

**How to Turn Persecution into Production**

Scripture: Acts 16:19-40

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As we come to the 16th chapter of Acts, we are coming, really, to a chapter that is going to, I think, leave an impression on all of us. It's one of those chapters that you always remember, just the record, alone, of Lydia and her marvelous liberation. And I've appreciated, so much, the interesting comments of you folks over that little study we've done. And then the little incident about the woman who was possessed of a demon.

And now we come to a third incident in this chapter that is going to indelibly impress it on our minds, and it's a very familiar story about a Philippian jailer and how God reached him through an earthquake. Now, there are folks in this church who can identify with this jailer (laughter). Some of you have told me that very thing. But there is, in this particular portion of verses 19 through 40, which is a long portion, but it's quite a bit narrative and very simple to understand, there is in this portion just one little facet that leaps off the page. Because in this passage, the ultimate question that a man can ever ask is asked. Verse 30: "What must I do to be saved?" And the only answer is given, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, we believe that all men need to be saved. And at the same time we believe there is only one way to be saved, by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. And, thus, at the beginning of the service I read to you the words of Peter, "neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." This then is the story of salvation.

Now, as all records in Scripture, there are many facets to it. And we can focus in on the story of salvation at the very beginning and then see it in the flow of the context, at the same time, picking up other very important and helpful truths. The man said, what do I need to do to be saved? And the answer came, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, I think, sometimes, we don't recognize the fact that people are really looking for salvation. I believe that people are seeking deliverance. I think that we get the idea that when we go up to somebody to present Christ to them, that we are really intruding on their lives when, in fact, we may just be giving them that which they are desperately searching for and maybe don't know where to look or aren't willing to admit they're looking. The other night when we had our new members meeting with the elders, somebody stood up and said that they had gone on for years and years searching for salvation, but no one ever told them. I believe that it is a basic thing in the heart of a man that he seeks answers. And the ultimate answer is what is life about and where am I going and what am I doing here. And, of course, when a man comes to the

place of terrible distress over his own life, that's the man who's ready to hear the message of salvation. Now, another reason we know that people are looking for salvation is because there's so many systems of salvation that have been invented. You know, people only invent what they think is going to sell. And people are...there are all kinds of systems. I just read about a new way of salvation the other day in a magazine. It's too a particular kind of occult trance operation, but it's another way of delivering men from meaninglessness and sin and guilt and boredom and loneliness and the dread of death and insecurity and anxiety and whatever. There's all kinds of panaceas being attempted and being offered to men. And the man in this account, a jailer, a crusty, hard, ex-Roman soldier most likely, who was sort of put out to pasture and ran a stinking, rotten jail in the city of Philippi...how do you know it was stinking and rotten?...they all were. Now, this guy was a hard-nosed character who really just lived and died for the fact that he had a little bit of honor left by being a jailer. At least he had a commission from Rome to do that job and he lived for that thing. You know, everybody, sooner or later, who doesn't have salvation, reduces his life to some little box that gives it meaning. For some people, it's money. For some people, it may be prestige, popularity. For some people, it may be a promotion. For some people, it's a new car. Just every once in a while when their life starts to get boring, they buy another car or they get another wife or something new. Maybe some people, it's sex. Maybe for some people it's athletics. There's many, many things. For some people it's drink; for some people, it's dope. And there's some people who get their little box and then it falls apart and they kill themselves. But eventually, men find that they have to face the reality and unreality of life and so they get a little box, whatever the little box is, and they put everything in that little box. And if the little box goes, that's the end. This man had a little box. His little box was prestige, status. All he had left was his name as a jailer and the fact that he had some honor because he was commissioned by Rome to occupy the jail. In the midst of this little account you know what happened to his jail? It fell apart. All the doors flew open, the chains fell off, the stocks were separated and every prisoner was loose. And you know what the man decided to do?...kill himself. Why? His little box had broken. The only thing he had to live for was his prestige as a jailer. If all of his prisoners got away, he'd lost it. And no matter how he tried to wiggle around it and call it an earthquake, somebody would've blamed him. And there wasn't anything to do but draw a sword and kill himself because he had nothing to live for. And that's exactly the way it is with people. They reduce life to some kind of simple commodity that they can stick their hopes in. Or maybe they run so fast around in their little box they don't realize that they don't have anything to live for. But they've got to escape somehow. Well, this man had no answers. He had no escape. And he came to the biggest crisis in his life up to this point, and the only left to do was kill himself. But instead of killing himself, God had something else in mind for him. And you know what he did? He just fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas and he asked the right question. He said "What must I do to be saved?" How do I get out of the mess of having my little box broken? Where do I turn to get rid of my fears and anxiety and loneliness and the meaninglessness of life and the fear of death and all this? Where do I go? And the answer came very clearly. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" and you'll be delivered, and not only you, but anybody else in your house who believes. Now, that's the main message of this passage. It has to be because it's the main message of Christianity.

Let's set the scene a little bit and kind of sneak up on that message.

