

Why Are We Here?

Lesson 3

To Help All People Experience a New Life in Jesus Christ

Paul and Silas in Prison

Acts 16:25-34

As we ended our last lesson, Paul was on his way back home to Tarsus, where he would remain for about fourteen years, studying and maturing in the faith. In today's lesson, in Acts 16:25-34, we find Paul with his friend Silas in Prison. Let me fill in Paul's story from Tarsus to the prison in the town of Philippi in the country of Macedonia.

We begin with Paul out of the way back in Tarsus, and we hear that *"the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase."* (Acts 9:31)

In Acts 11 - 12, Luke tells us that the Jewish Christians were only sharing the Gospel with non-believing Jews – not Gentiles. But up in Antioch, some Jews shared the Gospel with the Gentiles. This news arrived back in Jerusalem, and Barnabas was sent to Antioch to discover the truth. In Antioch, Barnabas was thrilled with the new Gentile believers and gave his blessing to the endeavor. Barnabas then traveled to Tarsus and brought Paul back to Antioch. Paul had been out of the picture for almost fourteen years. At that time, a prophet named Agabus told the Church in Antioch that a great famine was coming. Barnabas and Paul were sent to Jerusalem with funds to help support the believers during the famine. Luke confirmed that the famine occurred in the days of Caesar Claudius. After delivering the offering, Barnabas and Saul then returned to Antioch.

In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit announced that Barnabas and Paul would be sent on a missionary journey. The two were ordained and sent out to share the Gospel. At that time, John Mark was added to the evangelism team. The team would head toward the seaport to take a ship to Cyprus, but at the port of Antioch is the village of Seleucia. Barnabas and Paul did not wait to share the gospel in Cyprus; they began to share the Gospel with the people where they were boarding to sail to Cyprus. From Acts 13 through 14, Luke details Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey until they arrived back in Antioch, where they gave a full report to the Church.

Acts 15 tells us that in Antioch, while Barnabas and Paul were on the first missionary journey, the Christian Jews from Judea had arrived and were beginning to try to institutionalize the Church with a manmade Jewish regulations and traditions based slightly, but not fully, on the ancient Mosaic Law. Their teaching in Antioch attempted to restrict the Gentiles, requiring them to become fully Jewish before allowing them full membership in the Church. Paul and Barnabas were resolutely against the teaching. The Church in Antioch failed to accept Paul's position and sent the missionary team to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with all the Apostles and Church leaders.

Upon arrival in Jerusalem in AD 50, the source of the restrictive doctrine was discovered. It had been propagated by the converts to Christianity from one of the strictest Pharisee segments of the Sanhedrin. It was just twenty years after the resurrection of the Lord, and the Church leadership was in turmoil. The primary focus of Christianity was sidetracked. The central tenets of the Church had been replaced with arguments over ethnic origin and adherence to manmade rules and regulations. The Judaizers, Jews who wanted Gentiles to convert to Judaism before being saved, were given ample time and opportunity to speak on the matter. We can only wonder why it took Peter so long to stand and speak. Twenty years of ministry and growth in the Lord had changed

Peter's nature. However, when he spoke, he referred to Cornelius's conversion with his family and friends in Caesarea in AD 34 - 35, fifteen to sixteen years earlier. Also, at that time, he was questioned by the Church leaders concerning his actions, and the Church accepted his explanation. At this point, Barnabas and Paul join the conversation, supporting Peter's position and adding a report of what they had experienced over the past six years. Things worked out well for Paul in this debate; he won.

James, the half-brother of Jesus and the pastor of the Church in Jerusalem, made the final speech and decision. We do not know why he was allowed to speak since he was not an Apostle. Nevertheless, he decided to write a letter to all the Churches to settle the matter. The decision was not purely in favor of the Gentile way of life. James instructed the Gentiles to abstain from animals sacrificed to idols, animals that had been strangled, and animals that still contained their blood. They must also abstain from fornication. All were highly offensive to Jews. Therefore, since the Jews had synagogues in just about every city and town in the civilized world, the decision was made to institute these four prohibitions to keep from offending the Jewish brethren who also needed to come to the Lord.

The Church is to be guided under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them in all truth. The Judaizers were silenced, but only for a short time. They were not pleased with the decision of the Apostles and the Church leaders, and they would fight this battle again, in a different setting.

A band of godly men delivered the letter to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas were among them. Silas and Judas Barsabbas were inspired preachers who took the lead in defending the instructions of the letter. From there, many of the Church leaders depart for missionary work while Paul, Barnabas, and Silas remain in Antioch for a long time. Remaining in Antioch set up the logical sad encounter that took place between Paul and Peter at the next point in the story. Paul mentions the incident in the following passage. Galatians 2:11-21

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.¹² For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.¹³ The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?' 'We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;¹⁵ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.¹⁶ But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!¹⁷ For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.¹⁸ For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.¹⁹ I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.²⁰ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly. (Galatians 2:11-21)

Peter had probably made the three-hundred-mile journey to Antioch to see how things were going, and he mingled with Gentile Greek Christians in complete freedom. But rumors made their way back to Jerusalem of Peter's associations with the Gentiles and the Judaizers took the opportunity to reopen the topic settled in AD 50 at the council of Jerusalem. The Judaizers threatened Peter and all the Jewish brethren, who submitted to their threats and sided with the Judaizer's demands. Paul stood up against them all and won them back. It was another major crisis of debate in the Church that was only twenty years old. The issue was handled this time in Antioch where it began.

