

Acts 16:23-34 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴ Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ 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 chains were loosed. ²⁷ And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." ²⁹ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² Then 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* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Don't Do, Believe!

You have probably heard it said that they aren't any stupid questions. That is just plain wrong, there are lots of stupid questions! Awhile back I was experimenting with different granola recipes, trying to get the calories down while still liking it. I was brainstorming with Meghan about it and I wondered if there was crisped rice that I could buy. She laughed like I was joking but when she saw that I was serious she laughed even harder and said there are, they are called rice krispies. My question was a stupid question.

Meghan once had a friend who was trying to find a place to

park her car and found a spot, but it had a sign over it saying, "no semi parking". She stared at that sign for a long time and asked, "how can you half park"? That was a stupid question.

Lots of questions are stupid questions. The thing is, if you don't know the answer, it is not stupid to ask stupid questions. The jailor in our text asks a really stupid question, but it was the smartest thing he ever asked. "What must I do to be saved?"

This man had witnessed a lot in the last 24 hours. Paul and Silas were handed over to him with instructions to keep close tabs on them. He throws them into his darkest dungeon and what do Paul and Silas do? They neither rant in anger or cower in fear. They pray and sing hymns of joy and praise to God. If they were put to death, they would go to heaven. If they were released, they would tell others of heaven. If they were kept in prison, well, Jesus has made it so they would not be locked up for eternity in hell, so what did they care if they were locked up in this world? Paul and Silas let the light of their faith shine and the other prisoner and the jailor took notice and listened to their words.

God then sends an earthquake which shakes not just the jail,

but the jailor. First he is afraid for his life and then for his soul. In the Roman empire, the penalty for losing a prisoner was death. When Paul stops him from killing himself by telling him that all the prisoners were still there, you would think he would be relieved, but he is more afraid. He comes trembling before Paul and Silas. Why? Why was he more afraid after finding out he wouldn't be put to death by Roman authorities? Because having witnessed the trust of Paul and Silas in their God and having heard their words and seen that this earthquake was no random act but the act of God, for the doors were standing open and the chains were loosed, but the prison was still standing, he was terrified for his eternal soul. He was doing exactly what Jesus had instructed in Matthew 10. **Matthew 10:28**

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Seeing that Paul and Silas knew God and served this true God, the jailor asks his stupid question. "What must I do to be saved?" Why is that a stupid question? Because you can't do anything to be saved. **Galatians 2** *"by the works of the law no flesh*

shall be justified." Yes we should fear God because He is holy, almighty, and punishes sin, and we are sinful, and because He can kill the soul, which means casting it to the place of eternal torment. So what are you going to trade Him to be saved from that and for a place in heaven? The prophet Micah sarcastically asks "will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousands of rivers of oil? Should you give your firstborn child for your transgressions?" You can't do anything! Period.

Why then does Paul answer the jailor's questions? The jailor asks what must I do and Paul responds, "believe". So isn't believing what we should do? Believing is not doing. Believing is trusting and doing nothing.

Let me give you an example. In movies when a kid is kidnaped, what is it the police always tell the parents? Their child is missing and if the child isn't found in the first 48 hours, the child probably isn't going to be found alive. The parents want to do something, anything, but the police tell them the best thing they can do is to do nothing and trust the professionals. The parents want to do something but they are told to trust and do nothing. How hard

would that be? How hard would it be to just sit there and wait and trust when it is your child? It would be nearly impossible, wouldn't it?

Most people, most of their time, live like an ostrich with their heads buried in the sand. They are immersing themselves in the things they enjoy, video games, movies, sports, tv shows, making money, spending money, love, family, etc. and only once in awhile are they shocked, like the jailor was shocked in our text, to lift up their heads and look around and realize things. Things like, I am going to die. No really, I am going to die. And things like that there is a God. People try to ignore it and tamp it down but there is written into our conscience, a consciousness of god and that His wrath is on sin and that our sin is great. Every once and awhile, the justifications and excuses and delusions of our pride builds up our torn down and we get a glimpse of that fact that I am an awful person. Some people deal with this terrible knowledge of our mortality and sinfulness and wrath of god by sticking their heads back into the sand, immersing themselves back into whatever distracts them. Others, filled with fear, like parents whose child is kidnaped, try to do something,

anything, to fill the yawning maw of hell and death. They try to bargain with God, "God, if you will save me, I will dedicate my life to you". They try make up for the wrong they have done. They give alms and give up things that are dear to them. They blindly compare themselves to others to find themselves better and convince themselves that God will judge on a curve. They turn to the rationales and religions of men. None of these approaches will do anything to slack the hunger of the grave and the cry of justice for the punishment of your sins. But there is third group. A third group, blessed by the Holy Spirit, don't "do anything". They trust, they believe in the professional. And when it comes to dealing with sin and death there is only one Professional.

That earthquake terrified the jailor. It shook him to his soul so that he asked a stupid question but it was smart to ask it because he could see that Paul and Silas had the answer. What should the jailor do? He shouldn't do. He should trust in Jesus , The Professional to deal with His sins and guilt and to defeat death for Him. What is the result when the jailor didn't try to deal with his sin and when we don't try to ignore or excuse or make up for our sin?

“He rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. “ He rejoiced.

If your kid was kidnaped, the FBI would handle it, but the FBI could make mistakes and they might be disinclined to pay a ransom because it might be bad for society as a whole, encouraging other kidnappings and plane get them back safe and sound.

The FBI might make mistakes and might have a broader agenda and perhaps you could do something (if you drove the streets you might stumble upon your child) so you very well might be justified in not trusting but doing something. But faced with our sin and hell and guilt and mortality, there is nothing. Nothing we could do and Jesus doesn't make mistakes, nor is He hesitant to pay the ransom. He paid it already. That is why the trembling of the jailor turned to rejoicing. He didn't stick his head back in the sand, ignoring his sins, God's wrath, death, and hell, nor did he try to take them into his hands and do something. Through the words of Paul and baptism for him and his family, the Holy Spirit caused them not to do but to trust, to know that Jesus had paid the ransom, they were free. They couldn't do anything, but they didn't have to -Jesus had already.

How hard is it to do nothing when faced with a huge problem? Extremely. Every fiber of our being rebels against doing nothing, simply trusting. Your kid is kidnaped, you want to do something. Lay offs are coming at work, you want to do something to show them how valuable you are. In regard to those earthly examples, it is good to do something. It is responsible. But in spiritual matters, that instinct works against us. You can't do anything about death the destroyer, Satan the accuser, sin the sting of death. A thousand “hail Mary's” won't protect you. Giving up all earthly wealth won't save you. Trying your best won't be enough. Trust the professional. Trust Jesus. The Holy Spirit had to teach us to do that and every day the Holy Spirit needs to re-teach us. You can and should do things to thank and praise Jesus for being saved, but you can't do anything to be saved, you don't have to - Jesus already has.

Pastor Aaron Ude

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church