

An Unreachable Convert

Acts 16:25-34

Halifax: 13 January 2013

Introduction

It has been several weeks now that we have been away from our sermon series in Acts, so we will need to refresh ourselves a little.

- Paul and his companions had been clearly directed by the Lord to go to Macedonia by a special vision.
 - The Lord had first blocked them from going to the places they had planned to go, and then Paul saw the vision of man from Macedonia saying, “Come over and help us.”
- Philippi was a leading city in Macedonia, so they went there first.
 - But you will remember that when they arrived, there was no welcoming party—no indication of a people waiting to hear the gospel of the kingdom.
 - In fact, they could not even find a way to get started—there wasn’t even a synagogue.
 - It may be that Philippi, as a colony, had followed mother Rome in expelling all of the Jews.
- But Paul and his companions learned of a prayer meeting that was held outside the city and went there to see what they would find.
 - It appears that it was mostly women who attended this meeting.
 - Paul preaches to them, and the Lord opens the heart of one particular woman named Lydia.
 - She was a businesswoman, probably a very wealthy businesswoman as she was a seller of purple and had a large house.
 - Though already interested in the true God, it is only through the powerful working of God that she responds to the gospel with her household...
 - Now there is an oasis in the desert of Philippi—spiritual life in this place of spiritual death.
 - Clearly, it is the work of God that has brought about this beginning.

But this conversion was not very well known, it would seem, perhaps deliberately not because of the danger of opposition by the city officials.

- But the Lord brings it about that everyone in town might know that His kingdom has come to Philippi.
 - The demon in a demon-possessed servant girl begins to loudly announce that Paul and his companions are “servants of the Most High God who have come to show us the way of salvation.”
 - Paul finally rebukes the demon and casts it out,
 - but this enrages the servant girl’s masters because they had been making a lot of profit off of her demonization—using her as a fortune teller.

- These angry men drag Paul and Silas before the magistrates at the city square, charging them with teaching customs that are not lawful for us Romans to keep.
 - Now everyone at Philippi knows about these ambassadors of the Lord who have come to preach the kingdom of the Lord.
 - The magistrates want to discourage these men from their work, so they have them beaten with rods and cast into prison.
 - But we saw that these leaders were powerless to drive the joy from Paul and Silas—
 - There they are in stocks with their bruised and bloody bodies praying and singing praise to God at midnight!
 - Even though these men’s bodies were not yet in heaven, they were enjoying communion with heaven.
 - Even though they were in bonds, they were free!

And this week we get to see how the kingdom of heaven spread from them to the keeper of the prison—the Philippian Jailer.

- It is another remarkable account of the gospel breaking into the spiritually barren wilderness of Philippi.
 - This jailer would be one of the last people to listen to the gospel!
 - He was probably a retired soldier—
 - He was almost surely a crusty fellow, used to dealing with rough men.
 - And he had a reasonably good job in a prominent city.
 - Not the kind of fellow that would be interested to chat with you about the kingdom of God or to show any interest in it.
 - We do not know exactly what his personality was like, but my point is that Paul and Silas would have had very little way to reach this fellow.
 - Philippi was certainly not a place that you could do street preaching or pass out tracts.
 - But what we see is the Lord reaching this fellow with His salvation.
 - Of course it is always the Lord’s doing when a sinner is reached,
 - but in this case the hand of Lord is especially evident!
 - This fellow’s conversion serves as a reminder to us that nobody is beyond the reach of the gospel!
 - We need to be reminded of that!
 - Be honest, can you not think of people that seem unreachable?
 - Perhaps we even feel that way about Shanel right now.
 - Maybe some you feel that way about your unconverted parents or friends.
 - But it is never the case!
 - It is wrong for us to give up on people.

- Remember that we serve the God who can do the impossible!
 - He can reach the unreachable.
 - We need to pray to Him as if we believed that!
 - We need to pray to Him for the salvation of those who seem unreachable.
 - Don't write anyone off as a lost cause.
 - They may be totally uninterested in salvation one day,
 - and desperate for salvation the next day!

