

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-

29. THE AWAKENED SINNER

(Acts 16:25-32)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 31

1. The cry of an awakened sinner: **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** (30)
2. The one way of safety for the sinner: **“the Lord Jesus Christ”** (31)
3. The need of a confessed sinner: **“they spake unto him the word of the Lord”** (32)
4. The assurance of every sinner: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”** (31)

The great crime of which Paul and Silas had been accused and for which they had been cast into prison at Philippi was casting an evil spirit out of a slave girl. As this cut off the profits of vicious men who thrived upon the proceeds of her divination, they stirred up a mob, charged Paul and Silas with sedition and had them committed to jail. At midnight God shook the jail with an earthquake, loosed the prisoners' bands and flung open the gates. The jailer was halted in the act of suicide by the cry of Paul, **“Do thyself no harm: for we are all here”** (16:28).

This startling providence and unheard of attitude of the prisoners so unnerved the astonished jailer that, possibly thinking they had superhuman power, he fell down before Paul and Silas and cried: **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** (16:31). The people at Lystra thought Paul and Barnabas were gods come down from heaven when they healed a man who had been a cripple. The jailer had probably cried out often to Zeus the thunderer for salvation, as many of his acquaintances had done. The slave girl had said these men show the way of salvation. They had shown that they had power over the evil spirit, now they seemed to have power to shake the very earth. Were they gods? Were they possessed with divine power? In his bewilderment the jailer cried: What is this way of salvation of which you speak? Can I find it? What must I do to be saved? If they had said, believe on us for we have power over the spirits of men; we have power to shake the very earth, he would probably have believed them. Paul and Silas did not want to attract attention to themselves. They were not seeking their own honor. Their supreme aim was to declare the honor and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. They said: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”** (16:31). Then Paul and Silas began at once and explained the way of life to the jailer and his family. They believed their words, accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and were baptized that very night.

THE CRY OF AN AWAKENED SINNER

The cry of the jailer was the cry of an awakened sinner: **“What must I do to be saved?”** As the jailer retired for the night, after incarcerating Paul and Silas in the dungeon and the stocks, he had no idea that he would ever be the least concerned about the “way of salvation” which they taught. What cared he about the vagaries of some traveling Jews? But God loved the hardened jailer. He took a striking way of awakening him. The prisoners were loosed; the jail was shaken; he cried out in terror.

God uses different methods of awakening sinners. Not all who are frightened by some special providence of God are ready to accept His Son in order that they may be saved. Pharaoh was aroused by God’s providence again and again. Supernatural appeals had been made to him and each time he seemed to yield. When at last death came into his home he said he would yield to the command of God. He did yield for a day, but when he thought of the great financial and national loss which he would suffer if he obeyed God he gave way to avarice and became as hard as ever.

The writer went one day to call upon a young woman who was very ill. I found that she was getting worse. She was suffering from an attack of double pneumonia and the physician had almost despaired of her life. The nurse said, she is growing steadily worse and there is practically no hope of her recovery. We have sent for a special kind of medicine and we will try that, if it produces a reaction there is a little hope, if it does not there is none. Influenza had been especially fatal at that time and in this case it had turned into pneumonia. The physician had given orders that no one was to be permitted to see her until after the special medication had been tried.

The nurse said, “If this medicine does not produce a reaction I will let you in for it will be certain there is no hope of her recovery.” I remained in or about the house waiting for the change to come. Though not permitted to pray in her presence I prayed that God would spare that young woman in order that He might thus manifest His power to her husband, that he might see and believe.

Her husband was prostrated and stricken with grief. He was an unbeliever. I tried to show him that it was best to yield to the Lord’s will; if He saw fit to take his loved one away it was best, but that it was not well to despair of hope while there was life, for the Lord might hear our prayers and bring about her recovery. He seemed scarcely to listen, but said he did not see how a good God could take his wife when they have been married only a short time and were happy together.

