were not lawful for a Roman to accept or practice. A mob soon formed and began beating on the two servants of God. The officials had them stripped and ordered them to be beaten with rods, and then they were thrown into jail with strict orders to the jailer to secure them safely.

So the jailer put them in what Luke calls the "inner prison" probably referring to some dark hole deep within the recesses of the jail. Just to make sure they would not give him any trouble, he also had their feet bound in some stocks. You would think these people thought they were dealing with the most violent criminals in the world. Instead they were just proclaimers of the gospel. That's where I want to begin reading and then we will take a closer look at the jailer's question.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to 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 everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the

prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and 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 and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" That was his question, and what a terrific question! I can hardly imagine a question that might be more important to ask and get an answer for than that one. I realize, of course, that this is not a question that many people are asking today. Sometimes the church is accused of answering questions no one is asking, and that may be true, but you have to wonder, why **aren't** people asking that question?

The apostle Paul may have an answer to that question in what he wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:3,4**. He said, "*...if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*" Part of Satan's work has been in blinding people to the need for salvation. He has the world so caught up in everything else, they aren't seeing the biggest and the most critical reality of all, and that is that sin has separated people from their God.

In my experience what I've seen is that most people don't give this question much thought because they don't think about these things very much; they are not into God's Word, and furthermore, they assume they are going to be saved anyway. In their ignorance of the facts of the matter, they assume they are pretty good people; they have not done anything deserving eternal punishment. They also assume that if God is really merciful and loving as everyone believes He is, they will not have any problem clearing the bar.

Furthermore, people are distracted with all the busyness of life; they don't have time to think much about these things, and so they never get around to thinking about that question. People who do take the time to read and seriously consider what the Bible teaches know better. They know that Jesus said that many are going to be lost and only a few are going to be saved, Matthew 7:1,3,14. That is why the great commission given to the church is that we are to take the gospel into all the world and to every creature. Think about that. What is the assumption built into that commission? Isn't it that the world is lost and that every creature is in need of the gospel?

Luke 13:1-5 makes it clear that you don't have to be the most wicked person in the world to deserve eternal punishment. **Romans 3:10** tells us that there is *none righteous, no not one*, and in **verse 23** we read, "*for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" That is why the gospel has to be taken into all the world and preached to every creature, because all have

sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The fact that most people in the world do not see that, or have any concern about it is simply due to the fact that the devil has been incredibly successful in pulling off the greatest deception in the history of the world! The fact that most people aren't asking the question the Philippian jailer asked is an indication of just how successful Satan has been!

Think about what the jailer asked: "*What... Must... I... do... to be saved?*"

A lot of people like Paul's answer to that question, found in **verse 31**. Paul told the man, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" They read that and then they breathe a sigh of relief because they believe in Jesus; there is no doubt in their minds that they do. When we members of the churches of Christ read that, we are disappointed that Paul said it that way, and didn't make it clear that he had to do more than just believe. But before we jump on Paul or jump to the wrong conclusion, we need to take a closer look at the question. It's a terrific question.

"What... Must... I... do... to be saved?"

"What... Must... I... do..." tells us that there is something that must be done. It is not something we can do if we want to, or might do, it is what we **MUST** do.

Some people believe and teach a foolish gospel that says there is nothing that we have to do, or even can do to be saved? They believe and teach that God and Christ did it all; there is nothing else that has to be done. Of course, if that were true then everyone will be saved, because the Bible says that Jesus Christ tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). So, if God and Christ did it all, and they did it for every man, then everyone is saved, whether they know it or not, whether they believe or not, whether they repent or not, whether they are baptized or not. If their teaching is right, then Jesus was wrong because he said only a few are going to be saved, and a few is a long way from everyone!

Common sense, as well as the Scriptures tells us that there is something we must do if we want to be saved. What is it? That's what the jailer wanted to know, isn't it?

Now look again at what Paul tells him. He says, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" A lot of people like to appeal to this verse to prove that all one has to do—since obviously there is something that people must do—is to simply believe in the Lord Jesus. They say, he was not told to be baptized, just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. They quickly point out that baptism is not something one has to do to be saved.

But wait, don't make the mistake of taking Paul's first words as all of his words! If you ask me a question, I might give you a brief response and then give you a fuller answer after that. That's what Paul did here. Paul was simply answering this man's question in a kind of summary fashion. We know that is true because of what else we read in this passage. We also know his first answer was a summary because of what was not said about other things.

Paul said, “believe in the Lord Jesus” but what did that man know about the Lord Jesus? Probably next to nothing. Furthermore, in saying that, there is no mention of the need for the man to repent. And yet Jesus taught that *“repentance and remission of sins”* was to be preached in His name. Paul said nothing about the man confessing the Lord with his mouth, but in **Romans 10:9**, we are taught that confession is made with the mouth unto salvation. So, if the argument is that since Paul said nothing about being baptized, that proves that baptism is not necessary; then the same argument applies to repentance and confession of Jesus’ name. Paul said nothing about either of those things, so they must not be necessary. I think even a blind man could see that argument doesn’t hold water!

And incidentally, as we read earlier, verse 32 says that they then spoke to him the Word of God and to all who were in his house. That tells us that they had left the jail and had gone to the jailer’s house. Think about that. Think about what that tells you.

Then **verse 33** says, *“And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.”* I wonder where he got the idea that he should be baptized, especially if all he had to do was just believe in Jesus as Lord! Why would he do that, and why would he do it *“the same hour of the night.”* According to what I can read, the nearest water was the Gangites river which was about two miles from the city. Why would they traipse all that way at that time of the night for something that wasn’t even necessary? Think about that! And now notice **verse 34**: *“Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”*

You see, when you think about it, until he was baptized, there was no indication that he had really believed in the Lord Jesus. Think about the example of the conversion of Lydia, the businesswoman mentioned earlier in this same chapter. Luke tells about Paul and those with him going out to the river and finding a group of women, they preached to them the gospel. Beginning in verse 14, we read: *“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.”* When was Lydia judged as being faithful to the Lord, as truly believing in the Lord? It was after she had been baptized into Christ, wasn’t it. The same is true with the Philippian jailer. Now he could rejoice along with his whole household because he had believed in God.

Acts 16:30, WHAT A TERRIFIC QUESTION!

I hope in bringing you to this text again, that you have been helped to have a clearer understanding of what is necessary for men to be saved. On the other hand, by looking at this one question, perhaps I have raised some other questions in your mind. If that happened, that’s good, IF you will now take the time and effort to find the answers to those questions.

But here' a question that I want to close with: "What about you? Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you repented of your sins? Have you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is the Christ? Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins?"

If not, what's keeping you from these things? You could be like Lydia and that jailer this morning, able to leave here rejoicing because you have proven yourself to be faithful to the Lord, you have demonstrated your belief and faith in Christ. If you haven't done that, if you haven't truly believed in the Lord, or proven yourself faithful, then here is one last question: Why not? Think about that and if you need to come, do it now while we stand and sing.