

Baptismal Service A - Acts Chapter 16 v 16 - 34

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to read together now from our Bibles, and if you'd like to turn with me to Acts, the book of Acts and chapter 16. Acts and chapter 16, if you've got one of the Red Church Bibles, then that is page 1112. 1, 1, 1, 2. And we're going to read from Acts chapter 16, beginning at verse 16, and then we're going to read down to verse 34. And we'll come back to this a bit later on in our service.

Acts chapter 16, beginning at verse 16. Once when we, that's Luke's writing this, who was a companion of Paul and Silas, once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future.

She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune telling. She 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 annoyed, he turned around 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 her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

[1 : 3 4] 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 practice.

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

When he received these 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 everyone's chains became loose.

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword. It was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, Don't harm yourself. We're all here.

[2 : 4 8] 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 household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house, set a meal before them.

He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God, he and his whole household. So who on earth, in their right mind, would get baptized?

Maybe you're thinking that. What sort of person would want to be baptized in this way? A fanatic, maybe. A nutter.

[3 : 48] A religious madman. A bad person. Or maybe a good person. What sort of person gets baptized?

Well, I want to introduce you to somebody who was baptized many, many years ago. We read something of his story there in Acts 16. He's one of many people that we read about who were baptized in the name of Jesus, as we thought earlier.

This person, we don't know his name. We don't know a lot about him, but what we do know about him is important and significant. He's the one who is the jailer.

But really more than that, he's the prison, the chief jailer at the prison in Philippi. He's the governor, in one sense, of the prison.

He's the important position, indeed, to hold. Now, we know that from historic records that to become a jailer in a Roman colony, and Philippi was a Roman colony, part of the Roman Empire at that time, it was almost exclusively a job given to an ex-soldier who had served at least 20 years in the Roman army and had risen to the rank of centurion.

[5 : 07] A bit like an NCO, a sergeant or sergeant major in the army. So this man, we know, was a tough man. He'd fought in many battles.

He was a man who had seen terrible things. He was a harsh man. We can see that, as we'll see a bit later on, by the way he treats Paul and Silas.

He's a man who's been given this job as a reward in his retirement for his long service. We know that he was good at his job.

In other words, that he was conscientious as the governor of the prison. Because we're told that when he was commanded to guard Paul and Silas carefully, that he received those orders and put them in the inner cell.

In other words, the deepest, darkest cell in the prison. In the lowest place. The worst place. And, to make sure they didn't escape, he fastened their feet in the stocks.

[6 : 08] You might have seen stocks around village squares from time to time. You know, where the medieval times, they put their hands and their head through. Well, these weren't as nice as them. These stocks were for your feet.

And they would mean that your feet were stretched apart quite severely. So, he was conscientious in his job. And he did it well.

He was going to make sure that in no way would these men escape from his prison on his watch. But also, we know he's a family man.

A man who's got a family. A household, they're told. But it's the same word as family. His accommodation would have come with the job. Probably the prison would have been attached to a flat or an apartment.

Or even his dwelling place and house would have been above the prison. And there, he would have been with his family. That would explain why he was asleep.

[7 : 05] He'd locked all the prisoners up for the night. And he'd gone to bed. So, what happens to this hardened jailer, this ex-serviceman, this conscientious, hard-working man with a family?

What happens to him that in that matter of hours, he is baptized with water and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior?

Well, the first thing that happens is that there is a tremendous earthquake. Certainly, it is a God-sent earthquake. A localized earthquake which shakes loose all the doors in the prison and even the chains that were holding the men.

This could not be anything else than an act of God's. And he is woken by the earthquake. He's shocked by it.

He runs down, we're told, from his bed in his nightshirt and he sees all the doors of the prisoner open. And he presumes all the prisoners have escaped.

[8 : 16] So, what does he do? He takes his sword and he's about to impale himself upon his sword and kill himself. Why on earth would he want to do that?

Well, simply put like this. If those prisoners had escaped, his death would have been far worse than being put to death by his own sword. He would have been made an example of.

He may have even been crucified for failing in his duty to do his job as a Roman citizen and employee. But before he does that, before he is about to kill himself, Paul and Silas, who he's treated quite badly, remember, sticking them in the worst hole in the prison, putting their feet in stocks, a painful experience, Paul calls out, Don't do it!

Everybody's here. None of the prisoners had escaped. The chains had come off and the doors had been opened, but nobody had made a run for it.

Paula calls for lights. When a lamp is brought or a light is brought, he sees Paul and Silas, brings them out of their inner cell, and falls at their feet.