Now, we're traveling in this little trek through the book of Acts with a pretty sharp bunch. We're with a missionary team made up of four men. Without question, it's the best missionary group that ever went out. Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy...now it's hard to beat that kind of outfit. Now, these four men are making up this little group. Now, they have arrived at Philippi, which is the beachhead in Europe. And the gospel has landed in Europe. And the first thing, God directed them down by the riverside and they met some women there, some women who were worshipping the true God. They were either Jews or Jewish proselytes. No men, at least not enough men to found a synagogue, so the women had to meet at a little place called a proseuche, a place of prayer by the river. And there, God directed them to these women and the one woman in particular by the name of Lydia. And God opened Lydia's heart and she was saved and her whole household was saved. And just like that, the church was founded in Europe. And you know what happens immediately when God begins a work? What happens? Satan begins a counterwork. And so immediately they ran into another woman, only this woman was a demon-possessed girl. In verses 16 to 18 it records that little incident. And she followed Paul around and she did what Satan loves to do, she tried to infiltrate. She said, Oh, they're telling you the truth. You ought to believe them. You say, what is Satan doing agreeing? Satan will agree long enough to get into the organization and to be accepted as part of the same system and then he'll begin to do what he wants to do. And so Paul didn't like this kind of agreement, so in verse 18 he just turned around, didn't even talk to the girl; he just talked to the spirit in her. He said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ...come out of her. And the spirit came out the same hour." Now, two women that we've met, one a liberated lady and one an enslaved lady. Well, when the enslaved lady was freed, you say, what was the reaction. Well, the reaction was very typical for these kind of people. Look at it in verse 19. "And when her master saw the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers." Now, watch, friends. That's very interesting. The reaction was negative on the part of the guys who were using this girl to make money. Now, that reaction sets up what happens in verses 19 through 40. Satan's infiltration plan failed 'cause Paul just cast out the demon. Now, if Satan can't infiltrate, he's got another alternative. It never works, but he does it anyway. It's called persecution. Infiltration works; persecution doesn't. You know what happens when the church gets persecuted? It grows. You see, the blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the church. But Satan's so uptight about the church, he can't resist whacking away at it even though he knows it doesn't work. There's a great principle, beloved, and it's this principle and you see it over and over in the book of Acts: persecution always results in blessing. You persecute the church in chapter 4 and what'll they do? They multiply. You come back and persecute the church in chapter 5 and what'll they do? They multiply. As if that's not enough, Satan comes back and persecutes the church in a great persecution of chapter 8 and what happened?...scattered the church everywhere and they went everywhere preaching. It multiplies. Persecution brings blessing. Infiltration is what destroys. That's why, you know, all these people walking around and talking about, oh, this is such a great day for the church and so forth and so on and, you know, this is probably a time when Satan is as active as he's ever been. Because

we're not under persecution, which really causes us to grow, we're under the process of infiltration, which is Satan's subtle and effective work. Well, God overwhelmed infiltration in the case of the maid and He's about to overwhelm persecution and we'll see how.

Now, I want you to look at five features and I put them in the little outline for you to follow. If I was going to give you a proposition to base those points on, I would say How To Turn Persecution Into Production. How do you take a negative situation and make a positive out of it? How do you take a persecuted church or a persecuted man or men and make them productive? What is the process or what are the steps or what happens to bring about a positive result from a negative situation? Well, there are five things. Suffering persecution led to singing praises which led to preaching salvation which led to seeing production which led to securing protection and the cycle ran fully.

Now, let's begin at point one. The first thing we see in our text is suffering persecution. Now, this gets exciting because as soon as you start to suffer, you're gonna start seeing something happen. It's inevitable in the book of Acts, absolutely inevitable. Paul cast the demon out of the girl and her masters saw the hope of their gains was gone. It hit them right in the wallet, you see. I mean, this girl was essentially doing what all the rest of those women soothsayers, fortune tellers and palm readers and all do; she was making a fortune, only she had some agents who were taking in the gravy. She was just getting the residual. Now, it's amazing to me that their reaction was what it was because it shows that they didn't care about the girl, right. They could have cared less about the girl. They didn't say, Oh, she's delivered from that devil. These guys must be supernatural. Well, let's find out about this. They said, Oh, no, we've lost our income. Now, you know, that is not so abnormal. I remember in Mark, chapter 5 when Jesus took a little boat across the Sea of Galilee and came to a place called Gerasa or the land of the Gerasenes. And there was there a maniac. And, I mean, this guy was really a maniac. When he was asked his name, he said, "Legion, for we are many." He was infested with a legion of demons. And he cut himself, you know. And he lived in the tombs. And they tried to bind him with things and he broke them. And women and children were panicked at the guy. I mean, you know, you wouldn't even go out of your house. He was a complete madman. And Jesus came along and met the guy and cast all the demons out of him. And the Bible says he was sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And you would say, oh, the people in town will say, oh, thank you, thank you for delivering us. No. Jesus sent the demons out of him into a herd of pigs and they went right off the end of a cliff. Plop, right in the sea and all drowned. And you know what the reaction of the townspeople was? Oh, they didn't come out and say, oh, you've healed the maniac; they said, you get out of here, you killed our pigs (laughter), see...the crass response...typical. The same thing right here...they didn't care about the girl; they only cared about their gain. Believe me, people, the Bible is very explicit when it says that money can get into the way of spiritual perception. Do you know that? You say, well, that'll never bother me. I'm so poor it's not even a factor. Well, let me tell you what the Bible says. "For the love of money is the root of all evil." It doesn't say money is. So you can have none of it and love and you can have a lot of it and not love it. It's the love of money that's the root of all evil. He says "they that would be rich fall into temptation, a snare and into many foolish, hurtful

