

## **“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”**

# ***“The Simplicity of Salvation”***

## **Scripture Reading – Acts, 16:16-34**

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*Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved”. She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned round and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.*

*When the owners of the slave girl realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise”.*

*The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose. 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. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”*

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

*They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household”. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptised. 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 family.*

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***‘There is no difference between Jew and Gentile... for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”.’***

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***Romans, 10:12a, 13, NIV***

**This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.**

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The OLD TIME RELIGION needs to become the NEW TIME RELIGION because it is the ALL TIME RELIGION. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do through us today.

**THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.**

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against three obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

*The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...*

## **“THE SIMPLICITY OF SALVATION”**

**We skip forward in our studies to ‘THE CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR’.**

Although we have skipped forward some chapters, I would encourage you to spend some time reading the events of **Acts, 12:18 – Acts, 16:15**. Only time constraints for this series prevent us from considering some important events in the Early Christian Church. I would respectfully suggest that you spend some time looking at these four chapters during the week.

*Last time, we considered how the Christian Church met together and prayed for the release of Peter from prison – and the miracle that occurred. This time we look at Christians in jail again – and Paul and Silas’s equally miraculous prison break...*

**Question:** *If you had a child who was lost, and if you had just one opportunity to get a message to that child, telling them what to do, and how to get home safely... would you make that message simple or complicated?*

**The Bible reveals for us a very simple gospel.**

The path to salvation is really so simple and so plain. It is so gloriously simple that little children can have no problem understanding it at all, whilst intellectual giants stumble and fall over it. There is no premium on intelligence, nor is there any penalty on ignorance.

***‘Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children”.’***

***Matthew, 11:25, NIV***

**The Philippian jailor asked, “WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”**

Some Jewish Christians in Antioch would have answered: **“UNLESS YOU ARE CIRCUMCISED, ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM TAUGHT BY MOSES, YOU CANNOT BE SAVED”** (see **Acts, 15:1**). Paul’s reply was much simpler (and kinder!): **“BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS, AND YOU WILL BE SAVED”**.

Before we consider 'THE SIMPLICITY OF SALVATION', we look at the background to the story...

### **Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison, and chained up in the inner cell.**

Some may say that prisons today are too soft, but that was certainly not the case in Roman times. Then, there was no running water and no toilets. Urine and excrement would have been on the floor. Rats and other rodents would be running around the floor and the smell would be horrendous. Day and night you would hear the moans of the living, and the groans of the dying.

### **What would the ordinary Christian be doing in such a position?**

I would be surprised if they would not be crying out to God. They would be accusing him of not caring for them, or making their life easier as they set out to do his work. They would be criticising and complaining, continually asking: "Why?". Perhaps two ordinary Christians would be arguing with each other and accusing each other. Perhaps one might have said to the other, "Why did you do it? If you had only kept quiet, then I would not be in here with you".

### **But instead of complaining, the two men prayed to, and praised, God.**

*'About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.'*

**Acts, 16:25, NIV**

### **Prayer and praise are powerful weapons.**

God responded by shaking the foundations of the prison, opening all the doors, and loosening the prisoners' bonds. Paul and Silas could have fled to freedom straightaway, but instead they remained right where they were. For one thing, Paul immediately took command; and, no doubt, the fear of God was upon these pagan men. The prisoners must have realised that there was something very special about those two Jewish preachers.

### **Paul's attention was fixed on the jailer, the man he wanted to win to Christ.**

It was Roman Law that if a guard lost a prisoner, he himself was given the same punishment that the prisoner would have received. There must have been some men in the prison who had committed capital crimes, and the jailer would rather commit suicide than face shame and execution. A hard-hearted person seeking vengeance would have let the cruel jailer kill himself, but Paul was not that kind of a man. It was the jailer who was the prisoner, not Paul; and Paul not only saved the man's life, but pointed him to eternal life in Christ.

### **THE PREACHING OF PAUL AND SILAS**

#### **To be fair, this is not explicit. You have to read this a little into the story.**

Nonetheless, the jailer was pre-conditioned to ask the salvation question. He knew about his need of salvation and he was aware that Paul and Silas had the answers he was seeking. I wonder whether Paul and Silas had already witnessed to those in the jail. Of course, they could only answer this question because the jailer asked it – and he knew they had the answer.

*When Paul and Silas were beaten, perhaps they spoke to the jailor about the wounds of Jesus Christ, who was wounded for our transgressions; and by his stripes, we are healed.*

*When Paul and Silas were thrown into prison, perhaps they spoke to the jailor about the dungeon of hell, were those who do not receive Christ would spend eternity. When Paul and Silas were placed in chains, perhaps they spoke to the jailor about the sin that so easily entangles us; and that only Jesus can set men free.*

### **THE PRAYERS OF PAUL AND SILAS**

#### **'Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees' (William Cowper).**

The devil may do many things to inhibit you, but there is one thing that he cannot do – he cannot stop you from praying. Even when there are iron doors all around you – you can still pray! Even when there are chains all over you – you can still pray! Even when there are people all against you – you can still pray!