The medicine did not react favorably; the nurse said she could not live and that I might see her and talk with her. I still prayed that she might be spared that her recovery might be a testimony to her husband. We thought, surely if she is recovered, her husband will see God’s hand in restoring his wife and will be ready to praise God and trust in Jesus Christ for his own salvation. But to our surprise and regret when his wife was recovered - for she was restored to health again - he would not see and would not believe or confess his Lord.

There must be something more than the providential call of God to awaken a lost sinner. God must open the heart, as He did the heart of Lydia, before men will believe. God opened the heart of Cornelius. God opened the heart of Saul of Tarsus. There is no heart too hard for God to open, so long as they desire to hear the Word. For we know that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. We must depend, therefore, not merely upon the mighty works of God in providence, not merely upon our own persuasive powers, but we must depend upon the Holy Spirit, who works in conjunction with the Word, to quicken and save.

Sometimes men are aroused by the powerful preaching of the Word, as Agrippa was aroused by Paul, until they are almost persuaded. God gives multitudes of men the opportunity who do not accept it. Though He stands at the door and knocks they will not yield. There is something which attracts them which they are not willing to give up. For Agrippa it would have meant giving up his world attractions and an unholy alliance. He was not ready to make those sacrifices for Christ. The man is wise, who, having his sin pointed out, is not only awakened but throws himself on the mercy of God, trusting in Christ to cleanse him and make him acceptable to God.

One of our magazines, not long since, reported the following incident. A large Bible class of men was in session. In the midst of the opening exercises a rough looking fellow came in. It looked as though a crank might have appeared to disturb the class. He asked to be permitted to speak. It was granted, and what he said was something like this:

“Gentlemen, I am a gambler, a bootlegger and a general tough. I have never believed in Christ or God or the Bible. I am a poor man without resources. My wife has been critically ill and last night I took her to the hospital expecting of course to place her in the public ward. The man in charge said: ‘Your wife is in a very critical condition; she must have the very best of attention if she is to be saved. We have a private room here provided by a men’s Bible class which is not occupied at the present. If you like, your wife can have that room without cost.’ I said, ‘who is doing this?’ He replied, ‘a company of Christian men.’ I said, ‘then if Christianity causes men to want to serve even those whom they do not know I must have been mistaken about it. So I am here, gentlemen, to inquire about a Christ who puts noble impulses into the hearts of men.’” The rough man’s eyes filled with tears as the old, old story of Jesus and His love was told to him. He yielded to the pleading of the Spirit and soon found Christ.

“I stood alone at the bar of God,
In the hush of the twilight dim,
And faced the question that pierced my heart:
What will you do with Him?
Crowned or crucified? which shall it be?
No other choice was offered to me.
I knelt in tears at the feet of Christ,
In the hush of the twilight dim,
And all that I was, or hoped, or sought,
Surrendered unto Him.
Crowned, not crucified - my heart shall know
No king but Christ who loveth me so.”

ONE WAY OF SAFETY FOR THE SINNER

The only way of safety for the sinner is to **“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”** (16:31). **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). What did Paul and Silas mean when they told the jailer to believe on the Lord Jesus? They meant, as they no doubt explained to the inquiring jailer, that he was to put his trust in Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, who came down to this earth to live and die for sinners. They meant that Jesus did not die for His own sins; but that He might bear our sins and thus satisfy the justice of God, for He is holy and cannot look upon sin; that God is absolutely just and will not allow the sinner to go unpunished, but that in His mercy He sees fit to accept the righteousness of His Son, who was perfect and sinless, in our stead; that the only way we can approach God is through Christ, and by believing on Him we have the assurance that we may come to God without making any atonement for ourselves. Christ has done all that is required on our behalf and we receive the benefits of what He had done through faith in Him. Faith in Christ is, therefore, the first and most important act of the sinner.