lusts, which drown men in destruction and loss." People get messed up because of money. Listen to this in Mark, chapter 10, verse 23. "Jesus looked round about and said unto His disciples, 'With what difficulty shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.'" He just talked to a rich young ruler. Remember this story? And the guy was not willing to say, if You want all of my money, You can have it. It wasn't that you get saved by giving away your money; it was just the fact that it was obvious money was his god. And Jesus said, boy, wow, it is so difficult for rich people to get saved. "And the disciples were astonished at His words."...verse 24..."But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children,'...He liked to use that word when they didn't understand what He was saying...'how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'" Now, you can speculate about it must be a small camel or a big needle or whether the needle means a little gate or whether the word kamelos should be bamelos, which means cord, etc. You can do all of that, but the point is, what Jesus is saying is it's hard for rich people to get saved. You say why?...because money becomes such a god, such a dominating thing. "And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?'" And I like the answer. Well, Jesus says, "With men it's impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." There's a few that'll get saved cause God can do miracles. He said, actually, it's harder for rich people to get saved. Now, here were these guys making money like crazy off this girl and so preoccupied. Listen, money is a tremendous captor of men's hearts...tremendous. When you begin to worry about how rich you are, you're falling into many hurtful snares. Over in the 19th chapter of Acts, well, look what happened in Ephesus, just a terrific story. They preached in Ephesus and, man alive, things were going, Paul was teaching three years. I mean, he turned that city inside out. You can imagine Paul teaching night and day for three years in the same town. You think he'd have an effect. Wow! Well, the place was just tremendously affected. All kinds of things were happening. People were getting healed and saved and demons cast out and many believed. Verse 18: "...many...believed...confessed...showed their deeds. Many of those who used magical arts brought their books together...burned them before all men...they counted the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed." Do you know what reigned in Ephesus? The Word of God dominated the city of Ephesus. Do you know what that does to people who are in the idol-making business? Oh, that's tough. Watch what happens. Verse 23: "At that time there arose no small stir..." That's putting it mildly. "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines for Diana"...they used to make these little silver shrines for Diana...probably had a magnet on them and stuck them on the front of their chariot (laughter)...but they "brought no small gain unto the craftsmen..." They were profitable items. And it says "he called together the workmen of like occupation," he says, "Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth." We made our money on these little statues. "Moreover you see and hear that not alone at Ephesus, but all throughout Asia, this Paul"...you can see them getting uptight..."this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people saying that they are no gods which are made with hands..." They're saying that our little deals aren't for real. "So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should

be despised and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." And all the dumb people in the crowd all say, Oh, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." You know \_\_\_\_\_ (laughter). "And the whole city was filled with confusion..." Well, you see what happened? They hit them right in the wallet. The gospel messed up selling little idols. Well, you see vested interests always react negatively to the gospel. And the same thing happened over here...go back to chapter 16...when this girl lost her lucrative capacities, then of course, they got mad.

Well, it says they drew them into the marketplace. You know, it's such a gentle word, "drew." The word literally means "dragged by the heels." They dragged them in. This is a switch for Paul. You go back to chapter 8, verse 3 and you'll read that's what Paul did. He dragged Christians. Remember, it says hauling them out of houses, both men and women. And you remember what the Lord said to him after he was at Ananias' house after he had his vision. He said to Ananias, now you go tell him that he's a chosen vessel unto Me to speak to the Gentiles and also tell him he's going to suffer many things for My Name's sake. So Paul was being dragged by the heels and probably remembering how many times he'd been doing the dragging.

Well, they dragged him away and you know how Paul spells persecution? O-P-P-O-R-T-U-N-I-T-Y, persecution. So here came opportunity and they dragged him off and it says they took him to the marketplace, agora, Greek, which is equivalent to the Latin word forum. This was the big center area, city center, with all the Senate houses, courts, the temple, the places of public office, everything was in this big agora in the Greek cities. The magistrates and the dignitaries congregated there and did whatever they do. So they took him there. Well, they brought him in verse 20 to the magistrates. These people, their official name was duoviri, but they chose to be called praetors because that was kind of a classy Roman title. Every Greek colony, Roman colony in a Greek city, was given two of these men and these two guys had supreme authority. So here were the two praetors. And they said to the praetors, "These men, being Jews"...and you could just feel the contempt, the anti-Semitism...and you know anti-Semitism was a big thing in the Roman world. Over in chapter 18, verse 2, you can read that Claudius Caesar actually commanded all Jews to be thrown out of Rome. Now, maybe the edict of Claudius, which had been made, had already reached Philippi and so these people were just kind of picking up on that edict anyway and said, "These men, being Jews..." And they cast a terrible contempt toward Paul and Silas who were Jews. It's a marvelous, marvelous thing that God had just the right men who were the right nationality with all the right citizenship and all the right background to do exactly what he wanted them to do. They were Jews, which added to the contempt, which added to the beating, which added to the jailing, which resulted in a man's conversion, all planned by God. So in their anti-Semitism, they haul these two guys in and first they just cast this kind of a contempt at them from the standpoint of their Jewish-ness which is interesting. Then they go from there to this. They "do exceedingly trouble our city..." And the term "exceedingly trouble" means to throw into total disorder. These guys are just really throwing this city into chaos. Now, in a very technical sense they were right. Verse 21 says, they "teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans." That is correct. According to Cicero and

Tertullian and some other writings, the Romans had a law that no Roman could believe in or follow the teachings of any religion that had not been approved by the Senate. You see, within the framework of Roman government, they desired, most of all, that the people worship the emperor, you know. Apart from that, they allowed certain worship in order to keep peace in some of the lands they had conquered. But nobody could worship in any way that was not approved by Roman law and Roman Senate. So this new deal about Christ and all had not gone through approval of the Senate. And so they said, they are teaching things that are anti-Roman and we are not allowed to believe them; they are against Roman law. Well, right there on the spot, they had a kangaroo court. It was just a mob scene. A lynching was all it was. They had thrown the little contemptuous thing of anti-Semitism at them and then they blamed them for creating disorder through the town and then they said it's all because they're teaching something that we are not allowed to believe.