[9 : 29] He rushed in, we're told, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. And then he asks them the most peculiar question. A strange question.

He doesn't ask them, Why didn't you escape when you had the chance? What are you still doing here? What happened in the earthquake? He doesn't ask them any of those questions. He asks them simply this, What must I do to be saved?

A strange thing to ask. What must I do to be saved? Now when we think about the word saved, or being saved, we think about somebody being in physical danger, don't we?

We think of somebody's personal physical life being in peril. And so when people are perhaps caught in a flaming building and the fire brigade come, they have the sort of headlines, people saved from fire.

Or perhaps somebody who's had a terrible heart disease, or had to have a transplant, and they have surgery, life-saving surgery.

[10 : 31] But this man was in no real danger for his life, though he'd taken his sword. Is that what he's talking about? How can I be saved from the earthquake, or from killing myself? No. He's asking about something else.

And it's clear he's asking about something else by the way that Paul responds to him. For when he asks, How, sirs, what must I do to be saved?

It's clear that Paul understands what he's getting at. He isn't saying, Don't kill yourself, or look after yourself, eat well and exercise regularly, and you'll live a long life. He's not talking about that.

He says, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. The jailer is concerned about something more than his body, more than his physical health, more than his physical future.

He's concerned about something more than that. He's concerned for his soul. Paul's answer gives us that clear understanding.

[11 : 35] It's his soul that is in danger. Now, this man knew why Paul and Silas were in prison. He wouldn't just take people from the magistrates in prison without knowing why.

There had to be a charge. You can't just imprison people for no charge. He would have known that they'd been charged with preaching this gospel of Jesus and had been causing trouble through the preaching of the gospel.

He may well have heard Paul's preaching in the town. Remember, we know that for many days, Paul was in Philippi preaching. This girl followed him. Wherever he went, saying, these men are from the Most High God.

She had a demonic spirit. There's a real spiritual world. And surely he would have been there when Paul and Silas were praying and singing and picked up what they were saying as well.

So, in his mind already, there's this thought, this understanding that there is something that they are saying he's never heard before. And now, after this earthquake, now, as he thought for a moment that his life would end, now at last he realizes that he is in very real danger that night that he needed to be saved.

[12 : 46] Dear friends, I don't know all of you. I don't know your background or situation or what you're from or whether you identified with some of the things that were said here this evening.

But the reality is this. You need to be saved. More than anything else in your life, you need to be saved. The most important, the most vital, the most necessary thing in your life is not whether you get up and go to work tomorrow or have a job or whether you have a pension when you retire or whether you have a holiday home or whether you've got all the enough money to pay for Christmas.

The most important, vital question that you need to ask this evening is what must I do to be saved because you need to be saved. And you need to ask, as this man asked, that same question, what must I do to be saved?

And you say, Peter, what are you talking about? Why do I need to be saved? Why do I need to be saved? Why does my soul need to be saved?

Well, because of this simple truth that you and I are sinners. Every one of us, without exception, have sinned and continue to sin.

[14 : 03] You may say, Peter, you don't know me. How can you call me a sinner? That is rude. Come here, at the goodness of my heart, to eat your food, to drink your coffee, to share in this meeting, to support these people, and you're insulting me.

No, I'm not insulting you. I'm telling you that you and I, and every single person in this room, has sinned against the Holy God.

And you may say to me, well, where's the evidence? You call me a sinner. And in one sense, yes, I know I've not lived the best of lives. I know that I'm not perfect. Yes, I'm not squeaky clean.

But how can you say that I'm a sinner? What compelling evidence can you give for me to believe that? Never mind that I should be saved. First of all, I tell you that you're a sinner because God says you're a sinner.

God says it, not me. I'm just speaking on behalf of God and his word. And the Bible says very clearly, there are no exceptions. All have sinned and fallen short of God's standard and glory.

[15 : 14] There's no one good in this world. And you certainly, and I certainly, are not good. We have sinned. God says it. The Bible says elsewhere, if we say that we've never sinned and deny that we've sinned, we're calling God a liar.

He's not a liar. But I think there's more compelling evidence either than that. Your lifestyle shows that you're a sinner. Think about the way that you live your life.

Think about your relationships, your marriage, or your partner, or your children, or your parents, or the people you work with. Think about your habits and your lifestyle for a moment. Haven't you been selfish?

Haven't you been greedy? Haven't you been thoughtless, insensitive? Haven't you been unforgiving of those who've hurt you? Isn't it fair to say that the arguments and the quarrels in your life show that you are far from perfect and that you are a sinner?

Well, you might say to me, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I'm no worse than anybody else. Exactly right. You're not worse than anybody else. You're the same as everybody else.

