

# SEVEN SAVED SINNERS

## Or How God Saves Men

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A study of God's Varieties of Religious Experiences in the Book of Acts

by

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### CHAPTER SIX

#### THE CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

##### THE STUDY

Acts 16:25-34

##### *The Occasion*

The story begins with the damsel who was possessed with a spirit of divination, and whose masters had gained much by her soothsaying.

Because of her following the Apostles and crying, **"These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation."**

Paul is grieved and says in the Spirit and to the spirit, **"I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her."**

And he came out the same hour. The masters, seeing that their greed of gain was gone, had Paul and Silas hurried before the magistrate. There was no semblance of a legal trial, but merely condemnation. The Apostles are beaten and jailed in the innermost dungeon, with their feet in the stocks. Then comes the earthquake and deliverance. Here is conversion under uproarious and supernatural circumstances. The unexpected is predominant here.

##### *The Subject*

This Philippian Jailer is evidently a semi-ignorant Roman soldier, hardened in brutality. His adverse treatment of Paul and Silas was not by order, but by choice.

##### *The Agent*

Paul and Silas and supernatural accompaniments are at work here.

### *The Accompaniment*

Here we have salvation coming out of pandemonium, lawlessness, brutality, and nature's upheaval; yet peaceful, trusting, and praiseful servants in the midst of the bedlam are found.

Physical fear is the major emotion of the Jailer. His question, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**" is not an evangelical one, but Paul makes it so by his reply. There is true penitence found in the attitude of the Jailer.

### *Results*

The salvation of the Jailer and his family with rejoicing and a testimony which scared the magistrates, seem to be the major result of this conversion.

### *Significant Lessons*

Peacefulness and patience under unjust persecution is a condition which God can mightily use. The essential passion of Paul's soul is seen in this quick turn of the Jailer's question to the thought of personal salvation. "All God's chillun's got a song," including a song in the night!

## **THE SERMON**

### **GOD'S GREAT JAIL DELIVERY— OR PRAYED OUR OF PRISON**

Acts 16: 25-34

We were somewhat surprised in the study of the conversion of Lydia at Philippi to discover that there was no opposition, either by man or devil, and we had wondered if the devil had been caught napping; but if he had, we discover that he is wide awake again, as we face the situation that comes before us now.

As Paul and his companions continued their work in Philippi, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met them, a girl who had been used by her masters through her demon-possessed character for soothsaying purposes.

She possessed literally the spirit of a python. Now we are told that the serpent which guarded the Delphi prophetess was a python, and therefore we appear to have here a prophetic demon possessing the girl.

Unprincipled men had discovered that this poor girl was profitable, and a sort of stock company had been formed in her and her soothsaying business, and they took her about from place to place, and had her speak under the power of this demon and collected money for the supposed prophecies which she made. She probably did little more than give off a few insane ravings most of the time, but it was different when she came into contact with Paul and Silas.

Demons ordinarily haven't much sense. I have never been able to see why folks would take up Spiritism; why they would believe that their loved ones had nothing better to do in the after-life than to come back to earth, blow horns, and tip over tables, and rap on doors, and do all sorts of queer things which the spiritist claim that they do. But when you have a case of genuine demon possession, and when it's brought face to face with the truth of God, you may get some truth.

It will be recalled that demons confessed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God when He was upon earth, and He silenced them, and in this case the demon recognized that Paul and Silas were the servants of the Most High God. But the Gospel wants no testimony from demons, only from the redeemed, and Paul is grieved and rebukes the spirit and exorcises the demon out of the girl.

Elymas, the sorcerer, about whom we studied in the conversion of Sergius Paulus was voluntarily and wilfully a child of the devil; but here was a poor slave girl who was involuntarily possessed. It is worthy of our attention to study these two types of individuals in their relationship to demon possession.

The profits of her masters gone, they trump up false charges against Paul and Silas and hurry them off to the magistrate, where they are judged according to the popular cry, not according to law and testimony.

Then follows a beating, imprisonment and songs of deliverance.

## **I. TRUE CHRISTIANITY IS A TROUBLE-MAKING RELIGION**

Though it brings peace to the individual heart, it certainly does bring trouble into the world whenever it interferes with sin or gain, which it is likely to do.

