

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/16/95
Acts 16:25-34 "When Should a Person Be Baptized?"

Of all men, he was one of the most unlikely individuals you would expect to see getting baptized (at least humanly speaking). He was not the "religious type." In fact, he was a former military man who had grown quite calloused to human pain over the years. He had a stable job in a very affluent city, a job which he took quite seriously. But one night, his entire life changed. Not that he sought the change, mind you. He didn't. God graciously broke into his life, and this "man's man" humbled himself and entered the waters of baptism--in the middle of the night, in fact!

Who was this man? Actually, we don't know his name, not that it matters. The Bible identifies him as a jailor who lived in the Roman city of Philippi. His true story is told in Acts 16.

Tonight it will be our privilege to see six individuals be baptized. Perhaps you're wondering, "Why are these people being baptized?" Someone might say, "It's because this is a Baptist church, isn't it? Baptist churches baptize people. That's the reason." Though baptism is a Baptist distinctive, that's not the reason. Someone else might argue, "These people are being baptized to make their salvation complete, to put the finishing touches on their religious experience, aren't they?" The answer to this question is clearly no. Baptism doesn't add to salvation, nor is it essential to salvation.

When should a person be baptized? That's a vital question for us to answer tonight. It's also a question God answers for us in His Word. In fact, we can glean great insight into this issue by looking at the experience of the jailor I mentioned earlier. Perhaps you are wondering, "When should a person be baptized?"

Proposition: From the experience of the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:25-34, we can see four qualifications a person must meet in order to be baptized.

- I. I must admit my personal need (27-29).
- II. I must ask the right question (30).
- III. I must accept Christ as my Lord and Savior (31).
- IV. I must attest to a changed life (32-34).
 - A. Evidence #1: He hungered for the Word (32).
 - B. Evidence #2: He cleaned Paul's wounds (33).
 - C. Evidence #3: He made a public identification with Christ (33).
 - D. Evidence #4: He shared with God's people (34).
 - E. Evidence #5: He exhibited joy (34).

The Setting:

The episode took place in Philippi, an influential Roman city in modern day Greece. Paul and Silas traveled there with the good news of Christ. The Spirit of God blessed their ministry in a significant way. First, a well-to-do lady named Lydia converted to Christ and was baptized (15). Next, the missionaries set free a young servant-girl from the control of demons (18). Not everyone approved, however, namely, the servant's master. He accused the missionaries of being troublemakers, and got the law involved. Paul and Silas were beaten with rods, and thrown into jail.

Don't minimize the injustice God's servants endured here. The beating was severe. And the jailor stuck them in stocks in the deepest part of the prison (24). Commentator F. F. Bruce points out (336), "It was not the jailor's business to take any thought for the prisoner's comfort, but to make sure they did not escape. He was probably a retired soldier, and while the training of a Roman soldier developed many fine qualities of character, these did not include much of the milk of human kindness." God's providence was directing the whole ordeal, as we'll see in a moment.

Let's jump into the narrative at v 25, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God. And the prisoners heard them." Perhaps the jailor did as well.

Suddenly (26), the night singing was interrupted by a fierce earthquake. The tremor rocked the prison walls, broke open the prison doors, and unloosed the prisoners' chains.

Guess what the jailor did. V 27 "And the keeper of the prison, awaking out of his sleep and seeing the prison doors open, drew out his sword and would have killed himself..." He assumed the prisoners had fled. He assumed wrong.

Paul cried out in v 28, "Do thyself no harm; for we are all here." We see the jailor's response in v 29, "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas."

Right here's the first qualification that must be met in order to be baptized.

I. I must admit my personal need (27-29).

The jailor knew there was something very different about these two prisoners, about the God of these two prisoners. When he fell trembling at their feet, it wasn't out of fright from the earthquake. It was because he knew these two men had something he did not have. He had a personal need. He had buried that thought all his life, but in the presence of Paul and Silas, he could deny it no longer.

Frankly, no one can be saved until they do what the jailor did. I must admit my personal need. I remember about three years ago when one of the individuals being baptized tonight came to my house in inner turmoil, and that night admitted, "I have a need. I'm missing something on the inside." Which brings us to qualification #2.

II. I must ask the right question (30).

What question? The one the jailor asked in v 30, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" My friends, that is the right question. It's possible for people to know they have a need, but then ask the wrong question, "Can I join your church?" Or, "Can I be baptized?"