So here came the situation. Point one: suffering persecution. They got into this mess in the first place by being bold. Don't ever restrict your boldness for fear of persecution. Persecution only translates your boldness into new opportunity. Remember Acts 4? They preached so they threw them in prison. What'd they do when they got in prison? They preached to the Sanhedrin. They sent them out and they told them not to preach again. And they preached again and people got saved. Every time they did it boldly, the Lord brought results. I mean, you know, Satan, he has to learn, the dumbest thing you can do to a Christian is put him in prison because the cross turns into what?...the crown. And so they are. They're going to drag him off. Well, first before they put them in jail, they got something else they want to do to him. They had this little kangaroo court, no trial, no questioning, no inquisition, no nothing.

Verse 22: "The multitude rose up together against them..." You know, somebody could do a terrific study of the "multitude" just throughout the Bible. Great big gob of people mindlessly, like a pot of water, somebody sticks a fire under them and they boil and haven't got any idea what they're doing. So "the multitude rose up together against them..." And, oh, you can just hear the swelling crowd yelling and here's Paul and Silas just standing there and this big mob is screaming. And the magistrates come down and ripped off their clothes till they were naked "and commanded to beat them." Now, the magistrates had a group of guys that were local police. They were called lictors, l-i-c-t-o-r-s, and they were a kind of policeman. They carried around, for the purpose of punishment in these places where Greek people live, like, a pile of rods wrapped together. They were like birch rods, very hard. And they would wrap them all together. And in the middle they would insert an axe. And the axe was for the purpose of capital punishment when it was needed. On the spot, they could execute. When they didn't need the axe, they laid the axe aside, take the bundle of rods and just flail people with them. Well, that's what they decided to do. This was a Roman punishment. Incidentally, Paul got it three times. "Thrice was I beaten with rods," II Corinthians 11:25...three times. It's a fantastic thing to even conceive of this kind of a beating. And Paul says in II Corinthians 11:23, he says "in stripes above measure." There were so many wounds inflicted by this mass of sticks flailing away that you couldn't count them. No trial, no nothing! "And when they had laid many stripes," verse

23...and not even being able to count them...Paul simply said, "above measure,"..."they threw them in prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely." And what happened? When he received the charge, he "thrust them into the inner prison..." Boy, they said, get those people secure; we don't want them out of there. So he put them in the inner dungeon "and made their feet fast in the stocks." Now, the jailer was just doing his job. I mean, there was no sympathy in him. He'd seen prisoners come and go. He was an old crusty character. That didn't phase him. He just chucked them into the inner dungeon, dirty, filthy, dank, dingy, unsanitary jail in the inner dungeon. And to make it worse, he put them in stocks. Now, we think of stocks in the sense of early America, you know, with your feet and your hands, which is bad enough. According to archeology, the stocks that they used in those days had a series of holes that got wider and wider and the idea was to spread the legs of the individual as far as they could go in order to induce cramping. And so after all the beating was done, in this filthy dungeon where they would be living in absolute filth, their legs were stretched to the extremity to induce cramping that was excruciating. Already having been flailed by a bundle of heavy rods in the hands of an expert, their backs would have been a horrible pulp. Sometimes these things caused internal hemorrhaging, almost always, injuries to organs, smashed vertebrae, broken ribs and very often, death. They endured every bit of that. Then the aching, bleeding, limping men pushed into the dark cell, far from the light and far from the air in solitary confinement, lice, rats, disease, infested first century jails, the prisoners were forced to exist in their own filth, their legs were slammed into stocks which clamped them and that's the way they existed. You say, but all of that just to preach. You guys, you get yourselves in messes. Why don't you calm down? I'm sure some dear soul would have said that. Oh, Paul, you just go out there and you get in all that trouble, then you say, pray for me, pray for me. Why don't you stay out of trouble? (Laughter) If you didn't get into those messes, you wouldn't take so much of my prayer time (laughter). I was watching Monday Night Football last week and there's a guy doing a comment on one of the running backs and he said, You know why he's good is because he's reckless. That's right. That's one game where you better be reckless. And I'll tell you something, being effective in the Lord's work, you better have an abandonment to the cause...an abandonment to the cause...recklessness. Take no thought for yourself. You just cast yourself into the melee, present Christ and let it all fly and it will (laughter). Most of us are going carefully, very carefully through this evangelism thing, won't offend anybody, see. Well, they did what they knew was right to do and they suffered. But that didn't bother Paul...just hopped from prison to prison and later on in his life he was in another prison and he wrote a letter back to the same Philippians. And he said, Philippians 1:12, he said "...brethren...the things which happened to me have fallen out unto the furtherance of the gospel." He says, I'm in jail again but, boy, is it terrific. He ended the letter, he says, "All the saints greet you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." You know what he was doing in prison?...winning all the soldiers to Christ. And I've often thought that he was chained to a soldier, but [if] a soldier was chained to him, I think that'd be worse (laughter). Philippians 2:17, he says, "...if I be offered on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." He said, you dear Philippians, if I died in your behalf, I'd be happy. And that's about what he was doing right here, isn't it? But, you see, that's how he saw his ministry. He was reckless because he was expendable. He



wasn't seeking to protect himself at all so he cast himself into it. And he said, I even bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ. He got a certain glory and joy out of receiving wounds that were meant for Jesus Christ when he got to stand in Christ's place. And so the real ministry began with suffering persecution and, boy, that just set it in motion.