The hue and cry is oftentimes raised that we should keep religion out of politics, or politics out of religion, but, in the main, this is an impossibility, because both deal with men and morals, and function in the same areas, and when politics is corrupt and religion is true there is bound to be a collision. Today, the Church must speak out against greed and must never bow to the bossism and mercenariness of the times, which are so afraid that the sermon will hit the pocketbook.

Religion is tolerated by godless communities so long as it does not interfere with sin or gain. There doubtless was nothing more than a little ridicule over the conversion of Lydia, but when an evil spirit was cast out of a certain girl, and her soothsaying ability was lost and pocketbooks were touched and Satan's lordship disputed, there was trouble on hand.

Now, there are two great sources of trouble in the work of the Kingdom of God. First, "bossism," when there is a limiting of power and authority to those accustomed to rule; and, second, from mercenariness, when there is the hitting of the sins that affect the pocketbook. Jesus ran afoul the first, and Paul was persecuted for the second.

Christianity causes trouble when it demands consistent living.

The Church of God should be hated by the ungodly, not laughed at for its inconsistency, but hated for its righteousness and opposition to all evil.

## **II. CHRISTIANITY IS A RELIGION OF SUFFERING**

Outwardly, we have trouble predominating here. God oftentimes brings blessing out of trouble. Sometimes He must send disaster or threaten doom before He can bring men's hearts to the place of surrender. He longs to lead us without bit and bridle, as He says through the Psalmist, but sometimes we're "mulish" and He has to put the bit in our mouths and yank us back on our haunches before we look up into His face.

On one occasion Sir Harry Lauder told of the tragedy that came into his life when his only boy was killed in the trenches in France. Stark tragedy stared him squarely in the face.

"I found before me three possible ways of escape," said the Scottish songster, "one was drink; I could drown my sorrow in a continuous debauch of alcohol, but I felt that that would not do. The second was suicide; I could take my life and hide myself in the grave from my sorrow, but my training and religious background did not permit that. Then, there was God; casting all my care upon Him, letting Him help me out of my trouble and comfort me in my sorrow, "And," says Sir Harry, "I found God."

Too many people come to religious faith thinking that thereafter everything will be ease and lethargy, but these Apostles did not find it so. They had had a glorious vision and the Macedonian call to come over into Europe and help with the Gospel; and the result was imprisonment and beating and suffering unspeakable; and yet you could not discourage them.

They counted it a privilege to suffer for Jesus Christ. One is reminded of the poem by Annie Johnson Flint:

### **By The Way or Travelogues of Cheer**

Oh, there's many a thorn on the Jesus way,  
Many a thorn I know,  
There is grief and loss and the pain of the Cross,  
Wherever my feet may go,

But the Lord will heal all the wounds I bear,  
When the thorns have pricked me sore,  
For He's planted a rose where the briar grows,  
And He's walked this way before.

Oh, there's many a storm on the Jesus way,  
Many a storm I see,  
And the night is black and the wind's wild rack  
Throws angry waves over me.

But the Lord Himself is in my little ship,  
And the winds obey His will,  
By the word He has said "Be ye not afraid,"  
My heart and the waves grow still.

Oh, there's many a foe on the Jesus way,  
Many a foe to fight,  
And all the day I must watch and pray,  
In keeping my armor bright,

But the Lord is ever at my right hand,  
The Tempter's wiles to meet,  
Though the foe may be strong and the fight be long,  
He shall never know defeat.

### **III. CHRISTIANITY IS A RELIGION OF SONG**

The fortitude and irrepressible faith of the Apostles is seen by the fact that deep in the dungeon, with their feet fast in the stocks, and their backs bleeding and paining excruciatingly, they could still sing songs of praises unto God. What a glorious song it must have been, sung there in the midst of the filthy and foul dungeon. How the Spirit must have helped their infirmities! Truly, "all God's chillun" have got a song!

One is reminded of Madame Guyon's lines, written while in prison:

A little bird am I,  
Shut from the fields and air,  
And in my cage I sit and sing,  
To Him who placed me there,  
Well pleased a prisoner to be,  
Because, my God, it pleases thee.