In our text today, we see that this is exactly what happened to the jailer at Philippi.

I. In the jailer, we see how the Lord is able to shake people up.

A. Just look at how this jailer changed.

1. He had no interest in the gospel.
 - He took these new prisoners that had been brought to him and chained them up in the inner prison.
 - As they were educated Jews and religious men,
 - he probably took some pleasure in going a little beyond what was necessary—taking them to the inner prison and putting them in stocks as if they were dangerous criminals.
 - There is no indication that when he went to bed that night,
 - he had any respect for Paul and Silas or any fear of their God.
 - To him, they were just silly religious fanatics.
 - He enjoyed having complete control of these buds.

TRANS> From all appearances, he is unreachable.

2. But in verse 29 & 30, we see that he has had a total change of heart!
 - There he is, falling down with trembling before these prisoners and crying out in desperation,
 - “Sirs (Lords), what must I do to be saved!”
 - It is remarkable that this man should behave like this before his prisoners!
 - He is desperate for their help!
 - 3. My brothers and sisters, this same change can happen to the unreachable people you thought of when I asked you a minute ago.
 - They can seem so out of touch with their need—so impossible to get to—
 - but in a moment the Lord can completely change all of that.

B. How does the LORD change someone so drastically?

1. With Lydia, we saw what always must happen—
 - Even when it is someone who has been seeking the true God.
 - For them to really be open to the gospel, God must open their heart.

- And He does this by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit.
 - We are all dead in our trespasses and sins...
 - The only reason a seeking sinner is seeking is because God has done a work of awakening in their heart...
 - But even then, there must be a further opening of their heart before they will ever be ready to receive the gospel...
 - The human heart cannot tolerate the gospel because although it tells that Jesus gave Himself for our sins in His great love...
 - We cannot accept the fact that such measures are necessary in our case—not until God’s Spirit works in our hearts.
 - We are insulted by such a notion!
 - We may have done wrong, but we don’t need anything so radical as God’s Son bearing the curse for us!
- A Spirit-wrought change of heart is necessary for anyone to be converted...
- But God often uses various circumstances along with the Spirit’s working to bring about this change.
2. Look at how the Lord shook this man out of his complacency!
- a. He sent an earthquake—a literal earthquake!
- 1) It was the perfect thing!
- Many people in the Greco-Roman world of the first century considered earthquakes to be theophanies—
 - revelations of divine presence and power!
 - And of course they were correct in one sense...
 - The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.
 - God is sovereign over all things.
 - He is over every blessing and every calamity.
 - It is often in calamity that hearts are softened—if not permanently, at least long enough to cry out to God and make vows to Him!
- 2) This earthquake was sent by the Lord to vindicate his servants and their doctrine.
- a) Clearly so—because of the timing of it...when these men prayed and sang...the earthquake occurred.
- It is like the earthquake in Acts 4:31 when the persecuted church prayed for boldness and the room was shaken!
 - It was a very tangible response to their prayer.
- TRANS> But that is not all that showed that this earthquake was sent to vindicate Paul and Silas...
- b) It is also clear because of what the earthquake did...

- It opened the doors and loosened the chains of the prisoners.
 - Ordinarily, earthquakes don't do that—but God sent this one to show that His servants had been wrongly imprisoned.
- b. The jailer comes to recognize that he is in the presence of the numina—in the presence of divinity!
- 1) This did not seem to hit him at first...
 - He thought the prisoners had surely escaped and he feared the dishonour that would come to him for letting them get away.
 - In typical Roman fashion, he would much prefer to kill himself, than bear the shame of a likely execution for dereliction of duty.
 - Paul, somehow knowing that he is about to kill himself—
 - cries out to him from within the prison...
 - **Acts 16:28: But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”**
 - 2) It seems that the other prisoners had seen the hand of God!
 - They did not run away—they were in awe, believing themselves to be in the presence of God!
 - No doubt they would have been impressed to see how Paul and Silas responded to the jailer—not with bitter cursing—but with patience.
 - They saw the joy of these men and heard them praying and praising God...
 - And what an impression it must have made when God responded to them with an earthquake that opened the doors and loosened their chains!
 - It is most probable the timing of the earthquake corresponded with their prayers—in response to them.
 - Perhaps they said, “vindicate your servants” and then the ground began to shake.
 - The prisoners seem to be awe struck.
 - 3) And now the jailer joins them
 - Upon hearing Paul's voice, the jailer is struck with the reality of the situation!
 - Why should this prisoner care about him?
 - Surely the God of these extraordinary prisoners had come to vindicate them!
 - Now the jailer is more terrified than he had been of the Romans!
 - He knows that he has had a role in the mistreatment of these men that God has come to protect!
 - He is a sinner in the hands of an angry God!
 - What will become of him?