The second thing that happened, suffering persecution led to singing praises. You know, the way to handle persecution is an attitude problem. Right? Now, I don't know any of you who have ever had yourselves beaten with rods and none of you have ever been in inner prison like that and none of you ever had your feet in stocks. I don't know that we've ever suffered anything that could even begin to relate to this. But I want you to see the attitude of these guys in the midst of this. It's just overwhelming. Look at verse 25. "And at midnight..." You know what happened? They couldn't sleep. You think you could sleep in those circumstances? They couldn't sleep. But "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed"...they just talked to God for awhile, and then I love this..."and sang praises unto God and the prisoners heard them." You know, they wanted the prisoners to hear them. I mean, they were giving a witness. You say, what did they sing? I don't know what they sang. They sang praises. Maybe they sang the Hallel, Psalms 113 to 118. Maybe they sang some wonderful hymns that somebody had gotten together in the early years of the church. I don't know what they sang, but they sang praises to God. You say, yeah, but they don't...what are they gonna praise Him for? Don't you see, friends, this is just what everybody gets mixed up in the Christian life. You say, how could they praise God? On what basis could they praise God? Simply this, friends; God never changes. Did you hear that? God never changes. If God is worth praising right now, He's worth praising any moment. Are you with me? You say, but oh, if you knew my trouble, ah, oh... Listen, praising God has nothing to do with your trouble. Paul said in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the"... "in the Lord." He didn't say rejoice in your circumstances. I can't rejoice in my circumstances. Paul didn't do that himself. He said I have continual sorrow and heaviness of heart. You say, God, I don't know what this is all about and it sure hurts and the cramps aren't any fun and my back's killing me, but I know You're on the throne and I love You and I praise You for what You're doing. You know a Christian is defeated, he is dead, when he begins to focus on his problems. Did you get that? He gets his eyes off his God. Boy, we've hit that so many times. Oh, Habakkuk did that. Remember what Habakkuk's problem was? He couldn't understand his problem. He finally said, Forget the problem, God; I'm gonna talk about You. He felt so good he said, God, if the whole world goes crazy, I'm gonna keep trusting You. I don't know anything about the problem. I can't figure out the answer, but I know You're there and I know who You are and I know what You are and I know You're consistent. You know what bothers me? Christians will say to me, oh, I have this problem, John. Where is God? Oh, what's happening in my life? Has God forsaken me? Has God, oh... You know what they're doing? They're running around...circumstance, circumstance, circumstance, see. (Laughter) They got a big old telescope looking for all the circumstances, see. (Laughter) God hasn't changed. If you just be patient and wait, God is perfecting you. And God is about to unfold some fantastic ministry. And so they're there singing away in pain that's unbearable and singing praises. They're not saying, oh, ah, nobody knows the trouble, ah... (laughter)...you know. They were singing praises. Now, you've got to be above your

circumstances, right, to do that. Listen. Just get a grip on who God is and what He wants to do and remember that after you've suffered awhile, He'll make you perfect. That's I Peter. Now, you know, if you only realize Romans 8:28 says "And we know that all things work together for"...what?...we always say that and then we oohh..."all things work together for good." We all read it, recite it, memorize it; we just don't believe it (laughter). You know, Jesus said in John 16, of course, talking to His disciples, and He knew that He was going to be leaving and it was going to be rough on them and He said, You'll have sorrow, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy. Remember that? And then He said, It's like a woman who has a baby. It is the same pain that makes her cry, that makes her laugh when the baby's born. It's not, well, these are bad circumstances and later I'll get good ones. No. It's the same bad ones that 'cause the pain that will issue the joy. It's the child that's born out of the pain, you see, that causes the joy. And so they're just there. They're in the labor pains now but they're waiting for the child to be born. And so they're praising God for what's going to happen and for the fact that God hasn't changed. Listen. The Christian life, beloved, depends upon your knowledge of God. Did you get that? You know, you can base your whole Christian life and your whole Christian attitude on who you really believe God is. --You got that one. That's worth 50 cents; believe me. When you understand that God does not change...and that's why I've said so long that Jesus movements bother me because they end up in kind of a sentimental humanism and Holy Spirit movements bother me 'cause they end up in kind of an emotionalism. I like God movements because then you get things in perspective. And when you understand who God is, then you got everything else in perspective. God doesn't change. Watch it. They never let their problems alter their theology. Boy, is that an important one. Most people's theology comes from their situations. Well, God does this because He did this and you know. Or I don't know if God can do that because He didn't and you know. They just organize God around their circumstances. Not at all. So they were suffering purposefully and they knew it. They were just sitting there, singing away, waiting for God to do what He was gonna do. Well, God didn't have much...let them wait too long cause things began to happen real fast. You say, you know, John, I wish I could have that kind of song. You know how to have a song in your heart? Ephesians 5:18: "...be filled with the Spirit" then you will speak "to yourselves in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." That comes out of a Spirit-controlled life. If somebody is an unhappy person, they're not Spirit-filled. When I meet miserable people I say you got a problem and your problem isn't your miseries; your problem is the fact that you're not really living a Spirit-controlled life because the Spirit gives a song. Now, when you're Spirit-filled, you're gonna have problems. It's just the glory of being able to go through them with victory. You know, in II Corinthians 4:8, we got a little insight into Paul's heart. He says this, "We are troubled on every side and not distressed. We are perplexed, but not in despair." What he's saying is we have problems, but they never get us down, see. He says, "We're persecuted, but not forsaken" and the next phrase in Corinthians says "We're knocked down, but never knocked out." You say, well, how can you handle that, Paul? Well, he says, in verse 16, we don't faint. We don't say oohh, you know. We don't fall under the thing. Why? "...our outward man is perishing, but our inward man is renewed every day." Why? We're plugged in on the inside to the supply. What happens on the

outside is immaterial. He says this, our light affliction, it's only for a moment and "it works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Here's our secret. "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal...the things which are not seen are"...what?..."eternal." You know who he looked at in his problems? He looked at the eternal God. That's who he looked at. That's the key. Get your mind on the Spirit and on who God is and not on your circumstances. Well, there they were singing praises. It was about time for God to act.