Naught have I else to do,  
I sing the whole day long,  
And He whom most I love to please,  
Doth listen to my song.  
He caught and bound my wandering wing,  
But still He bends to hear me sing.

My cage confines me round,  
Abroad I cannot fly,  
But though my wing is closely bound,  
My heart's at liberty,  
My prison walls cannot control,  
The flight, the freedom of the soul.

Oh, it is good to soar  
These bolts and bars above  
To Him whose purpose I adore,  
Whose providence I love,  
And in Thy mighty will to find,  
The joy, the freedom of the mind.

Yes, Christianity is a religion of song. Blind unbelief, black atheism, has little to sing about, but  
“all God’s chillun got a song,” a song for all ages and conditions of life.

There is a song for babyhood, and the little ones can lisp:

“Jesus loves me, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so.”

And at Christmas time their baby voices are heard singing:

“Away in a manger,  
No crib for His bed,  
The little Lord Jesus,  
Laid down His sweet head.”

There is a song for the convert, newly born. He can stand up and sing with joy:

“Oh, happy day that fixed my choice  
On Thee, my Saviour and my God,  
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,  
And tell its raptures all abroad.”

“He taught me how to watch and pray,  
And live rejoicing every day,  
Happy day, happy day,  
When Jesus washed my sins away.”

There’s also a song for those in the full vigor of the Christian life:

“Oh could I speak the matchless worth,  
Oh could I sound the glories forth  
Which in my Savior shine,

“I’d soar, and touch the heav’nly strings,  
And vie with Gabriel while he sings  
In notes almost divine”

The Christian also has a song for the hour of sorrow:

“When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul”

Or perhaps, comfortingly, he sings:

“I must tell Jesus all of my troubles,  
I cannot bear these burdens alone,  
In my distress He surely will help me,  
He ever loves and cares for His own”

One remembers that Jesus sang in the Upper Room on the night before He was crucified, when the awful burden of the world’s sin was upon Him, when the hatred of the race was about to be foisted upon His innocent head, He sang praises unto God at the Passover Feast.

The children of God have a song even in the black hour of death; and you may hear them singing:

“Safe in the arms of Jesus,  
Safe on His gentle breast,  
There by His love o’ershaded,  
Sweetly my soul shall rest. Hark!

‘Tis the voice of angels,  
Borne in a song to me,  
Over the fields of glory,  
Over the jasper sea.

Safe in the arms of Jesus,  
Safe on His gentle breast,  
There by His love o’ershaded,  
Sweetly my soul shall rest.”

How true it is that “stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage”!

Truly our God supplies for those who trust Him “**songs in the night.**”

You know the devil is a fool to persecute God’s children; he always loses out when he does. I sometimes think he does not use that technique so often, today; rather he lulls them to sleep with indifference.

A little persecution would be a mighty good thing for the Church. It would rouse the real Christians and drive out the pretenders. That jail at Philippi became a veritable sanctuary of God.

All the saved of the Lord have a song, and they sing it best under pressure and persecution.

#### IV. CHRISTIANITY IS A RELIGION OF POWER

There is something more than mere drama about the earthquake. It was undoubtedly a miraculous thing; it may have had its roots in nature, but it had the finger of God directing it, and perhaps it was sent to teach God's power to break the shackles of sin, for we read that, when the earthquake came, the doors were opened and the chains of the prisoners were unloosed.

But Jesus can break every fetter without the help of an earthquake.

“He breaks the bonds of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free!”

Now earthquakes are signs of God's judgment, and since the turn of the century earthquakes have been tremendously on the increase. Records show that a half-million people have been killed—two hundred thousand at one time in China, in 1920. There was an earthquake at the Cross, there was another at the Resurrection, and there will be another great earthquake at the Second Coming of our Lord; but what you need, my friend, if you are outside of Jesus Christ, is a real earthquake in your soul.

That's what the Philippian jailer got, and the man who has had an earthquake in his soul by the grace and power of God does not fear the coming judgment because there is no condemnation for him.

If we are ever to have another revival, we must have the power of God come upon the church of Jesus Christ. If that power comes, it will probably come by the way of persecution that brings men low before God and causes them to pray with great earnestness. Then God's power will fall, evil will be defeated, God will be glorified in the salvation of precious souls.

