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WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

– ACTS 16:16-40. – JULY 11. –

Golden Text: – "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

PAUL AND SILAS, bruised and doubtless bleeding from the cruel beating they had received at the command of the rulers of Philippi, were enabled to praise God in the prison, notwithstanding the fact that it must have been, like other prisons of that time, a most unhealthful and disagreeable dungeon. That night they sang praises to God. The other prisoners listening must have been surprised, it probably being the first time hymns to God had ever risen from that prison. If any other songs at all had ever echoed from its walls they were probably ribald, and inspired by alcoholic spirits. It is indeed remarkable that practically none but the Christian religion possesses a hymnology. Buddhists have none; the Mohammedans have none; the Confucians have none, and these three represent more than one-half of the world's population. Indeed, there seems to be nothing happifying or consoling in any religion except that of the Bible. The Bible alone teaches the love of God, his care over his consecrated saints and his provision for their change to glory, honor and immortality – yea, for the awakening of all the families of the earth and the bringing of all to a knowledge of the grace of God and to opportunities for life eternal.

We can readily see that nothing less than a strong, living faith in God enabled those two missionaries to feel that their adversities endured for the sake of the Gospel meant to them Divine approval, if rightly received. It was because they realized that their trying experiences were but "light afflictions" which, under Divine providence, would work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory – only this enabled these

distressed men to triumph in their hour of distress and to praise God for the privilege of suffering as *members* of the Body of Christ, filling up a share of the sufferings of Christ that by and by they might also share his glory as members of his Body – members of the great antitypical Moses, the Mediator of the New Covenant. – Acts 3:23.

These things are written for our instruction, that, beholding the faithfulness of others, we might be encouraged. Our Covenant is the same as theirs and theirs the same as the Lord's, for the sufferings of Christ are [R4406 : page 168] one, however varied in character, and the glories to follow will be one, although the sharers will differ as star differeth from star in glory. The greater the sufferings faithfully endured, uncomplainingly, rejoicingly, the greater will be the reward in the Kingdom of our Father and of our Lord.

A WELL-TIMED EARTHQUAKE

Whilst the missionaries were singing, an earthquake shock was experienced which jarred the walls and loosed the staples of the chains whereby they were bound, releasing also the bars wherewith their prison-doors were held in place. The jailor, finding the doors down and supposing that the prisoners had escaped, and knowing that he would be held responsible, drew his sword and was about to suicide, when St. Paul called to him and said: "Do thyself no harm. We are all here." By this time the jailer was fully convinced that the missionaries committed to his care were remarkable men – not ordinary criminals. Possibly, indeed, he had some knowledge of demonism and obsession and had heard that, by word of mouth, one of these men had spoiled a supposedly Divine "oracle," by exercising some superior power.

At all events the jailer was now ready to care for these prisoners and to hear the message of God's love. Presumably he

first secured the prison, the while thinking over all these matters, and then brought the missionaries into his own living quarters in the prison. He attended to their comfort and meantime heard from them something respecting their mission – respecting Jesus the Messiah and his death as the world's Redeemer. He was convicted of sin. He realized in a general way at least that all mankind are sinners, aliens, separated from God by wicked works. He longed for a realization of a forgiveness of his own sins and a reconciliation with his Creator. And these missionaries, above all others, could help him. Hence his inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" What must I do to come into relationship with [R4407 : page 168] God, that I, like you, might be able to realize his loving care in all of my affairs; that, like you, I might be able to glory in tribulation, and to realize that all things will work together for my good under Divine providence?

The answer came promptly: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Taking this as the text the missionaries explained to the jailer and his household some of the philosophy of the Divine Plan of Atonement, the death of Jesus, the just for the unjust, the blessing that, in due time, is to reach Adam and his race through the resurrection processes and the privilege now of hearing and accepting the Divine call to joint-heirship with Jesus as his "members" in the *sufferings* of this present time and the *glory* that shall follow.

The Truth-seed sank into good soil. Those present believed and gratefully accepted the privilege of discipleship – to suffer for Christ's sake. Forthwith they were baptised, thus symbolizing their death to the world and to sin and to self, and their desire to walk in newness of life as "*members*" of the Christ. Ah, how the missionaries must have realized that they were as much providentially directed to the jail (by the injustice of the

magistrates) as they had been previously guided to Lydia and the riverside prayer meeting! Their faith was strengthened. They were willing to endure hardness with patience and joy for the sake of enjoying this great privilege of carrying the good tidings to others.

According to some standards it was now high time for these missionaries to strike for Five Thousand Dollars a year and a parsonage, and especially to strike against any further persecution or beatings and to tell the Lord that they had had enough along the lines of *self-sacrificing*. But the effect was just the opposite. They were the more encouraged to go on, to endure still further sufferings. We must see to it that our experiences tally with those of Jesus and the apostles. We must not be looking for any other kind nor be satisfied unless we find opportunities for suffering for the Truth's sake. We may be assured that although times have changed in some respects our Lord was quite right when he declared, "Whosoever will live godly in this present time shall suffer persecution." It may be in his own home and family or in the Church or from the world; he will not escape if he is faithful. If, therefore, any of us is *escaping* persecutions he should feel fearful of his condition and make careful examination as to whether or not he is faithful to all the privileges and opportunities he can find. This does not mean that we should seek persecutions in the sense of doing foolish things or doing proper things in a foolish manner. But it does mean that we should not shrink the responsibility of proper conduct, because of fear of consequences. Fear is one of the most subtle foes of the "little flock." It should be offset by trust, faith in God.