- This is the only explanation for his response!
 - Running in and falling before them with trembling!
 - Calling them lords.
 - Asking them what he must do to be saved!
 - This man wants to know what he can do about the displeasure of God!
 - The Lord has brought him to this point!
 - No one else could have done it.
3. There are a couple things for us to learn through this.
- a. First, you ought to learn that God is able to shake up the unreachable people in your life!
 - He can use literal earthquakes to bring them to see their knees.
 - But there are many other ways He can shake them up—
 - job problems, family problems, physical problems, health problems, economic problems, political problems, war, bereavement, and just a sense of the vanity of life.
 - Very rarely do people begin to seek God because they are overwhelmed with a sense of His goodness!
 - We are in such a sorry state that God’s goodness usually hardens us, so usually it is only through affliction that we wake up.
 - One of the few exceptions to this is with covenant children who, by God’s grace, sometimes recognize the goodness of God to them and continue in faith from childhood...
 - but even then, God often uses calamity to sanctify them and help them grow.
 - Our haughtiness must ordinarily be broken by calamity.
 - It is usually in calamity that we come to God.
 - As believers, we learn to rejoice in our sufferings because we see how much they help us grow—
 - and we realize that God used them to bring us to Him in the first place.
 - But the point here is that God is able to shake up even the most hardened unreachable person in this way.
 - b. Second, learn that we need to be faithful servants so that the Lord can use us to reach the unreachable.
 - Rarely does the Lord save anyone without using those who are already His disciples.
 - Remember how he sent Philip to the Eunuch and Peter to Cornelius?
 - He could have just given these men a revelation, but instead He gives us the privilege.

- In the case of the jailer, I have already mentioned how he and the prisoners had witnessed the extraordinary demeanour of Paul and Silas.
 - Where cursing was expected, there was thanksgiving and praise!
 - We forfeit many opportunities when we whine and complain and do not praise God.
 - You never know who may be watching you.
 - You have an opportunity to glorify God and if you are faithfully serving Him, then He will use you in unexpected ways.

TRANS> And now we come to the good part...

II. See how this unreachable man is saved along with his household!

A. See first of all how simple salvation is!

- He has asked how to be saved, and Paul gives him a very straightforward answer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”
 1. Simple faith is all that is required.
 - Once a person realizes that he stands condemned before the Most High God, the message is very simple.
 - Such a person knows that he cannot plead his good works.
 - Such a person knows that he cannot propose some scheme for his salvation.
 - It is up to God to save him and all he can do is look to God.
 - Things are not so complicated once a sinner has been shaken.
 2. And you see that Paul directs him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - This was not all that Paul says to him of course.
 - In saying that it is simple, I do not mean to imply that.
 - Verse 32 tells us that further instruction was given to him—
 - He had to be told about Jesus, and what Jesus had done, but nothing more than faith in Jesus was required...
 - And this man was ready to do whatever was required!
 - Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ involves this...
 - First, you must trust in Him as the Christ, recognizing that He is the Christ—the anointed One whom the Father sent from heaven to save.
 - He went to the cross to pay the penalty for His people’s sins.
 - You can only be saved from God’s wrath by casting yourself on Him as the one who bore the wrath of God for all His elect.
 - Second, you must recognize that He is LORD and follow Him as such.