#### V. CHRISTIANITY IS A RELIGION OF DELIVERANCE

When the jailer discovered the prison doors open, and the prisoners free, he was about to commit suicide. Hard and relentless Rome would have held him responsible for the safekeeping of his prisoners, and if they escaped he would likely be put to death.

But he hears Paul's reassuring words: “**Do thyself no harm for we are all here.**” Then, trembling, the jailer asks: “**What must I do to be saved?**” or, literally, “What must I do to be delivered?”

We doubt that this jailer had any truly evangelical ideas when he asked the question. Fear of physical calamity mingled with a desire for some supernatural deliverance seemed to be uppermost in his mind, but the important thing is that Paul was “quick on the trigger,” and used the occasion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If the child of God and personal worker is alert, he does not need to wait for an evangelical question to give a gospel answer. Almost any type of conversation can be turned into gospel channels if God's child is seeking to do so.

**“What must I do to be saved?”** It is a great question, and how variedly it would be answered today.

- If the Moralist were asked the question, his answer would be, “Be good and trust that God is good, and He will honor your goodness.”
- If a Theosophist were asked, he would give you some vague teaching on the transmigration of souls, and would tell you that your salvation depended upon the upward tendency in these reincarnations and transmigrations.
- If the Buddhist were asked, he would give you a moral code and a philosophy of life that would end up in Nirvana or the soul’s nothingness. Your salvation would come through your ultimate submersion into universal spirit.
- Ask the Eddyite, or Christian Scientist, falsely so called, and your answer would be that you do not need any salvation except from error. Sin is nonexistent, evil is an error of mortal mind, God is all, God is love, God is good.

And if you listened long enough, your mind would be hypnotized by this ethereal philosophy.

And what is Paul’s answer? It is: **“Believe, believe, believe, on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”**

And what does that mean?

- It means, commit your all to the finished work of Jesus Christ;
- It means, to confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, believing in your heart that God hath raised Him from the dead.
- It means, receiving Him as your personal Saviour, and receiving the authority to become a child of God.

I can scarcely understand how it could be so, but somehow by God’s grace that Jailer believed and was saved. Think of it! A raw pagan found Jesus that night in the midst of turmoil, and you who have heard the Gospel all your life say you don’t understand the working of it.

Ah, beloved, it’s not the trouble of your heads but with your hearts; it’s not that you don’t understand so much as that you are not willing to believe.

The story is told of a prodigal young man of high Russian family in the days of the Czars, who was jailed for his spendthrift habits that had brought him into severe debt. In the prison, in a spirit of remorse, he made a list of his remembered debts, and they totaled a staggering sum. In desperation he wrote absent-mindedly on the paper, “And who will pay these debts?”

Exhausted in mind and body, he fell asleep with his arms on the table, the paper in front of him. While he was asleep, Czar Nicholas, who knew the family and the lad, came to the jail and looking in saw the paper and wrote under the statement, “And who will pay these debts?” in a bold hand: “I, Nicholas!” and tiptoed out, while the young man slept on.

Imagine the surprise of the lad when he awoke and saw this statement, and was told of its authenticity and that freedom had been obtained for him. But, oh, what is that compared with the joy of the lost sinner brought face to face with the realization that though his sins were as scarlet, yet by the death of Jesus Christ, they had been made as white as snow. Though the wages of sin were death, yet the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ Our Lord. “Oh, believe it!” says the Apostle. “Believe it!” is my plea to you.

Alexander Maclaren tells the story of an old Rabbi who used to say to his congregation, “Repent the day before you die.” But one said to him, “Rabbi, we do not know the day on which we shall die. How then shall we repent the day before?”

And the Rabbi replied, with a twinkle in his eye, yet in all seriousness: “Then, repent today.”

Now is the accepted time—now is the day of salvation.

“Why do you linger, why do you stay,  
In the broad road, that most dangerous way—  
While right before you, narrow and strait,  
Is the bright pathway to heaven’s pearly gate?

“Come, then, beloved, no longer stay;  
Leave the broad highway, oh, leave it today!  
Make your decision—oh, do not wait!  
Take thou the pathway so narrow and strait!”

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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