PAUL AND SILAS SHARERS IN SUFFERINGS

The account tells us that St. Paul alone rebuked the evil spirit and thus he alone was responsible for the tumult. We can readily see how Silas might improperly have taken a course in opposition

– might have publicly reprimanded St. Paul and partially, at least, have joined with the multitude and thus have escaped arrest and beating and imprisonment. Or if his disloyalty had been greater than this he might have upbraided St. Paul and said, Why did you not mind your own business and let that young woman alone? She was commending us, not opposing us. We should have gone right along preaching the Gospel. You are always getting us into trouble. I intend to leave and to start on a more successful missionary tour of my own. Alas, we all know some who have just such a wrong spirit as would take such a wrong view of the situation. We are glad that it was not so with Silas – that he was a worthy companion to the noble Paul. He recognized the Lord's blessing upon the Apostle and that he was being specially used of the Lord and that whatever experiences came to them the Lord was able and willing to overrule for good. Thus Silas was privileged to share in the privileges of the beating, of the songs, of the conversion of the jailer. Surely it means a great deal and brings a great deal of blessing to have faith in the Lord and to be obedient to Divine providences and not too worldly-wise and cautious and self-seeking.

The Apostle mentions in Heb. 10:32 some who "endured a great fight of affliction," and some others who were merely their *companions* in the shame without experiencing the same losses. The Apostle points out that God appreciates faithfulness in either of these respects and will duly give a reward. Let us be *faithful* to the Lord, followers of his leading and sharers of his blessings.

"LET THEM COME AND FETCH US"

The magistrates evidently realized that they had no just cause against the missionaries. The beating and imprisoning of them was merely to satisfy the public clamor, just as when Pilate similarly commanded Jesus to be beaten, not as a satisfaction for

justice, but to appease the anger of the multitude. But St. Paul had not been a lawyer for nothing. The night before he had probably attempted to tell the rulers that he and Silas were Roman citizens and had the right to demand a fair trial before having any kind of punishment, but probably the clamor of the people was so great that their protests were unheard. Now, however, the missionaries sent word to the magistrates that they were Roman citizens and had been unjustly dealt with and would have to be treated in such a manner as would show that they had done no wrong. This would avoid leaving a reproach upon the faith at Philippi. The public should not say to them, "Your teachers were tried and expelled from this city and forbidden to return." On the other hand, notice the spirit of compromise. The missionaries did not insist on going forth to preach in public and demand that they be given legal protection in the exercise of their liberties. On the contrary, they concluded they had accomplished all in their power and that God's providence was now directing [R4407 : page 169] them elsewhere. They acted upon Jesus' counsel, "If they persecute you in one city flee to another."

Thus a peaceful compromise was effected by which the magistrates were relieved from further difficulty and the missionaries were honorably led forth as men who had done nothing amiss, but who had concluded that in the interests of peace they would quit the city, although their rights as Roman citizens would have permitted them to remain. Some of the Lord's people make the mistake of not insisting sufficiently on their rights and others err in the opposite way of insisting too much for their earthly rights. Here in St. Paul's condition we find illustrated the proper course – "the spirit of a sound mind." He insisted on such of his rights as were reasonable and necessary for the cause, and he freely relinquished other rights in the interests of peace; in harmony with the Scriptures, "Seek peace and pursue it;" and again, in harmony with his own exhortation, "So far as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

Before separating they returned to the home of Lydia and "met the brethren" and comforted them. What they said for the comfort of the brethren is not difficult to imagine. They surely recounted to them the joy they had experienced in suffering for Christ's sake and how the Lord overruled their trials and difficulties, sufferings and imprisonment for good, in that thereby the jailer and his family were added to the number of brethren – "the Lord's jewels."

Whoever has read the New Testament properly has surely noticed the spirit of brotherhood therein recorded as prevalent amongst those accepted of the Lord as members of the household of faith. And whoever intelligently comes in contact with those who are now rejoicing in the Present Truth must surely note something of the same spirit of brotherhood, in a remarkable degree.

"FATHER, GLORIFY THY NAME!"

"Father, glorify thy name!"
Is my humble prayer;
Not because in all thy joys
I may have a share;
But because my love for thee
Has grown deeper, Lord,
I would have thy blessed name
By all hearts adored.

"Father, glorify thy name!"
Is my earnest prayer.
It may cost me keenest pain –
Yet, O Lord, I dare
To uplift this fervent plea,
And the answer claim:

Though it mean the cross for me,
Glorify thy name!

"Father, glorify thy name!"
Is my daily prayer.
All the loss my life may know
Thou wilt help me bear;
To thy will I say, Amen!
In thy love I trust:
Father, glorify thy name
Through unworthy dust!

"Father, glorify thy name!"
Is my constant prayer;
I have nought to dread or fear –
Thou hast all my care.
Death can be but gain for me,
E'en a death of shame:
Father, grant my humble prayer,
Glorify thy name!

– F. G. BURROUGHS.

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