#### **Paul and Silas did not call on God to judge their enemies.**

They did not ask God to get them out of jail – they were more concerned with getting the jailor out of his 'spiritual' jail. They were not prisoners of Satan – the jailor was. This fact was the focus and feature of their fervent prayers.

### **THE PRAISES OF PAUL AND SILAS**

#### **When you are in pain, the midnight hour is not the easiest time for worship.**

*'Any fool can sing in the day. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skilful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by. Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men.'*

**Charles H Spurgeon**

#### **The prisoners gave their attention to this unusual combination.**

Amongst the moans of the living and the groans of the dying there were the prayers and praises of these peculiar people. God noticed what Paul and Silas were up to as well. The force of their prayers and praises caused an earthquake. Although the walls did not fall down, the doors to the jail opened and the prisoners' chains fell off.

*The jailor was saved... The jailor's family was saved... Were some of the prisoners saved?*

## **1. THE MEANING OF SALVATION**

*'He brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"'*

**Acts, 16:30, NIV**

#### **First, we need to understand what it means to be saved.**

The word 'SAVED' comes from a Greek word 'SODEZO', which literally means, 'TO BE DELIVERED'.

#### **What was the Philippian jailor asking to be delivered from?**

He was not asking to be delivered from the earthquake, because the earthquake ended the moment the prison doors were flung open and the prisoners chains had fallen off. He was not asking to be delivered from his superiors' wrath, because the prisoners had not escaped.

***“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”***

**Romans, 10:13, NIV**

### **From what, then, are we saved?**

Let us allow an angel to answer this question. When the angel announced the birth of Jesus Christ to Joseph and Mary, he said, **“YOU ARE TO GIVE HIM THE NAME JESUS, BECAUSE HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS”** (see **Matthew, 1:21**).

### **People do not like the idea that they must be saved from their sins.**

Today if you tell someone they are a sinner standing in the need of salvation, they will find your words offensive. Nonetheless, that is the way the Bible calls it.

*Once upon a time, drunkenness was a sin – now it is a disease.*

*Once upon a time, pregnancy outside marriage was a sin – now it is a mistake.*

*Once upon a time, abortion was a sin – now it is a woman’s right to choose.*

*Once upon a time, rebellious children was a sin – now they are maladjusted.*

*Once upon a time, cohabitation was a sin – now it is an alternative lifestyle.*

*Once upon a time, homosexuality was a sin – now it is a lifestyle choice.*

*Once upon a time, gossip was a sin – now it is a prayer request.*

*When Willie Nelson built his own golf course, someone asked him what was par for the course – the number of strokes a first-class golfer should normally require (usually 72). He replied, “This is my golf course, and par is exactly what I want it to be”. He pointed to the first hole saying, “That hole is a Par 47, and yesterday I took a 46 on that hole to birdie it”.*

### **People today believe the same thing about sin.**

Despite what God and the Bible might say about their actions, no one believes that they are committing sin. Imagine how they would respond to you if you went to the United Nations and said that the problem with the world is sin. How would you be received if you went to the Government and said that the problem with the country is sin? Would they laugh at you if you went to Oxbridge Universities and told them the answer was the eradication of sin? “This is my life. I have the right and the freedom to choose. I will do with my life what I think is right.”

### **We live in a world that admits man may be ill, but he is not evil.**

Man may be weak, they say, but he is not wicked. The only problems that mankind faces today has to do with his environment and his chemistry. When you get those two things right, everything else will work out well. The Bible points to the very root of the problem and calls it ‘SIN’. We are all born with ‘A SINFUL NATURE’. We ‘SIN BECAUSE WE ARE SINNERS’.

*The good news: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners...*

### **WE ARE SAVED FROM THE PENALTY OF SIN**

***‘The wages of sin is death.’***

**Romans, 6:23a, NIV**

**In ancient Rome, criminals were killed in several gruesome ways.**

Cicero described crucifixion as ‘THE MOST CRUEL AND HIDEOUS OF TORTURES’.

### **Others were executed by being physically attached to a ‘cadabre’.**

A ‘cadabre’ was a dead body. The decaying body of someone who died from a loathsome disease (perhaps leprosy) would be tied to a criminal who was required to work, eat, and sleep attached to the decomposing lump of hideous flesh. Eventually, the criminal would contract a disease and die a slow, agonising, humiliating death, still attached to the body.

***‘We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with.’***

**Romans, 6:6, NIV**

### **WE ARE SAVED FROM THE POLLUTION OF SIN**

#### **Imagine that you are about to enjoy a lovely fresh fruit salad.**

That salad is full of beautiful fresh fruit – portions of apples, oranges, bananas, pineapple, grapes, strawberries, cherries... Just as you put the first mouthful to your mouth, you are introduced to the lady who prepared it. She has used the freshest fruit she could find and washed and prepared it with her own hands – hands that you now see are covered with sores and cuts, from which blood and puss are pouring. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the fruit, but the cook has polluted it with her hands. I bet you lose your appetite!