There are multitudes of men today who are laying the emphasis upon other things such as, culture, pleasure, wealth, and seeking the beautiful in the world. There are social, political and economic changes needed, and these make their contribution to the welfare of mankind. But the most important, without which all the rest are as dross, is to seek Christ for salvation. After all the efforts of men to find contentment and satisfaction in other ways, surely it is useless for us to try. Solomon, after trying the whole round of ways which the world tried - wealth, wisdom, pleasure, business, honor, wine, royalty and polygamy - said: **“All is vanity and vexation of spirit”** (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Sadhu Sundar Singh may be considered as a typical modern representative of the oriental religions. As a little child, he had “rubbed his forehead on the temple door” and sat at the feet of Hindu holy men, and when he became large enough to think for himself, he began to seek for the inestimable treasure he had learned to regard as the one thing worth obtaining in the world.

“The Granth of Sikhs, the sacred books of the Hindu religion, and even the Qur’an of the Mohammedans, were all ceaselessly read and searched. Often when his family lay asleep Sunday would sit poring over the pages of one or other of these books. Many passages and verses he learned by heart, and yet with all his increasing knowledge there only came to him a deeper unrest of soul” (*Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 17-20).

“The constant cry of his heart was for shanti - that comprehensive Hindu term that means not only peace but a full satisfaction of soul. But the more he longed the greater was his disappointment when he found himself growingly filled with a deep soul-hunger that nothing would satisfy.” Nor did he find satisfaction until he found in divine revelation these words **“Come unto me - and I will give you rest.”**

When he read, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,”** a whisper of comfort came to his sore heart.

Since there is no safety for the sinner or satisfaction of soul without God and His SON Jesus Christ, is it not strange that those who have found Him and have received all of His blessings should be so slow in taking or sending the glad tidings to others who do not know and are about to die without hope?

Spurgeon said: "An infidel once met a Christian man and said: 'I know you do not believe your religion.' 'Why?', asked the Christian. 'Because,' said the other, 'for years you have passed me on my way to my house of business. You believe, do you not, that there is a hell, into which men's spirits are cast?' 'Yes, I do,' said the Christian. 'And you believe that unless I believe in Christ I must be sent there?' 'Yes.' 'You do not I am sure, because if you did you must be a most inhuman wretch to pass me, day by day, and never tell me about it or warn me of it'."

Suppose you were to see a blind man unknowingly approaching the brink of a high precipice, and you were to sit by without concern or putting forth any effort to warn him from almost certain death, would you not feel guilty of his death if he stepped over and perished? The death of the body which might have been prevented is a terrible thing, but what of the death of a human soul, perhaps of many souls? What of your responsibility, if through your neglect souls go down to eternal death?

There is but one way of safety for the sinner. We know that way. Shall we not use every effort and opportunity to make it known to lost men?

THE NEED OF A CONFESSED SINNER

"They spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house" (16:32). Paul and Silas taught the jailer. They did not even wait until their stripes were cleansed and their hunger satisfied before they began to teach him and his household.

It would be an interesting chapter of the Acts if we could have had the conversation of that hour recorded. The word, "spake" (v. 32), is not the usual word, "*lego*"; it is, "*laleo*," a word which means primarily, to chatter, or to converse with. It means that the missionaries talked at length expounding the Word of God and the way of life. I can see Paul's eyes fairly shine as he explained to this waiting soul how Christ came down from Heaven, walked and talked as a man, was greatly hated though He was ever kind and loving, and at last was put to death by His enemies upon the cruel cross. Then he would go on and tell of the sacrifices which were slain through all the centuries past; that now Christ was the LAMB which was slain once for all; that there is now no more need of sacrifices to be offered for sins, and that God accepts Christ's offering as sufficient for all for He was of infinite worth and His sacrifice was perfect in the sight of God. He would perhaps also tell him that death cannot destroy the soul for whom Christ died, since He has lost none that have placed their trust in Him.

I can see the hardened face of the jailer become softer and the tears roll down his dark face as he thought of how cruel he had been to the servants of Christ, and of how he might never have known this glorious message if they had not been willing to suffer shame and face death that they might bring the Gospel to Philippi.

How shall men believe on Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher? Every awakened sinner needs instruction. The mere statement, believe on Christ, without any explanation, may mean very little to the man who has been reared in a place where nothing is known of the true and living God. Paul and Silas had evidently gone on to explain to the jailer and his household the nature and necessity of being baptized according to Christ's command, for when they had professed their faith in Christ they were baptized.