At the end of Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas left on their second missionary journey to visit all the towns where they established Churches on their first journey. After visiting the towns, they moved on to Troas where Paul had the vision to go to Philippi in Macedonia. Paul was keen on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, staying away from the places that would damage the work of the Lord during this missionary journey. There were several synagogues in Philippi and we can only wonder why Paul did not enter one of them to worship the day he arrived, as was his custom, but he did not. Nevertheless, he decided to go to the riverside, seeking a peaceful place to pray. Day after day, Paul and his team returned to the riverside to pray. Day after day, they were bothered by a demon-possessed slave girl. It was interesting that the demons in this girl never fail to proclaim the Highest God as who He was. Neither did they fail to proclaim to the world the men who serve the Highest God. Very few Christians and Jews were ready to proclaim God to the world, yet the demons did not hold their testimony. Paul rid the girl of the demons. The men who own this slave girl were incensed because they made their fortune displaying her demonic behavior before the normal people for a price. The ability of these men to have Paul and Silas thrown in jail was actually precipitated by a decree from Claudius Caesar the year before. Claudius was fed up with the Jews in Rome and commanded that they leave the country. Because of the new law, and since Paul had disrupted the business of the masters, they were beaten and thrown in jail. We come to our text for today in Acts 16.

“But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;”²⁶ and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened.²⁷ When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.²⁸ But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!”²⁹ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,³⁰ and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”³¹ They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.³³ And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.³⁴ And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.” (Acts 16:25-34)

The jailer who put the team in jail had to carefully watch them in fear of his own life. If they escaped, he would be killed for failing to do his duty. When the earthquake occurred at midnight, the jailer feared that his prisoners had escaped and sought to take his own life, as was the custom in the Roman Empire. Paul stopped the jailer and the scene was set for his salvation and the salvation of the entire family. It is interesting that the jailer took the team from the jail to his home. The jailers were responsible for the prisoners, but they did not have to keep them in a prison. On this day the jailer took them home, introduced them to his family, and they were all saved.

Let us focus on the most important part of this passage. The jailer said to Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas immediately replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” All the jailer had to do was “Believe in the LORD Jesus” for his salvation. All the family members of his household had to do was “Believe in the LORD Jesus” and they would also be saved. Everything else about life in Christ follows after belief and that includes repentance, baptism, worship, and discipleship. Nothing is a prerequisite requirement for salvation except belief in the LORD Jesus Christ. Once a person hears the Gospel message, calling them to believe in the LORD Jesus as Savior, the person must believe that Gospel message to be saved. Is it really as easy as that? Yes, it is! All you have to do is make the decision to believe in Jesus and you will belong to Him and he will belong to you forever. Wherever you are in life, whatever challenges you are facing in life, when

you have nowhere else to turn for answers, Jesus has the answer. Believe in Him for your eternal salvation and your future eternal home with Him forever.

As we come to this point, we must admit that heresy has entered our Churches concerning salvation. The heresy is called “easy-believism” and the term comes from the strangest sect in Christianity, the neo-Calvinist or simply Calvinist. This sect is vehemently opposed to the simplicity of the statement by Paul and Silas when they said, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved....*” They have labeled this phrase as “easy-believism.” They use this derogatory label to express their belief that such evangelism is a faulty understanding of the essential element in the path to salvation. Those who call this “easy-believism” say salvation cannot be that easy. This point is interesting because these Calvinists have their own path to salvation which they call “lordship salvation.”

Let me explain what Calvinists mean by the term “lordship salvation.” The heresy of Calvinism says the “gospel” is “sovereign grace.” It is the doctrine of the *eternal divine decree*, His “lordship salvation,” by which the LORD has ordained everything that occurs in all human existence. Before creation, He determined all that would occur and caused and continues to cause all things. Every thought, desire, attitude, and belief that every person has ever had, was His plan. It includes every action of every person, who has ever lived, good or evil. He caused all evil, and He caused all good. He is sovereign. No one thinks without Him controlling the thoughts; no one acts without Him controlling the action. When a person commits adultery, He made that decision. When a person kills the innocent, He made that decision. When a person is saved, He made that decision. In His divine “grace,” He has already decided who will and will not be saved.

To fight those who believe in the very core of Paul’s response to the jailer, that salvation comes through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Calvinists throw out the term “easy-believism.” Non-Calvinists understand the gospel message to be free to all, to whosoever will, who believe in salvation through Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection as the way to eternal life with Him through faith. Belief in that message guarantees the sinner the assurance of the LORD’s love for him, the forgiveness of sin, and salvation through accepting Him as the LORD of their life. A person’s eternal destiny is decided by his response to the salvation God provides for them in Christ. They, personally, must either accept or reject the offer of salvation. God has not predetermined who will be saved to the exclusion of all others. He desires that all sinners be saved.

This leads to the question of God’s foreknowledge. God is all-knowing. Before the creation of the world, He knew who would and would not accept the LORD Jesus as Savior. Some say that because God foreknew who would accept the LORD as Savior, He did not give them a choice - He chose them to be saved. Think about that statement. What sense does it make? It makes no sense. If God knew who would accept the LORD as Savior, why did He need to predestine them to salvation? Calvinists believe God is a puppet master, determining every thought and action of every person. But God is not a puppet master. God gave Adam the law that he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but yes, He knew Adam would eat from it, but He still allowed Adam to have that choice. (Genesis 3) That example completely destroys the “lordship” theory of the Calvinists. “*Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.’*” (Genesis 4:6-7) God allowed Cain to make the choice. He did not pre-determine Cain’s choice. Once again, that story completely destroys the “lordship” theory of the Calvinists. Without proceeding through any more of the heresy of Calvinism, if people knew the true teachings of Calvinism, they would not be Calvinist, not one point in Calvinism. By God allowing a human to make a choice destroys all points in Calvinism and the whole heresy collapse. Therefore, believe in the LORD Jesus Christ and you will be saved, just as Paul and Silas stated.