***‘Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.’***

**Psalms, 51:2, NIV**

#### **Jesus Christ does more than keep us out of hell.**

He also gives us a new nature. He cleanses us from the inside out. He gives us power to be victorious over bad habits. He helps us learn a new way to live. He removes the things that do not belong in our lives and replaces them with that which is pure and noble.

#### **No wonder the author of ‘ROCK OF AGES’, Augustus Montague Toplady, wrote:**

*Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

*Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

### **WE ARE SAVED FROM THE PRESENCE OF SIN**

#### **In the New Jerusalem, there will be no sin to be found.**

***‘Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.’***

**Revelation, 21:27, NIV**

#### **Do you think that in the Heaven Jesus prepares, there will be room for sin?**

***‘Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”.’***

**John, 14:2-4, NIV**

## 2. THE MAN OF SALVATION

*'They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved".'*

**Acts, 16:31, NIV**

**When the jailor asked the question, Paul and Silas lifted up the name of Jesus.**

They did not speak about the jailor being saved by his works. He could not be saved by his deeds, nor his good intentions. It was not a WHAT that can save man, it is a WHO.

*He is Lord – MASTER ... He is Jesus – MEDIATOR ... He is Christ – MESSIAH ...*

### **JESUS IS THE MASTER**

Some silly preachers say, "Now that you have accepted Jesus as your Saviour, will you not make him your Lord?" It is almost as though they picture what Jesus offers as a self-service cafeteria where you can help yourself to a portion of salvation today, but turn your nose up at the unappealing sight of making him 'Lord'. Such teaching is nonsense. If Jesus Christ is not your Lord, then Jesus Christ is not your Saviour!

*The Bible mentions Jesus as Saviour 24 times.*

*The Bible mentions Jesus as Lord a staggering 433 times.*

*'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'*

**Romans, 10:9, NIV**

**No one is saved who has not made Jesus his Lord.**

You cannot have what he gives – SALVATION – unless you receive who he is – LORD.

### **JESUS IS THE MEDIATOR**

**The very name of Jesus means 'JEHOVAH SAVES'.**

*'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.'*

**1 Timothy, 2:5-6a, NIV**

**The dictionary defines a 'MEDIATOR' as 'ONE WHO INTERVENES'.**

We human beings are separated from God by sin, and only one person in the universe is our mediator and can stand between us and God and bring us together again – Jesus, who is both God and man. Jesus' sacrifice brought new life to all people.

### **JESUS IS THE MESSIAH**

**Jesus is 'THE CHRIST', the Messiah, which means, 'GOD'S ANOINTED ONE'.**

We cannot be saved by our Church – no matter what that Christian denomination is.

**We can only be saved by receiving the one and only Christ.**

*'Peter said, "Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved".'*

**Acts, 4:12, NIV**

**This is not something the church decided; it is the teaching of Jesus.**

Many people react negatively to the fact that there is no other name than that of Jesus to call on for salvation. Yet, if God designated Jesus to be the Saviour of the world, no one else can be his equal. Christians are to be open-minded on many issues but not on how we are saved from sin. No other religious teacher could die for our sins; no other religious teacher came to earth as God's only Son; no other religious teacher rose from the dead. Our focus should be on Jesus, whom God provided as the way to have an eternal relationship with himself. There is no other name or way.

## 3. THE METHOD OF SALVATION

*'They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved".'*

**Acts, 16:31, NIV**

### **WHAT DO YOU TRUST IN FOR YOUR SALVATION?**

**Some people are trusting in their good works.**

They have tried all their lives to be nice people. They think that so long as their good deeds outweigh their bad acts, then their place in heaven is guaranteed. They risk a place in eternity on a false premise.

**Some people are trusting that a loving God will never send anyone into hell.**

They know the Bible tells us that 'GOD IS LOVE'. They think that a loving God would not create any man, woman, or child on earth and then sit back and allow them to go into the fires of hell. Despite the fact that Jesus suffered the pain of scourging and crucifixion, and that he died for sins, they still risk a place in eternity on a false premise.

**Some people are trusting in their knowledge of, and about, Jesus.**

In the world there are millions who believe with their head that 'Jesus is Lord', but they have never believed in him with their heart. They will miss out on Heaven by about eighteen inches!

**To believe in Jesus, is to have faith in him.**

FAITH, simply put, is 'FORSAKING ALL I TRUST HIM'; relying totally and completely on him.

*Jerome, the Early Church Father who translated the Bible from Greek into Latin, said that he had a dream in which Jesus came to his house to visit him. Jerome gathered all his money together to present it as a gift, but Jesus looked at him and said, "I do not want your money, I do not want your possessions. "Lord, what do you want?", Jerome asked. "Your sin", the Lord replied, "that is what I came here to get". Jerome later said, "In my dream I gave Jesus my sin, and he gave me eternal life. What an exchange!"*