The Christian minister has not done his duty when he has led men to make a profession of faith in Christ. He has a further and just as important duty in instructing them in the way of life. They are not fitted to be intelligent Christians until they know the plan of salvation and the law of God. As in the case of the jailer, a summary of the Gospel can be presented to men in an hour, but a whole life is needed to grow in the knowledge of God and to become more and more like Christ. It took eighty years of training to fit Moses for forty years of work. It is well then to impress upon all followers of Christ the value of applying themselves that they may gain an understanding of God's revealed will in order that they may love their Lord most and serve him best.

A little child just born into the world is in a very dangerous condition if it is left without nourishment and without care. So is the child of God, just born again, seriously neglected if he is not fed with the milk of the Word and thus spiritually developed.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, groping in spiritual darkness. Jesus told him that the first thing necessary was to be born again; that to be born again he must believe on the SON of God, and if he did so he would not perish but have everlasting life. Then he went on to give him a discourse instructing him in the way of life.

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well and she was awakened to see and believe that He was the Christ, He remained to talk with her and the others who came to hear Him. Many others who heard believed that He was the Christ the Saviour of the world. Jesus did not leave them immediately when they had professed His name, but abode there two days teaching the people and feeding them with the bread of life.

Jesus by practice and precept taught us that all new disciples, as well as old ones, need to be taught. Paul first sought to win men to Christ, but, when he was permitted, he remained for a time in the churches which he founded, or revisited them when he could. He spent a great deal of time instructing them. The largest part of Paul's writings is what we call doctrinal, that is, instruction for those who have become Christians.

THE ASSURANCE OF EVERY SINNER

Every man, though he may consider himself to be the worst of sinners, may take the invitation of Paul and Silas to himself: "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.**" The jailer at Philippi was no doubt a hardened man. Cruelty was a common thing with him. He could see men beaten, bound with chains, placed in torture in the stocks, hear them groan with pain, and yet go to sleep as usual.

He was probably almost as hardened as the men who were confined in the prison. Not all hardened men will yield to Christ as this man did, but the fact remains that whosoever will may come: **“And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:40).

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

The two thieves on the cross had the same opportunity. Jesus would have forgiven both of them had they asked Him. One cried out, **“Lord remember me.”** and Jesus forgave him and promised that he should be with Him that day in paradise.

It is difficult, for even those who are disciples of Christ, to realize the greatness of His love and of His power to save. It was difficult for Ananias to believe that it was wise or safe for him to go to see Saul of Tarsus. Even when the Lord spoke to him in a vision he objected at first. He yielded, however, and went to Saul. So fully did he trust God that he called this former persecutor, **“Brother Saul.”** We do not have the comprehension of God’s great love and of Christ’s saving power which we ought to have, unless we believe that the vilest wretch who trusts in Christ may be saved.

That man had a wonderful conception of God’s love, of whom Spurgeon spoke when he said: “I remember a minister who went to see a dying laborer, and the man growled from his bed, ‘Tell him to be gone - I want none of the like of him to disturb me.’ He called again and received the same rude answer. He called again and received the same rude answer. He called again and went half-way up the stairs; he heard an oath and would not intrude. He continued to call until he had numbered twenty times, and the twenty-first time the man said, ‘Well as you are set on it you may come in.’ And he did go in and that soul was won for God.”

In a recent article on God’s wondrous love, says Mr. J. Chrichton-Jack: “A minister of the close of one of his services was waited upon by a Christian lady, who asked if he would accompany her to visit a sick man who was lying very ill with a complaint which was thought to be incurable. The minister replied that he would gladly go. But, said the lady, the man is a secularist, and does not believe in the Bible; and denounces Christians and Christian ministers. Will you go? - He put her mind at rest by saying that he would go at once. She guided him to a house in a working class district, and entered a nice clean home. He was shown into a room where the sick man lay and sat down on a chair at the side of his bed.

The man, seeing that his visitor was a Christian minister, gathered all the strength he seemed to possess and raising himself up on his elbow began to denounce the Bible and Christians, and Christian ministers, and to blaspheme the God of the Bible.

