

June 2, 2019 What Must We Do to be Saved?

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Acts 16:16-34

¹⁶ One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." ¹⁸ She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰ When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹ and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³ After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴ Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will

be saved, you and your household.”³² They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.³³ At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay.³⁴ He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

What must I do to be saved?

Prison was always a fascinating place to me growing up. All I knew about it was that it was where we sent people who didn't follow the laws, and that I had a Christian cousin in prison that my mom would write to. My cousin was in prison my entire childhood and is still there now. My parents told me he was wronged and that's how he ended up there, his lawyer told him to take a plea when there wasn't enough evidence to convict him. The judge that sentenced him was later shown to have forced many innocent Black men into very harsh sentences without cause. Yet prison is where is,

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2019 despite all evidence pointing him toward freedom. My cousin's case prompts me to view the prison industrial complex as flawed and biased.

I grew up in churches hearing this story of Paul and Barnabas and most of the disciples being imprisoned and wondering why so many good Christians ended up arrested. The stories of the Bible show us that empires have the ability to be corrupt. The law was used to put innocent people behind bars, and in this story we see God setting them free. Then the agent of the empire asks that question that keeps showing up in Acts and the Gospel text, “What must I do to be saved?”. We get this question from the rich young ruler, from the woman at the well, people at different ends of the wealth spectrum seemingly different walks of life asking that same pervasive question what must we do?

Our text today points us to the hard facts, the laws of this nation aren't always just. People following Christ can end up on the short end of the justice system. Paul and Barnabas chose to hold a mirror up to the justice system they faced. When they were met with harshness and violence, they responding with singing and joy. And when they had the chance to return evil with evil, they chose to invite their enemy into their community. It makes me wonder, "What must I do to be saved?"

When children are torn from their parents at my nation's border and held as hostages.

When women aren't safe to make their own decisions about their healthcare.

When our legal system is working to keep young men of color locked up or shot while unarmed

When children are marketed bulletproof backpacks because our schools are overrun with guns

When trans Black women are being murdered left and right

When LGBTIQ rights are being stripped away

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2019 What must we do to be saved?

We must lean on the teachings of Jesus, who taught us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Which means if we are concerned for ourselves we must also be concerned with our immigrant neighbors. We must learned to tap into the power of God's unconditional love to be more loving, peaceful, kind, patient, gentle, generous. We must believe in the Lord Jesus, which means we must be willing to learn from him how to treat

others, how to have compassion on those who may not show it back to us, how to love others. Being saved isn't something that happens once. It's a continual commitment to being open to the Spirit moving us to be better than we could ever be alone, it's about trusting our community to have our backs when hard times hit, it's about coming to the table of communion and being fed by Christ's own hand.

Now I'm not telling you all to get a merry band of Christians together and recreate Bastille Day by breaking people out of prison today. But I am asking you to think critically about the laws and lawmakers you choose to support. I'm asking you to use the gifts and skills God has given you to think more about how you vote and whom you vote for because the way you use the power you have matters. It can be the difference between life and death for some people in this country. I'm asking us all to recognize that in this story we may be the the slaver owners angry about the way God is changing our business model. We may be the Roman guard still waiting to have a life changing encounter with the Risen Lord. We may be the crowd waiting for the next thing to arise that gets us angry and ready to burn things down. We may be the people asking.

What must we do to saved?

How can we collectively work to pushback on systems of injustice?

How can we collectively work on being more like Christ?

How can we be made new?

the journey at the Lord's Table. And we have been given songs to sing when we end up on the wrong side of law. We may not be the rich young ruler, or the woman at the well, but we are people that still ask "What must we do to be saved?", and Christ is so patient with us that he reminds us with bread and wine, that we must simply lean on him and walk humbly with God.