- You must see that the Father has made Him Lord and Christ and has exalted Him to sit at His right hand until all His enemies are made His footstool!
 - As Lord, He is to be followed and obeyed, for our salvation involves not only forgiveness by His cross,
 - but also deliverance from a sinful life by His grace and Spirit.
 - We follow Him and He empowers us to live as God's servants.
3. We are told that this man did believe—
- In verse 34 it says that he did.
 - Right then and there, this man was eternally saved, just as Paul promised!
 - Now he was fully pardoned—
 - not only for what he did to Paul and Silas,
 - but for all the sins that he had ever committed and for his native corruption!
 - Now this man—who only hours before was a hardened sinner—
 - has eternal life—peace with God—hope of glory—union with Jesus Christ!
 - How wonderfully simple and complete it all is—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ—
 - That is all that must be done!

TRANS> But look—there is more to be learned here...

B. In this passage, we are shown that baptism goes hand in hand with faith.

1. Baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant. It is commanded by Jesus.
 - As soon as a person turns to Jesus to be cleansed by His saving work, that person is to be given this outward symbol of Christ's work.
 - He confesses that he is a sinner, but now he is depicted as a pardoned, cleansed sinner by the washing with water in baptism.
 - It is the sign that he is washed by the blood of Jesus Christ and cleansed by His Spirit.
2. Jesus does not have true disciples who have not been cleansed, and therefore He wants them all to have the sign and seal of cleansing...
 - washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - None are to be without this sign who are His disciples...
 - It is true enough that there are many false disciples,
 - but Jesus makes it clear that He would rather have false disciples with the sign than true disciples without it!
 - You cannot find any disciples, young or old, without baptism in the apostolic church.

- Someone might point to the thief on the cross—he was not baptized!
 - But that is an exception that proves the rule.
 - The only reason he was not baptized was because the circumstances did not allow him to be baptized.
 - He only had a few hours before his death and he was not exactly in a position to do as he pleased during those few hours!
3. The baptism of the jailer is a striking case for baptism without delay!
- He washes Paul and Silas of their wounds and then they wash him with the ceremonial washing of baptism that very night!
 - They did not require him to take courses or wait to see if his profession was genuine.
 - As with those who professed at Pentecost, and at Samaria, and in the house of Cornelius, and in every other case,
 - as soon as there was a solid profession of faith, they were baptized.
 - We might indeed delay in some cases where the profession is not sound—
 - where the individual does not so clearly see his need of Christ or shows a reluctance to follow Him as Lord...
 - Jesus turned many away who came to Him, but as soon as simple faith is professed—baptism should follow.
 - I think it is appropriate when there is a settled church to wait until the elders can examine the person together—and to do the baptism in the assembly—but it should not be delayed for long!
 - Jesus has no disciples that He has not washed, so none should be without the symbol of washing.
 - The two go hand in hand.
- And there is yet another lesson from this jailer’s conversion...that...
- C. God not only embraces unreachable sinners, but also their households.
- Look at how this man’s household is emphasised in our text...they are brought into the kingdom of God...together...
1. First, he and his household are invited together... v. 31:
- **Acts 16:31: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”**
 - This is a clear echo of the promise that was given to Abraham when the Lord first established His covenant with him...
 - He told Abraham that the promise was to him and to all that were in his house.
 - God’s mercy is great toward us—
 - He not only embraces us as His people, but also our household.