Please notice that question again. "What must I do to be saved?" Saved from what? We don't want to put words in the jailor's mouth, but apparently he had overheard bits and pieces of the gospel Paul and Silas brought to Philippi. He knew he needed to be saved--not from a bad self-esteem, not merely from personal fears (like we hear today)--but saved from sin. He needed spiritual deliverance.

Just like everyone of us does. Why? God is holy. We are not. We are all sinners born under the wrath of God. We can't save ourselves. We need to be saved.

When should a person be baptized? We're looking at four qualifications in the jailor's life. I must admit personal need. I must ask the right question. Thirdly...

III. I must accept Christ as my Lord and Savior (31).

V 31 is one of the most important verses in the Bible when it comes to helping a person know how to be saved. Paul and Silas respond, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Jailor, do you want to be saved? Then come to grips with the truth about Jesus Christ. He is the Lord. He is the only One Who can save you. He lived a perfect life in your behalf. He shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Believe in Him. Receive Him. Salvation is through a Person, the person of Jesus Christ.

That's what a once hardened prison-guard discovered one dark night long ago. So have the individuals who will be baptized tonight. But there's a fourth qualification.

IV. I must attest to a changed life (32-34).

When was the jailor saved? There's no mention in the text that he bowed his head or prayed a prayer. We do know he received Christ as his Savior. How do we know? Because of the evidences. What strikes me about this jailor is that he proved his conversion by his deeds. There is evidence recorded in this passage that Christ had truly changed his life, right from the start. Notice four evidences.

A. Evidence #1: He hungered for the Word (32).

V 32 states, "And they spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me (Jn 10:27)." The first evidence that a person is saved is a hunger for the Word of God. Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby (1 Pt 2:1-2)."

B. Evidence #2: He cleaned Paul's wounds (33).

V 33 is amazing, "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes." Stop there and think about something. Who caused those wounds? Did the jailor? If he didn't, we do know that a few hours earlier, he approved of them. He aggravated those wounds by sticking Paul and Silas in stocks in the darkest, dingiest part of the prison. Now he's cleansing those wounds. He's a changed man. His attitude has changed. His allegiance has changed. He no longer lives for Rome, but for Christ and Christ's people.

C. Evidence #3: He made a public identification with Christ (33).

That's what baptism is. Remember, it's still the middle of the night, but watch what happened next. V 33 says that right after the jailor washed the wounds, he was baptized. As the early church leader Chrysostom observed (Bruce, 338), "He washed and was washed."

Baptism is a public identification with Christ. It doesn't save a person. The jailor was saved when he believed in Christ. So were his family members. But baptism was the outward sign of the inward decision. It was the evidence that he meant business. F. B. Meyer made this observation, "In all His people Christ is PRESENT. In some He is PROMINENT. In a few He is PRE-EMINENT."

D. Evidence #4: He shared with God's people (34).

The commentator, William Barclay, made the following insightful observation, "Unless a man's Christianity makes him kind it is not real. Unless a man's professed change of heart is guaranteed by his change of deeds it is a spurious thing." He's right.

Notice the very tangible act the jailor did next. V 34 "And when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them." True Christians share with each other, not to earn God's favor, but because of what God has done for them.

E. Evidence #5: He exhibited joy (34).

V 34 finishes with these words. He "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Joy. Just think of it. The jailor had gone from trembling fear to exuberant joy in less than a night! In fact, I would remind you that all five evidences happened the first night he was saved! Why was that? Because when Christ saves a person, He changes that person!

In a few minutes, we will be privileged to see several individuals make a public identification with Christ. As part of the new members class requirements, each was asked to write out their personal testimony. I'd like to read a portion of one:

"My life as a non-Christian was one without peace. I found myself never being satisfied and feeling incomplete." But Jesus Christ changed all that! In answer to the question, Since becoming a Christian, in what ways has your life changed? the person wrote this, "As a Christian, I am at peace with myself knowing that Jesus walks with me always. I now know that things of this world are temporary while God's love is everlasting. I feel happy to be a Christian and now am looking forward to growing as a Christian in order to know Jesus better."

We began this evening with a question--When should a person be baptized? Perhaps you are thinking about being baptized. That's great, but I would ask you to consider the four qualifications we've seen in the life of the jailor. Have you ever done what the jailor did, by the grace of God?

Have you admitted your personal need?

Have you asked the right question?

Have you accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord?

Have you attested to the fact that Christ has changed your life by tangible evidence?