[16 : 30] Like me, you're a sinner. And every single one of us must acknowledge that. There's another reason. And it goes even deeper than what God has said and what you know about your life and what your friends and family know about your life.

And it's what you know within yourself. You have a conscience that tells you that you're a sinner. Perhaps even now, as I'm speaking and speaking about God's word, perhaps even now, there's that niggling inner voice saying, I know that's true.

I don't like to admit it and I certainly don't want to admit it now, but I know it's true. I know that I say hurtful things. I know that I have unpleasant and horrid thoughts.

I know there's something within me that is not as it should be. And I feel ashamed at times for the way I behave. I feel bad about myself. Well, that's the conscience that God has given you.

You may not like having a conscience. And you may do all you can to shut that conscience up, but it's there because God has put it there. It's God's warning system to you to tell you the real truth about who you are.

[17 : 48] And that's why you need saving, dear friends. You need saving because you are a sinner and you're in grave, grave, serious danger from God.

Here's something else that the Bible says. All of us lived that way following the passions of our sinful nature. Like everyone else, we were by nature objects of God's anger.

The Bible is very, very clear that God is love. The life of Jesus proclaims and declares that God is love. But do not be fooled into thinking that God is stupid or that he is blinded by love.

They say love is blind, but God is not blind. And God sees your heart and your life and mine and he sees what's deep down that nobody else sees. And what he sees, he hates.

He hates sin. He hates evil. Think about it for a moment. If we are made in the image of God and I truly believe that and the Bible teaches that, is it any surprise that when we see evil and wickedness on our screens that we are repulsed by it?

[19 : 07] Why are you repulsed by evil? By selfishness and wickedness and abuse? Why? Because you're made in the image of God. And if you, sinful though you are, feel that way about the evils in this world, how can you expect God not to feel that way?

And he feels that way not just about the things we see on the telly, not just about the big things, the terrible things out there. But remember, he sees your heart. He sees there the jealousy and the envy and the greed.

He sees there the vile attitudes and thoughts you have about other people and about him particularly. Why wouldn't you expect him to be angry with these things?

What sort of a God would he be who'd be indifferent and unmoved and uncaring about sin? God is not indifferent to sin.

He doesn't turn a blind eye to wickedness in any person. But instead, he set a day when you and I and all people will be judged according to our lives, our words, and our thoughts.

[20 : 17] Again, the Bible says this, every single person is destined to die once and after that to face judgment. You will believe in God, dear friends, because you will meet with God one day and you will give an account as I will for your sin.

And on that day, God will not make excuses for you and you will not be able to make excuses for yourself because on that day, God has declared that sin will be punished and it will be punished with the only suitable punishment and that is death.

The wages, the rewards, the Bible says, of sin is death. Not just physical death when we die and these bodies decay, but an eternal death, an unending death, which the Bible elsewhere calls hell.

And whatever hell is like, and the Bible does not give us a full description of hell as it does not give us a full description of heaven, but it makes it very clear that it's there.

Whatever hell is like, it has no comparison in this world. It is the worst, it is the most horrifying, it is the most dreadful experience that you could possibly imagine times a million because it is to be cut off from everything good because everything good comes from God.

[21 : 49] Now, dear friends, let me ask you, have you any sense of what this jailer felt about his sin? Have you any sense of just what a dangerous, perilous place you're in?

Because surely if you do, then you must ask the same thing as this man asked. What must I do to be saved? What must I do to be forgiven these sins? What must I do to be right with God?

What must I do to be spared from this judgment that my sins deserve and I know that I deserve? Well, the answer to you is the answer to this man.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. There is one way to be saved and only one way and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man who came into this world to rescue sinners like you and me.

Paul, as he was preaching in another part of Acts, tells the people there's no other name given under heaven, given to men and women by which we must be saved than the name of Jesus.

[22 : 59] without wishing to be unnecessarily controversial or rude. There is no salvation in the name of Muhammad. There is no salvation in the name of Buddha.

There is no salvation in the name of Hinduism. There is no salvation found in anywhere else or anyone else including yourself than in the person who is Jesus Christ, God's Son.

Because of God's amazing love for you, though you've lived a life in rejection of him and selfishness and sin because of his love for you, he freely gave his only begotten Son to come into this sin-sick world to rescue men and women.

That was his purpose. That was why he was born on Christmas Day. That's why he went to the cross and suffered and died and took the judgment that you and I deserve. That punishment of hell and of death was laid upon him he said, I'll do it.

