

## “SIRS, WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 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 bonds were unfastened.

When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

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*Excerpt from John Webster (2014). Confronted by Grace: Meditations of a Theologian. (D. Bush & B. Ellis, Eds.) (pp. 27–29). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.*

**What is it that the jailer is told to do in answer to his question?** Where does escape from ruin lie? It lies in a “name,” and the name is the name of Jesus. Salvation—escape from ruination and destruction, and restoration to life and flourishing—is identical with the name of Jesus, with this one, the man from Nazareth, once crucified but now uncontrollably alive. Salvation, that is, is not some general idea, some generic religious reality. It’s not something which comes in all sorts of shapes and forms, including a specifically Christian form. Nor is the name of Jesus a sort of label which Christians paste onto salvation, to give it a bit of Christian coloring. Salvation for Luke and for the New Testament as a whole is Jesus. He constitutes and embodies God’s salvation.

**Why?** Because, the apostles tell the jailer, this Jesus in whom salvation is to be found is “Lord.” He’s the one in whom and as whom all God’s purposes are brought about. He’s the one in whom and as whom God rules all things. He is therefore the reality of God’s saving rule. He’s not some partial or incidental figure, some character on the margins of history, some territorial divinity. He is comprehensively Lord, Lord of all things. This Jesus—the one who has been glorified at his resurrection and ascension and now rules over all things at the right

hand of the Father—this Jesus is the great factor. He is the reality of all human life; he alone is the reality of salvation. And so when the jailer turns to the apostles in the deepest distress and cries for help, what’s offered to him is nothing other than a repetition of his name, a naming of this one, Jesus, as the one place where God’s salvation is to be found. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Face to face with this Jesus, the jailer is called to “believe.” **What is this belief to which he’s summoned?** Believing can mean something a good deal less than certainty. I believe the bus will come in five minutes, but I can’t be sure. Or sometimes it can mean the kind of knowledge which is acquired after scrupulous review of evidence to build up a cumulative case for some conviction. But believing here is not half-certainty, nor the fruit of mental effort. It’s belief in the deep, strong sense of giving allegiance to something which overwhelms us. To believe in the Lord Jesus in Luke’s sense is to do far more than simply give him a passing nod with the mind or even to honor him with our religious devotion. It’s the astonished business of being so overthrown by his reality, so mastered by his sheer presence, so judged by him, that we can do nothing other than acknowledge that he is supremely real, supremely true. **To believe in him is to confess him—to affirm with mind and will and heart that he fills all things, that our only hope lies in his name.**

Belief in this sense concerns the entire shape of a personal life. It embraces the whole of us. It's not one department of our life, something in which we engage alongside all the other things we do—working, loving, hoping, creating, worrying, and so on. **Believing is about the way in which we dispose the whole of our existence. We believe when we're totally shaped by something outside of us, acknowledging that it has put a decisive stamp on all that we are and all that we do.** This is why belief in this deep, strong sense defines us completely: **We're "believers," doing all that we do out of the inescapable conviction that the Lord Jesus is the persistent factor in the whole of our life. Believing in him, confessing him, involves no less than everything.**

And the issue of this confession of Jesus is salvation. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (16:31). **It's very important that we get the connection right at this point.** The apostles aren't saying, If you

believe in Jesus, then as a reward for your belief you will be offered something called salvation. They aren't telling us that certain beliefs are a precondition, something we need to do in order to merit a divine gift: belief first, salvation second. No, they're telling us something incomparably more gracious than this. They're telling us that as we believe in Jesus, as we confess his sheer reality, we will discover that we are in the sphere of salvation. **To confess him is to know that we are embraced by his salvation, taken up into that salvation and made new by it.**

**Our believing has no power of itself; we certainly aren't saved by belief. We're saved by the grace and goodness and majesty of him in whom we believe—by the one whom we confess as we believe.** In a real sense, our belief is nothing in and of itself. It's simply a looking to him, a listening to him, in which we are wholly absorbed by that which we see and hear.

## **HAVE YOU BEEN SAVED?**

Have you done this **one thing?**

Have you **believed** in the Lord Jesus?

Are you today—this morning—**giving thanks to the Father for the beloved Son, in whom you have redemption, the forgiveness of sins?**