Now, God does what He needs to do to get who He wants to get. With Lydia, her heart opened like a flower to the dawning sun. With this guy, it took an earthquake (laughter). But God always...but God always uses what He needs to use to accomplish what He wants to accomplish. It was like that with me. You know, I've always said that some people God speaks to and they listen, others, He grabs them by the nape of the neck, hits them on the pavement and they say, uh, did You want me? That was me. I got thrown out of a car going 75 miles an hour and the whole thing and through that terrible accident got my life right with God. Well, this guy went through a terrible experience. That's how it is with some of us hard cases. Verse 26, here it comes. They been singing "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 bands were loosed." Now, that friends, is a very specific earthquake. You know, it was localized right at the jail (laughter) see. And the effect of it was that it opened all the doors and opened all the chains. Now, that's amazing. That's just one of those special earthquakes (laughter). You want to know what that says to me? I get excited when I read about that. Do you know, do you really realize that when you go out to share Christ with people that God is on your side and if need be, He'll move the earth? He'll move the earth to accomplish what He wants to accomplish. Don't ever think that when you go out in evangelism to share Jesus Christ, that you're going alone. You have all of Sovereignty behind you. And when the time comes when God's gonna reached the prepared heart through you, whatever it takes, God's gonna do it. Have you ever heard a person give a testimony and say, You know what happened...and in this circumstance...and I couldn't believe it...immediately after that...this...hn...hn...hn Have you ever heard anybody's testimony like that, how all these things, bang, kept fitting together? Well, of course, no big mystery (laughter). Nobody ever got saved by accident yet. Just the perfect miracle, just rattle that jail till all the doors flew open, all the little chains fell off and it was exciting. God is always, beloved, listen, God is not only active in protecting His saints; He is active in doing what needs to be done so that His saints and ministry is effective. God will take care of you and God will do what He needs to do to cause you to reach that which He wants you to reach. We have divine resources. I'm telling you, I just sometimes think to myself, well, I'm going out to minister today. God, whatever it takes, earthquakes or whatever You got to do, let's do it. And you know that God is on your side. Well, the earthquake hit and, of course, verse 27, the jailer was staying at his house, probably next door to the jail. "The keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep..." He sure didn't lose any sleep over Paul and Silas did he? He wasn't real sympathetic about anything, he just...out. But this thing woke him. And he saw the prison doors were open and what happened? He had his whole life in his little box. And what was his little

box?...prestige and honor as a Roman, doing a good job as a jailer. He lived for that. All the sudden his jail was open. His automatic assumption: what jail ever had all of its doors fly open? Secondly, if a jail ever did have them all fly open, what prisoner would stay inside? He was right. And so he figured they're all gone, I've lost, the only reason to live, I'll lose my job, my prestige, they'll blame me, this localized earthquake and all that stuff. There's no indication that the people in town even felt the thing. Isn't that amazing? And so he takes out his little sword. The word "sword" is little one, dagger, and he's gonna kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. Well, out of the darkness comes a voice. It's the voice of Paul. He says, "Do thyself no harm, we're all here." I don't know the reaction of the jailer, but you can imagine (laughter). You say, well, why didn't the prisoners leave. I don't know except that God kept them there. Maybe the attachment of Paul and Silas; I don't know. For some reason they didn't leave. Maybe they were so scared that they couldn't leave. They'd been hearing Paul and Silas singing praises to God and all the sudden God moved this earthquake. They might have been too afraid to move. But they stayed and Paul says, Don't hurt yourself; everybody's here. That was too much to handle. It says that "he called for lights"...plural...he "sprang in and came trembling"...shaking..."and fell down before Paul and Silas." Now who's on top? Boy, how God can reverse the situation that fast. Here's a guy on his knees and Paul and Silas are standing there. And God did what He had to do. You see, salvation, beloved, and get this in your mind, salvation is a sovereign work, isn't it. It's the work of God. The man had had conviction of sin in his heart. God had done all the preparation. All that he needed was the blast to throw open his consciousness and the earthquake supplied that. And the guy came in and he knew that he was a lost man and he knew that he had no answers and he knew that life was meaningless and he knew that he was sinner and he knew everything and it all came to one great big head and he fell down before Paul and Silas. And here, God had just taken two guys that had been beaten up, sat around in that jail singing praises, and God now gives them an opportunity for point number 3, salvation preaching. And, man, they took advantage. It's so exciting to see how this works. Salvation is the work of God and you and I are just around to supply the content. You got that? It's the work of God. You and I are just there to provide the content.