- He said to Abraham, “I will be a God to you and to your descendants after you.”
 - Peter echoed this promise at Pentecost when he was calling the Jews who had seen their error to repent and be baptized...
 - He said, “The promise is to you and to your children...”
 - And here, you see, with this pagan jailer, the promise is also to him and his household.
2. Second, he and his household hear the gospel together... v. 32:
- **Acts 16:32: Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.**
 - When God called Abraham, He also made it clear to him that He expected him to command his household in the way of the Lord after him...
 - **Ge 18:19: For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.**
 - If Christ has taken our children to be His disciples, we are to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
 - We are to see that they too hear the word of God and keep it.
 - God loves our children and He is highly grieved with us if we do not train them and teach them in the way.
3. Third, he and his household are baptized together... v. 33
- **Acts 16:33: And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.**
 - We saw a moment ago that Christ had no disciples in the apostolic church that were not baptized.
 - He cleanses all those who come to Him and therefore He wants the sign and seal of cleansing to be given to them.
 - As soon as Peter saw that Cornelius had received the Holy Spirit, he said, “who can forbid water that these should not be baptized?”
 - Whoever has the thing signified by baptism should have baptism.
 - This was the case with Abraham also—
 - He was commanded to circumcise all his household when he was circumcised,
 - and then to circumcise all who born in his house after that.
 - This was to be the case even with the little ones—on the eighth day they were to be circumcised.
 - The Lord takes the children of believers as His disciples before they can even speak... He calls them His...

- He even calls the children of His covenant people who were offering them as sacrifices to idols “my children.”
 - And if they are His, they are to be given the sign that shows that He cleanses His own.
 - But let me be clear—this does not mean that they are all true disciples who will be saved...
 - Some of them are not truly regenerate—
 - but He commands that all of them be given the sign of cleansing that belongs to those that true.
 - The sign is to be given both to the Isaacs and the Ishmaels, both to the Jacobs and the Esaus.
 - As I said before, He would much rather have false disciples **with** the sign of cleansing than true disciples **without** it.
 - And the fact is that many little children are true disciples—they are regenerate from before they can speak.
4. Fourth, he and his household believe together... v. 34:
- **Acts 16:34: Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.**
 - This is a splendid testimony of the grace of God.
 - So often it is the case that when the head of the household believes, so do the members of his household.
 - No one believes apart from the working of God’s Spirit,
 - but God promises that His righteousness is to children’s children to such as keep His covenant.
 - We need to pray earnestly that God will so work in our households that both we and our children will keep His covenant, trusting in our Lord Jesus and following Him.
 - What a blessing it is to believe together!
 - How kind God is to save us and our households!
 - Together we are delivered from Hell and established into God’s household with our families.

TRANS> So you see the marvellous way in which this man and his household were converted by simply believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Now they have a whole new life ahead of them—a life with God!
 - And that new life is what I want to look at now...

III. See how this unreachable man is joined to the loving fellowship of Christ and His people.

A. What a transformation in this jailer!

1. He was so cold-hearted that he had put Paul and Silas in stocks in the worst part of the prison when they had just been beaten with rods...
 - But look at how Christ has changed him!
 - He didn't care about others, but now he himself washes the wounds of these men and prepares a meal for them in the middle of the night!
 - There is this wonderful communion that goes on...this give and take...
 - Paul and Silas give him instruction and he gives them food...
 - He washes their wounds and they baptize him...
 - This jailer was a new creation in Christ.
 - He knew that he had received from the love of Christ and now he wants to give what he can out of gratitude.
 - This is how you can tell that a person really understands the gospel.
 - John says:
 - **1 Jo 3:14: We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.**
2. It is remarkable to look at the people that have been brought together here in this loving communion of Jesus Christ!
 - a. What would this Roman jailer ever have had to do with these Jewish preachers apart from Jesus?
 - Only a few hours before, he would have had nothing to do with them.
 - And think of Paul before his conversion—
 - He would have despised this man—would never have entered his house.
 - It is the gospel that has changed them and brought them together!
 - It is Christ!
 - b. What a marvellous assortment of people now make up the church at Philippi...
 - A wealthy merchant woman—a seller of purple from Asia Minor who had an intellectual need that could not be satisfied with Greek philosophy.
 - A poor demon possessed servant girl—who did not even own herself—now transformed by the power of Christ...
 - And now a crusty Roman jailer and his household!
 - None of these people would have had any interest in loving each other or in loving Paul and Silas,
 - But now they are united in the bonds of Jesus' love!
- B. Oh brothers and sisters, let us live in the bonds of Christ's love!
1. We have some diversity in our congregation...