“The minister bowed his head in silence and lifted up his heart to God in silent prayer that He would touch the man’s heart and conscience. When the man was done denouncing and blaspheming God’s servants, the minister raised his head and looking the man right in the eyes said with all the earnestness of his soul, ‘Is it not a wonder that God should love such as you?’ The man was startled and said: ‘What! God loves me? Never!’ ‘Yes,’ said the minister, ‘Although you have been blaspheming His name and denouncing His servants He loves you! He loves you!’ ‘I thought,’ exclaimed the man, ‘that God hated secularists.’ ‘No!’ was the reply, ‘God loves secularists He hates their secularism.’ It was the means of the man’s awakening. Is it not a wonderful love - the love of God to sinners?”

“Up in a little town in Maine,” says Dr. Torrey, “things were pretty dead some years ago. The churches were not accomplishing anything. There were a few godly men in the churches and they said, ‘Here we are only uneducated laymen, but something must be done in this town. Let us form a praying band. We will all center our prayers on one man; who shall it be?’ They picked out one of the hardest men in town, a hardened drunkard and centered their prayers on him. In a week he was converted. They centered their prayers on the next hardest man in town and soon he was converted. They centered their prayers on the next hardest man in town and seen he was converted. Then they took up another and another until, within a year two or three hundred were brought to God, and the fire spread out into all the surrounding country.”

In one of his Bible lectures I heard Dr. R.A. Torrey tell of the man who was the assistant pastor at the Chicago Avenue church when he was pastor there. His name was Mr. Jacoby. He had been one of the worst bandits which America knew. When the merchants of the little town in Iowa, where he lived, knew that he was about they would pull down their blinds when they saw him coming lest he should attempt to hold them up. One day in Omaha he rode down the street with a revolver in each hand shooting up the town and defying the police. But that man was converted, and Dr. Torrey said of him that he was the most Christ-like man he ever knew. He was humble, kind and trustworthy. He was a friend of the little children and an earnest teacher of the Gospel of Christ. Paul knew what a hardened man was from his own nature, in the early years of his life, and he knew that when God could save him there was no man too hardened for God to save. Christ would have that lesson indelibly imprinted upon the heart of every one of his servants. He would have the message flung out to the world that is sunken in sin, that all who hear it may believe that He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.

“In spite then, of earth’s sorrow,
In spite of all its sin,
The kingdom is before you,
Arise and enter in.
Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be,
When I let the Saviour’s pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered,
‘All of self, and none of Thee.’
Yet He found me, I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree,

Heard Him pray, 'Forgive them, Father,'
And my wistful heart said faintly,
'Some of self, and some of Thee.'
Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet, and strong, and oh, so patient,
Brought me lower while I whispered,
'Less of self, and more of Thee.'
Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
'Lord thy love at last has conquered,
Grant me now my soul's desire,
None of self, and ALL of Thee!'"

- Theodore Monod

QUESTIONS (Acts 16:25-32)

1. What had Paul and Silas done which led to their accusation?
2. What was the real reason why their accusers were angry?
3. Why was the jailer frightened?
4. When had the jailer likely heard of salvation?
5. Whose honor was sought by Paul and Silas?
6. How did they tell the jailer he might be saved?
7. In what verse is that statement found?
8. Will you repeat it?
9. What more than an awakening providence is needed in order that men may find Christ?
10. What more than charity is needed to save men?
11. How is charity an agent to lead men to consider the Gospel?
12. What is meant by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ?
13. What are some of the things upon which men depend rather than upon Christ?
14. Whose duty is it to tell those about you of the love of Christ?
15. What duty rests upon us in addition to leading men to profess the name of Christ?
16. What Bible characters gave us an example of teaching new converts?
17. What leads you to believe that there is no man too hardened for Christ to save?
18. What means does God give us besides testimony of winning men?
19. What Scriptural example do we have of a man whose prayers went up for a memorial before God?
20. What leads you to believe that we should testify to men as well as pray for them?

~ end of chapter 29 ~

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