So he comes and he asks the right question. He says, "What must I do to be saved?" He didn't say, uh, well, wha--how did this happen? W--why aren't you guys gone? W--well, what happened--what happened in this earthquake? He couldn't even think of the earthquake. You know what he saw in his own mind? He knew God was working in his heart. God had convicted him to that point already supernaturally. All he could think about is I'm in rebellion against God; I gotta get squared away. I'm sure he didn't even understand who this God was and all about Him; he just knew he was a lost man. And he fell on his knees and said, "'Sirs,'...the word is Lords or Masters...'what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.'" Now, I like a simple question and I like a simple answer. You know, another man asked Jesus a question very similar...a rich man. What do I need to do? he said to Jesus. And Jesus said, Well, you need to do this, friend. You need to sell all you have and give to the poor. You say, well, oh, are you saved by doing that? No. You say, well, why did he tell him that? Because he could never put his faith

in Christ until he'd gotten the barrier out of the way and the barrier was money. Do you know what the barrier in this man's life was? There wasn't any. He wasn't hung up on anything. He was so desperate, he just said, "What must I do to be saved?" and he said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." I mean, it was just, like, point me in the direction I need to go. That's all. He was ready. Nothing stood in his way. Beloved, that's the question and that's the answer. And after they had said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house," they spoke unto him the Word of the Lord." They first said salvation is by believing in Jesus Christ, then they taught him what Jesus Christ did and who He was, you see. And they taught everybody in his house.

I like the fact that he states the method of salvation very simply. Presentation is so simple. And I don't even need to say it; it's so obvious. Salvation comes by believing in Jesus Christ, doesn't it? There is no other salvation apart from faith in Christ. In Romans, chapter 3, Paul is talking about the terrible sinfulness of man and he says, How are you gonna be righteous? Righteousness is apart from law; it is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all that believe, you see. Salvation is simply believing. In John 1:12, John said, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that"..."what?..."believe on His Name." Believing in Jesus Christ! Chapter 2 of Acts, chapter 4 of Acts, chapter 8, chapter 11, chapter 13, chapter 15...in all of those chapters you'll find statements regarding believing in Jesus Christ. That's the only way of salvation. [In] Ephesians it says, "by grace are you saved through faith." Believing...a man is saved by believing, simply and only. There is no works involved. "...not of works lest any man should"..."what?..."boast." We'd just all be bragging about everything. You say, well, John, what am I supposed to believe? I don't want to just believe in believing. You know, a few people say I have faith in faith. I believe in believing. That is ridiculous. You're supposed to believe in something. What are you supposed to believe in? Jesus Christ. What about Him? One: who He is...who He is. John 20:31, "These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you might have life through His Name." You need to believe that He is who He claimed to be and that He can give life. That's who He is. The second thing you need to believe is what He did. Right? I Corinthians, chapter 15 says...really recites the gospel. He says, I preached unto you the gospel by which you are saved, unless you believe in vain. And then he says this. Here it is. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...buried...He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." There you have it. Believe in who He is and what He did. And what does Romans 10:9 and 10 say? "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." So, salvation is a question of believing that Jesus is who He claimed to be and believing that He did what He claimed to do. Now, that's salvation.

Well, that's all they said to the man. And then they went on, of course, having said "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," they told him, surely, in that verse 32 what it was that Christ had done that he was to believe in and his whole family. You say, well, does that teach that if a man gets saved, his whole house is automatically saved? "Thou shalt be saved and thy house." No, no, that doesn't mean if the father gets saved everybody's automatically a Christian. They all believed. You say, how do you know

they all believed. The end of verse 34 says, "believing in God with all his"...what?..."his house." They all believed. Salvation is by believing. Don't think you can get saved by going to church, reading the Bible, singing a hymn, thinking religious thoughts, sprinkling your human activity with divine salt. You can't get saved by being good, being baptized. You can't do it that way. You can be saved only by believing that Jesus is who He claimed to be and did what He claimed to do. And that's it and there's no works to it.

Well, suffering persecution led to singing praises led to salvation preaching and you know what happened. That led to the seeing of production. God gave results. Boy, when the gospel is preached and the heart is ready and everything is in motion, the results come. I love what happened. You say, what happened? The whole family got saved. It says at the end of verse 34 they all believed. And now there was a little group of women and now there was a jailer and his family and the church of Philippi had two groups coming together as one. You say, this is what the Lord wants, isn't it, production? Yes. Jesus said in John 15:16, "I pray that you might have fruit and that your fruit might"...what?..."remain." I want you to be productive. You say, well, did this fruit remain. You say, oh, I think this guy was really saved. You say, why?...four reasons.

One, verse 33, "he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes and was baptized..." "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord..." I think it's not only a question of believing in your heart, but being willing to take a public stand and confess Him as Lord. Right? He was baptized and his whole house, which is a public declaration of his commitment to Christ.

Second thing that shows me his salvation was real, it says at the beginning of verse 33, "he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes." Now, just get a hold of that, friends. This guy couldn't have cared less about them. In a flash, in an instant, he's washing their wounds. You say, what happened? Did they pay him some money? No. I'll tell you what happened. He was transformed. The only thing that could take a hard, old, beleaguered, belligerent, totally unsympathetic old crusty jailer and have him washing the wounds of people he just chucked into the deep dungeon is when God changes his life. Jesus said, "by this shall all men know that you are My disciples, because you have"...what?..."love one for another." Boy, he revealed that he was for real, bang, like that, because of his love for Paul. You know, he instantly fell in love with Paul and Silas. Have you had that experience since you believed? When you became a Christian, you all the sudden fell in love with Christians. Fantastic! That's exactly what happened to him. I John...I just love I John 5:1 and it says this. Listen. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." That's how you get saved, believing. Now, watch. "And everyone that loveth Him that begat"...everyone that loves God, the one who begat Christ..."loveth him also that is begotten of Him." Now, there's all kinds of ways to look at this. If you really love God and you really love Christ, you'll also really love who...Christians. John says in another place, if you say you're a Christian but you don't love your brother, you're a liar. They automatically, when they were saved, that little family fell in love with Paul and Silas. You know, in I Thessalonians, Paul said to the Thessalonians, nobody needs to teach you

to love; you're taught of God to do that.