- Many of us would have had little to do with each other apart from Christ—but now He has brought us together in His love.
 - Reconciliation is a beautiful thing!
 - Let the love of Christ flourish in our midst!
 - Let it be seen in our congregation—
 - Let us have a true genuine care for one another—a looking to reach out to each other and to meet each other’s needs.
 - Jesus has cared for us, let us care for each other in His name.
2. Let this love also be seen in our homes...
- a. Let it be seen in husbands who love Jesus and so lay down their lives for their wives and for their children...
 - Let it be seen in gentle, loving service that truly cares for their needs and washes their wounds.
 - Let it be seen in loving patient instruction that feeds them with the life-giving, ever-refreshing word of God!
 - Let it be seen in sacrificial giving to provide.
 - b. And let that love be returned by respectful wives and loving obedient children...
 - Children who yearn to honour Jesus by obeying their parents and going out of their way to do good to them...
 - Wives who are patiently submissive to their husbands and who give freely to their children, looking well to their needs...
 - Brothers and sisters who constantly look for ways—not to annoy and aggravate—but to be a blessing to their siblings.
 - Who step aside to let others go first or take the last piece...
 - Who cover the faults of others instead of stirring up strife magnifying the wrongs in their siblings...
3. Does the gospel really have power to transform our homes like this?
- Yet it does! Of course it does!
 - Don’t you want this?
 - Then look to Christ—look at what He has done for you—and start making a difference in your home!
 - We all look at the others and how they need to change.
 - Look at yourself and look to Christ—you change and don’t worry about what others do.
 - How ashamed we should be that we are so often not characterised by this love.
 - It is a dishonour to our Saviour who calls us to be imitators of Him.
 - We bring glory to Him by the love that we have for one another.

C. And what joy this loving union with Christ brings.

1. Verse 34 tells us that this crusty Roman soldier rejoices!

- I am sure that rejoicing was a new thing for him—
 - He probably never even thought of joy as a thing he wanted to have.
 - But now he has it in abundance!
 - He has the joy of reconciliation with the living God!
 - He has the joy of fellowship with a Saviour who took God's curse for him on the cross.
 - He has the joy of total forgiveness and total justification.
 - He has the joy of a renewed heart.
 - He has the joy of loving others and being loved by them.
 - He has the joy of serving others and of having a purpose of living for his Saviour and glorifying God.
 - He has the joy of an eternal inheritance—a future in glory.
- Sure, he may have had superficial joy from his wine...or perhaps the joy of victory at war before...
 - but now he has a true, deep joy that no suffering could take away.
 - This joy was a lasting joy of substance.
 - It was the joy that caused Paul and Silas to sing when they were in pain and misery.
 - It is the joy that Paul mentioned 16 times when he later wrote to the Philippian church, even though he and they were being persecuted at the time.
 - It was the joy that no one could ever take away.
 - It was the joy that belongs to the triune God Himself and that the jailer and his household now shared with Paul and Silas and the other members of the fledgling church at Philippi.

2. My dear friends, do you know this joy?

- It is yours in Christ Jesus.
 - Do not lose sight of what you have in this most excellent saviour!
 - Like the jailer, you would be a sinner in the hands of an angry God if it were not for our dear Lord Jesus Christ.
 - He saves you if only you will believe in Him!
 - And He will transform you if only you will walk with Him!
 - There is no one else like Him!
 - Yes, we stumble and we blunder along—but He is at work in you through it all and He will bring you forth as gold!
 - What riches you have in Him!

- Oh that God the Father “**would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

Conclusion:

He is the God who is able to reach the unreachable!

- Jesus our Saviour and Lord can take a crusty Roman jailer and turn him into a joyful servant of God!
 - No one is beyond the reach of His powerful grace.
 - You are not beyond the reach of this grace.
- He says,
 - **Isa 45:22: Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.**