

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
1st Sunday after Epiphany
January 8 & 11, 2009 Acts 16:25f



About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

People of God—rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

The day after Christmas I bought my annual copy of *USA Today!* Once every year they do a two page article called *Passages!* Passages is a very thoughtful list of famous, gifted, influential people who passed away this past year. Sometimes you have heard of them and sometimes not. A man named Larry Levine passed away. He helped Phil Specter reinvent this thing called "the wall of sound". I just like saying that—"the wall of sound"! The most important sound in the whole wide world is the Gospel. People need to hear the Gospel. That's why pastors always say a word of prayer—just before the sermon—that we don't do anything to get in the way of law and gospel—powerful and effective in the hearts of God's people. Only the Holy Spirit—can make God's Word—take root and grow in people's hearts! Mr. Robbins—died. Mr. Robbins—along with his brother-in-law Mr. Baskins—invented that whole 31 flavors ice cream. Sweeter than any ice cream—is the simple profound truth—that all our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. A man named Kermit died—Kermit Scott—childhood friend of Jim Henson—Kermit Scott is thought to be the inspiration for Kermit the Frog. How wonderful a human being would you have to be—to be the inspiration for Kermit the Frog? It isn't easy being green. And it isn't easy being a human being—either! It isn't easy being a Christian—in this world all infected by sin, death and the power of the devil. In spirit we cry out with the Jailer at Philippi:

What Must I Do To Be Saved!

The answer is the central truth of all of God's Word:

- 1. Believe the Gospel**
- 2. Be baptized**

The context this week? Paul and his faithful co-worker Silas are in the city of Philippi. If you were in adult Bible Class last Sunday—you will remember this part. Philippi was named for Philip of Macedon—the father of Alexander the Great! Philippi was a place famous for hot springs, mineral springs and mud baths. Hence it's original name Krenides—which means

fountains. Philippi was also famous for gold mines – veins of gold were in the hills. But eventually the gold ran out and most of the people left. Still – the Lord of history had plans for this city. Not long after Julius Caesar was assassinated – there was a terrible battle at Philippi. On the one side were the assassins – men like Brutus and Cassius. On the other side were Octavian and Mark Anthony. Those on Octavian’s side won. This was all part of God’s plan to rescue us. You know the Scriptures: **“And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Octavian – that is Caesar Augustus – that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Quirinius was governor of Syria.”** Luke 2 This was all part of God’s plan – so that Joseph and Mary would be in Bethlehem – when the Christ-child would be born.

It was after Jesus died and rose again – that Paul and Silas were preaching law and gospel in Philippi. **On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home...Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.**

Can you imagine sharing God’s Word – telling people about Jesus – when someone actually physically possessed by a demon starts trailing you – harassing you – shouting after you that you are servants of the Most High God – showing people the way to heaven? And when – in Jesus’ name you cast out this demon – you are falsely accused – and beaten? Can you imagine being tied to a post – your clothes ripped off – and your back literally torn to shreds? Can you imagine being thrown literally into a dungeon – a place dark and cold and filthy – I mean truly filthy – with mice and rats and bugs – and the most horrible prisoners and brutal prison guards? You are locked in a cell – in chains – with your feet in the stocks. What would you be doing about midnight? **About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.** Praying and singing. Only Jesus could make your faith so strong that in the darkness and filth of that dungeon – you could sing! Sing songs of praise and thanksgiving – that Jesus had spared your life. That you didn’t die from that beating. Thank Jesus that one day you would be in heaven – where all your wounds – even all your scars would be gone! Sing songs of praise and thanksgiving – that you were counted worthy – worthy to suffer in some small measure – like Jesus suffered – for the sake of the gospel! Other prisoners listened! You can be sure – when you face troubles and problems other people will listen to what you say. What do you say – when painful troubles

and problems come into your life? Do you say – what’s the point – what’s the use of faith and prayer if these things still happen to me? Or do you say – Jesus loves me, this I know. I am Jesus’ little lamb. The Lord is always with me – and he will see me through this trouble, too! Jesus will make even this painful time work out for my ultimate spiritual good. If I am deathly ill – Jesus will either make me better or he will make me perfect. Remember and repeat what Jeremiah wrote, **“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to help you, not to hurt you. Plans to give you hope and a future!”** Jeremiah 23 We have that hope and that future because of Jesus’ cross and empty tomb!

Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. Jesus can do that. He can make the very earth itself tremble. It is a very small thing for the creator of Heaven and Earth – to make it move. A small thing for him to make prison doors – I don’t care how big the locks are – to fly open – for everybody’s chains to come loose – I don’t care how rusted shut they might be. **The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.** When the jailer saw every cell door open – he immediately assumed that all the prisoners had escaped. He would be held accountable. The authorities would give him the death penalty – but not before making him pay. And so he thought the merciful thing would be to take his own life. Something terrible might happen to us. We might – in a moment think there is no hope. We might be so sad, so depressed, so embarrassed, so ashamed – we might think the only thing to do is to self-destruct! But despair is never right. Jesus’ forgiving love will never fail you. To despair is to do unimaginable hurt and harm to all the people who love you. Know that whatever we have been – what ever we have done – no matter how horrible – Jesus died for that sin, too!

But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. Believe in Jesus! This too is a gift of God – worked by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Believe in Jesus. Don’t doubt! Don’t deny. Know in your heart of hearts that Jesus is the only Savior from sin. Believe in Jesus! Know that he loves you and forgives you. Be baptized! The Jailer and his whole household. That would be his wife – his children and their children – his servants and their children, too. Any babies – any infants – any toddlers? I would imagine! Think about your Christmas parties. Did you have children there? Didn’t you have grandchildren, too? Any time we have people over – there are little people – newborns – toddlers – little people. Paul and Silas baptized them all! The jailer showed his love by washing Paul and Silas’ wounds. And then they showed Jesus’ love – as baptism washed away sins and planted saving faith. What a miracle of grace in the middle of the night!

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!” Alexander Solzhenitsyn – died this year. He was a Russian man who wrote about the horrors of Dictator Joseph Stalin’s slave labor camps. He wrote about the gulags – work camps where literally millions of people were enslaved. Sometimes it’s painful even to read about man’s inhumanity to man. Again it’s difficult to imagine what it must have been like – to be prisoners behind barbed wire – beaten and starved – until you die. But no man-made prison can begin to compare to how forever horrible it would be to spend eternity in hell. We are saved – we are rescued – we are set free by

Jesus – who took all our sins away. Paul Newman died this year. Paul was 83 years old. The headline said he *was a good egg, too!* That's nice – *a good egg!* You would want people to say that after you died, too, wouldn't you? A good egg because he was so generous. You see – besides being a very successful actor – Paul Newman was even more successful selling salad dressing. It seems for Christmas presents he used to give away this homemade salad dressing – and he got the idea maybe it was good enough to sell. The next thing you know he is selling everything from steak sauce to popcorn. In 26 years he made so much money – he gave away over \$250 million dollars! Paul Newman said *he wasn't running for sainthood.* And we aren't either. We aren't doing acts of kindness and charity to get noticed by people. But the Scriptural fact is – *we are saints* – by grace through faith. We are saints – heirs of heaven – because all our sins are washed away. We are saints – because Jesus has washed away all our hurtful mistakes!

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!” Mr. Blackwell died this year. He was famous for every year making a list of rich and powerful and famous people who didn't wear outfits that he approved of. He would mock and ridicule their lack of taste and fashion. Yves Saint Laurent died, too. He was a very famous French designer. He used to stitch his initials *ysl* onto the very expensive clothes that he designed. I wonder if these people whose passing this world took note of – are dressed in the robes of righteousness – that Jesus bought at the exceedingly high price of his sinless life – and his innocent blood. Levi Stubbs died. He was 72 years old. He was the front man – the lead singer for the Four Tops. I love those guys – their harmonies – and the way they would all dance exactly the same – with all the hand motions – and then they spin around. Levi died in his sleep. Isn't that the way almost every one wants to die? We want to pray, *“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake – I pray the Lord my soul to take. And this I ask for Jesus' sake!”* Levi died in his sleep. By the grace of God – that's how we can die too. We can fall asleep in Jesus and wake up to see him face to face. Amen!

To God alone all glory!
Rev. Anthony E. Schultz