Third thing that tells me they really were saved was hospitality. They did just what Lydia did. Verse 34: "When he had brought them into his house, he set food before them." They just...I think old Paul must have sat there, eating, thinking of the Psalm, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." You see what a little singing in jail did? Just...God used...here this guy puts them in his house and he cleans them up and he feeds them. You say, well, that doesn't necessarily qualify as salvation. It does in my mind. In James...listen to what James says...2:14...he says, Can faith save a man? A guy comes along and says, I believe, I believe, I believe. How do you know if he was for real? Well, here's a good test. Faith without works is what?...dead. And "if a brother or a sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you say unto him, 'Depart in peace; be warmed and filled.'" That's like, hey, I hope you find some food and some clothes. We'll be praying for you, friend (laughter), see. Oh, he says, come on, that kind of faith is dead. You know what true faith does, says James? It takes that brother, feeds him and gives him clothes. That's exactly what they did to Paul and Silas, fed them and gave them some clothes. That's why I know he was really saved. He had the fruit of it...the works that issue from true faith.

Fourth reason I know he was saved is in verse 34. "...he set food before them and"...what?..."rejoiced." Do you know that a few minutes before that he was a suicide? Now, you say, what would make a man change that fast?...God and God, alone. God alone can transform a man that fast. This guy, he was gonna kill himself and now the jail's in crumbles. Who knows where the prisoners are? He's in there having a party (laughter). God changed him. I have no question about the fact that he was a believer. You see, there's production when there's preaching, when there's praise and when there's persecution.

Lastly, and I'm just gonna fire this past and we'll be done, just this simple thought. The last point was securing protection. What was Paul's greatest concern whenever he had a group of believers?...take care of them. Inevitably he was concerned with taking care of believers. So he thought to himself, I'm gonna leave town now and, you know, all these little Christians here are gonna be under the gun. So God had a plan. Oh, it's so exciting and fantastic! Look at verse 35. "And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants saying, 'Let those men go.'" Here these two big wheels sent; you tell them, let those guys go. They've had enough. We beat them up good and one night in that crummy jail and they'll get out of town and won't bother us anymore. The keeper of the prison told this to Paul. He comes in and he says, hey, "the magistrates have sent to let you go, now...depart in peace." Terrific! Look at this. "Paul said unto them, 'They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans..." Wham! You see, it was forbidden under Roman law to ever corporeally inflict a wound on a Roman citizen. That was against the law. All a Roman had to do was say, I am a Roman citizen and they couldn't put one wound on his body. That was the right of Roman citizenship. You know what happened? They had violated Roman law. You say, well, why didn't Paul say it earlier? God didn't want him to, because if they hadn't got beaten, they wouldn't have got to jail. If they hadn't got to jail,

this whole family wouldn't have gotten saved. But here, Paul now says, I am a Roman. Now, he says, they threw us in prison, now are they gonna thrust us out so quietly and privately? "Nay, verily"...well, he is really in control...he says, "let them come themselves and fetch us out." He says, you go tell those boys I got something to say to them. Get them over here (laughter). Get those guys over here. So these lictors, these policemen, go back and they "told these words unto the magistrates"...verse 38..."and they feared." Oh, they were scared when they heard they were Romans. Why? They had violated Roman law. You know what that meant? They could lose their position. And they probably had the same box the little jailer had, too. And they were gonna lose their Roman position and that scared them to death. But don't you know how good this is? This is what's called spiritual blackmail...mmm...(laughter). See, in effect, Paul is saying, you touch one Christian and I'll report you to Rome. You see, Paul is establishing the fact that he knows they have violated Roman law and they are now really afraid of Paul. Listen. He came back to Philippi later on and they didn't lift a finger. And so here he secures that little group of believers. Isn't that beautiful to see Paul care for his flock? And incidentally, he left Luke there to care for them, too. Isn't it important that they didn't take Timothy and Luke into prison since they didn't fit the perfect picture of the Jew and the Roman citizen that Paul and Silas did? Oh, how God orders everything. Well, then the magistrates did come. Boy, they knew and they were scared. Verse 39, they actually showed up and they besought them and they brought them out and they desired them and it's just kind of a pleading. Oh, oh, I'm so sorry, oh, oh, please, quiet, you know, leave...see. So \_\_\_\_\_ Paul and Silas played it pretty cool. It says "they went out of the prison and entered into the house of Lydia"...just stuck around town for awhile just to let them know who was boss (laughter)..."and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them and departed." There you have it, securing protection. Beloved, that's just exactly the cycle of evangelism all the way around to the fact that they actually cared for the new believers.

Let me close with this. A man stood up in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada four years after the sinking of the Titanic in a testimony meeting and this is what he said. He said, I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought a man toward me in the sea and his name was John Harper. He was hanging to a piece of wreckage. And as he neared me, he said, Man, are you saved? No, I'm not, I replied. He said, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. And the waves took him away but strange to say, they brought him back a little later and he said, Are you saved yet? (Laughter) And I said, No. And he said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. And I watched him go down. And he said, there alone in the night with two miles of water under me, I believed and I was saved. He said, I was John Harper's last convert.

You know, there's a lot of sinking men in this world. It's a simple message. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and...what?...thou shalt be saved. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for salvation offered in Christ and we pray for anyone who's here today who's not met Christ, that they might believe and be saved. We pray in Jesus' blessed Name. Amen.



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