I'll take it for them in their place as their substitute. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[24 : 21] In the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, he has accomplished what you and I could never accomplish. He has secured full and complete forgiveness for every single sin.

Even those terrible sins. Even those awful, unrepeatable, secret sins. sins. By rising from the dead, he has given us the evidence that he really is God's Son and that there is life everlasting to be had because he's bought it, purchased it for you.

You can't do anything except receive it. Receive the gift. It's a gift that comes to us and we take hold of by faith.

That's why he says believe in the Lord Jesus. It's not about what you can do, jailer. It's not about you becoming a better person and turning over a new leaf. It's not about you going to church and reading your Bible.

It's not about you doing good deeds and giving to charity. It is only a gift that you can receive or reject. How do we do that?

[25 : 41] Very simply in this way. We have to decide to turn away from sin and to turn back to God. The Bible calls it repentance.

It means a change of mind. It means recognizing that all my life I've been going the wrong way. Perhaps you've seen on the telly from time to time people who've gone the wrong way down the motorway and they've been stopped by the police and they say I didn't even realize I was going the wrong way down the motorway.

I wonder why all these lights were coming towards me. Dear friends, I'm a light coming towards you and I'm telling you by God's word you're going the wrong way and you've got to turn around or else you'll be lost.

You'll perish. You'll die in your sense. It's more than just feeling sorry. It's more than just feeling bad about yourself.

It's more than just feeling guilty. It's saying deep, deep down in my heart, God, forgive me, put me right.

[26 : 49] and secondly, it's asking Jesus to save you. It's asking Jesus to save you. It's saying God, saying Jesus, thank you that you died for me.

Thank you that you love me so much. You do not want me to be in eternity away from you in hell. Thank you that you were willing to suffer the excruciating pain and the suffering of the cross and bearing my sin.

Thank you you did that for me. And I know I don't deserve it, but thank you that you did. And I gladly receive. I take hold of this gift.

And I say, Jesus, come and cleanse me, wash me, and make me yours. It's got to be sincere. It's got to be from the heart.

And he promises that he'll do that. Remember this jailer. We're back to him. What happens? A moment ago, he's about to commit suicide for fear of his life.

[27 : 50] In the next few minutes, as he hears something of what I've just been saying, explained by Paul, much, much better than I could ever do it, he realizes that Jesus is the one who died for him.

And what do we find? He's baptized. He's baptized. Why? Because he's filled with joy. Because he's come to believe in God. That's why he's baptized.

That's why these people are being baptized. They've been filled with joy by coming to know and believe in God. They've experienced and felt the cleansing of their sin, their conscience eased.

They've experienced meeting with the living, saving God. without wishing to labor the point beyond its proper place.

I have to say to you again, you must be saved. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't leave this building and this place and go back to the darkness of your life.

[28 : 55] Go back to just ignoring God and doing your own thing. Don't just forget what he, in his loving kindness, has said to you tonight. Not me. You can tell me to do whatever you want to tell me to do.

It's not about me. It's about you and God. And I would urge you, I'd plead with you, I'd say to you more than anything else, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

There's nothing more important in all the world. I'm going to pray now and perhaps during this prayer you might feel like you want to respond to God.

As part of my prayer I'm going to pray a very simple prayer which you may want to pray for yourself. If as I've been speaking you have sensed that God is speaking to you then this is your opportunity to do something about it.

And if you pray that prayer please come and speak to me or speak to somebody else who's a Christian who you know. I'm going to pray now. Thank you God that you are interested in us that we matter to you that you love us.

[30 : 14] Lord there's nothing in us that's lovely. There's lots in us Lord that should make you not love us. We thank you that you love us in spite of who we are.

Thank you that you made us in your image and you put within us a soul. You gave us that part of us which cannot be seen but is real and we know it's there. It's the real us that we might know you.

That we might share with you and enjoy you. That we might know your nearness day by day. That we might know your love in our lives and your help. Lord we know that we have never trusted you.

But we thank you that Jesus came to do what we could never do for ourselves to save us and to wash us of our sins. And so Lord we want to pray those of us who feel our need and perhaps have never prayed like this before or spoken like this before but in our hearts we want to say sincerely to you Lord I've sinned and I've lived my life my way too long.

Lord I've rejected your love when you've spoken to me again and again. Lord I want to change. I want to turn to you from my sin and I want to walk and to live your way from now on.

[31 : 51] Please forgive me for my sins. Please forgive me because of what Jesus has done on my behalf. And please come into my life so that I might really know your forgiveness and your life living in me.

hear my prayer Lord. Answer it I ask not because I deserve it but because you've promised that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and I know that you are faithful.

Amen.