



### **Life's Most Important Question**

Acts 16:22-34

Sunday, May 1, 2022 – Aledo UMC

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### **Text, Acts 16:22-34**

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

<sup>31</sup> They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

### **Sermon by Pastor Dave, “Life’s Most Important Question”**

Acts chapter 16 is in my Top Ten favorite chapters in the Bible. There is so much there, and so much of what is there has shaped my life, my ministry, and my faith journey. For some time, I’ve wanted to do a “deep dive” into Acts 16, and I’ve finally arrived at the time when I am able to do so. We’ll be dwelling in Acts 16 throughout the month of May.

The chapter features the remarkable story of Paul and Silas in Philippi as they proclaim the gospel and are subsequently persecuted for their faith. They are arrested and thrown in jail. But then an earthquake shakes the foundations of the prison, opening the doors, allowing them to escape.

However, just a few chapters earlier in Acts 12 Peter was also miraculously freed from prison. Newly freed, he goes to where the believers are praying for his release, knocks on the door, but is left standing there as the doorkeeper, a servant named Rhoda, goes back to the prayer meeting rejoicing to say Peter has been set free. However, the believers don’t believe it, so they go back to praying for Peter’s release.

Sadly, the joy and humor of that story is shattered in verse 19 when Peter Herod learns that Peter has apparently escaped from prison, so he orders the four jailers to be put to death.

I suspect that weighed heavy on the minds of Paul and Silas, so when the Philippian jailer realizes that the doors to the prison had been shaken open, he draws his sword to kill himself. Fortunately, Paul shouts in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here” (Acts 16:28).

The jailer puts down his sword, rushes in to see Paul and Silas and then asks the most important question in life: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

One might think that the most important question in life would also be a question with a complicated answer. But that’s not the case. The answer is really quite simple, and it’s found in verse 31: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

That’s the first and foremost thing I want you to understand this morning: **the answer to the most important question in life is simple:** “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

Now what does it mean to believe? I think James can help us out on this one. In James 2 we read—

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith—  
—we could also say, ‘belief’—

If someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and

well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Did you catch that? *Even the demons believe*. Clearly faith or believing is not merely a matter of gaining knowledge. And that’s an important lesson for us because we are a knowledge-based society living in a knowledge-based world. Most of us are high school graduates—or are on the path of becoming a high school graduate—and that means we have dedicated twelve years of our lives to acquiring knowledge. For many of us, twelve years wasn’t enough, so we went to college to acquire even more knowledge. But believing in Jesus is not a matter of simply acquiring knowledge. If it were, we would be no better off than the demons who are destined for eternal death.

James rather bluntly tells us that faith or believing without works is dead. And yet, Paul reminds us that we are not saved by good works. In Ephesians 2, Paul seems to counter James by writing—

<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> **not by works**, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> **For we are God’s handiwork, / created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It sounds like James and Paul disagree with one another, but I disagree with that notion. And that’s because we have to understand what faith is really all about. Remember, the answer to life’s most important question is to “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”

James talks about giving food and clothing to a brother in need. But what is he really talking about? He’s talking about the second most important commandment. Remember when a teacher of the law tested Jesus by asking—

<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment.

<sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

James isn’t talking about doing good works for the sake of doing good works—I suppose there’s a time and a place for that—James is really talking about *loving your neighbor as yourself*. In other words, belief is tied to action, and the action to which belief is tied is the action of love: not the feeling of love, but the action of love.

Let me say that again: belief is tied to action, and the action to which belief is tied is the action of love: not the feeling of love, but the action of love.

Now let’s apply that to what we’re discovering in Acts 16:

First, Paul and Silas recognize the Philippian jailer as their neighbor and love him by not escaping, because they knew that if they selfishly escaped, the jailer would die.

When the jailer realizes that his life has been spared, he asks the most important question in life: "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replies, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."

But Paul wasn't talking about a head knowledge of the Lord Jesus; we now know that Paul was talking about a heart knowledge of the Lord Jesus. That's clear from his use of the word, "Lord." A head knowledge of Jesus doesn't make him Lord of your life; but a heart knowledge will.

And that brings us to the greatest commandment which we just tapped into: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Believing in Jesus isn't just about your head; it's also about your heart and your soul as well as your mind.

So the jailer believed, not just with his head, but also with his heart. And immediately after falling in love with God, he fell in love with his neighbor—what's the second greatest commandment? "Love your neighbor as yourself." So the jailer introduced his household to Paul so they might also share in the love of God.

That's the last part—but a critical part of the answer to life's most important question: What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Some of us were baptized as the way the jailer was baptized; in other words, we were baptized as believers. Others of us were baptized as the members of his household were baptized; we were baptized because a parent or grandparent or guardian said, "I love Jesus and I'm going to raise you to love Jesus too." And you were baptized, perhaps as an infant, as I was when I was baptized on February 24, 1957 at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Watertown, Wisconsin. But we were all baptized out of an expression of love for God.

There came a time in my life when I needed to affirm that the decision my parents made for me when I was just nine weeks old was the right decision, and I made the decision to have a loving belief in God which hopefully has spilled out to neighbor over the course of my faith journey.

Today, four young people—Abby Blaser, Katheryne Jungmann, Hailey McRae, and Miles Ward will all, through confirmation, declare that the decision that their parents made was the right decision for them, and they will make the decision to have a loving belief in God which we trust will also spill out to neighbor as they continue their faith journeys. I pray they are not alone. Would you, this day, put your loving belief in the Lord Jesus and be saved?