

The Church in Philippi by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Litany based on Psalm 33

Leader: Let all the earth fear the Lord;

All: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

Leader: For He spoke, and it came to be;

All: he commanded, and it stood firm.

Leader: The counsel of the Lord stands forever,

All: the plans of His heart to all generations.

Leader: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,

All: the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!

Leader: We worship you, Lord, In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and The Holy Spirit.

Philippians 1:18-21 Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Acts 16:25-40 ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And 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 and to all who were in his house. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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.

³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

...he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:34)

These are the words of a Philippian jailer some 2000 years ago. God created belief in this man, at his lowest point, through water and words. Salvation comes when we needed it most through the voice of another.

I remember as a young kid driving in the family car on a hilly 2 lane highway at night in Dodge Omni. The three of us kids were strapped across the back seat. My sister is in the middle.

For some reason the car died. I remember everything going dark. The car slowed and then came to a sudden stop - on the highway. By the grace of God my parents realized that without lights there was no way for the traffic behind us to see us. With urgency in their voices they told us to do something rather odd. Get out of the car, on a highway, and run into the ditch.

It became obvious in the confusion of this sudden demand that my sister was not going to be able to get her seatbelt unbuckled. I remember standing on the edge of the road locking into the back seat. I remember the panic in my parents' voice. I remember my father from the front seat trying to release the buckle.

It would not release. And just at that time a Semi came rolling over the hill behind us. He was not slowing down. He could not see us.

My father fumbled with the seat belt one more time. It would not release. He flipped around, put the car in neutral, ran around the car and reached into the back seat grabbing the seatbelt that restrained my sister. He then lifted the car by that seatbelt in the center of the backseat and rolled it into the ditch as the Semi Truck – dodged into the other lane with no time to stop.

Let me tell you from that point on in my life. I came to believe some things about my dad. He had saved my sister. I came to believe that no matter what happened my dad would keep me safe. And I also came to believe that God steps in when we need Him most to do things we could not imagine.

...[the jailer] rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:34)

Where does belief come from? How is it that we come to trust in anyone, much less the abstract presence of God? In our time of need, God speaks into our need. God brings his salvation to us through the words of another.

Chapter 16 is the start of Paul's 2nd missionary journey. Paul went back and forth from Jerusalem into these churches dotted all over the Mediterranean 3 times. His last trip took him, under arrest, to Rome. From this point on in Acts we follow Paul's work with the early churches to whom he was writing letters.

God brought salvation through the voice of Paul.

His letter to the Church in Phillippi was actually the last letter he wrote. While in prison in Rome he wrote to one of his first churches he helped get started. It is a fascinating picture into the early church, Chapter 16. The kind of interactions that Paul (and this time Silas) encountered.

There were 3 distinct audiences that formed to create the early church. The Roman citizens, transplants who they themselves were trying to promote Roman culture and religion. The locals, people who had lived in these lands for centuries carrying with them ancient superstitions. And in just about every town there was a synagogue.

Interestingly enough it was the Jewish citizens who were most resistant to this new way that God was making himself known. This is how Paul and Silas end up in Jail – so that God can speak to the jailer and his family.

The Greeks offered culture, the Jews offered a set of rules and tradition, the ancestors offered ancient superstitions... and then God sent a voice into this man's life who offered and created! - belief in a living God.

Finally someone came into this man's life offering something more than a cultural, religious or superstitious ladder to climb.

Finally, someone came into this man's life to tell Him, not what He must do, but what God has done.

He has got a good life, good job, family... but than and earthquake comes. He is about to take his own life when he experiences God.

He asks Paul, his beaten and wounded prisoner, what he must do to be saved.

An interesting question. And why did He ask Paul?

I suppose Paul had just saved his life, kept him from killing himself. Maybe the word about Paul had gotten around town. This new message of hope and healing. Maybe the man was just asking if they were going to stay put so he didn't lose his job. Or maybe he was asking the deeper question.

Why has God just taken me through this? The earth is still rolling under his feet, he falls in fear before Paul and Silas. How should I respond to the obvious presence of God in earthquake and miracle.

Believe! "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)

This man was not seeing the logic in a religious debate. This man was not deciding to believe. This man was brought to his knees by the power of God to save him through a voice out of the darkness. God created belief in his time of need.

The man brings Paul and Silas to his home, washes their wounds, feeds them and listens for the first time not about what he must do, but what God has done for him through Christ Jesus. He and his whole household are baptized then

and there. And in a meal, in the water, in the words of forgiveness[the jailer] rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:34)

Who have been those voices in your life, in your time of need?

When has God brought you to the end of yourself and your abilities, so that you might hear what He has done?

When have you come through the dismay of what the culture, religious rules and superstitions have to offer - to find a loving God who would give himself for you. Not because you earned it or figured it out ... but because you had nothing else to hold onto?

Maybe, even now you have come to the end of your hope in your own abilities. Maybe even now you have come to see the promises of our culture and world religions and your own superstitions have not given what they promise.

Maybe even now, you can hear the voice of Jesus. ²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus Christ is here telling you what he has done for you on the cross. You do believe in the Lord and because of His water and His words you are, once again, experiencing the salvation and faith only He can give.

