

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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FROM JAILER TO JESUS FOLLOWER

Acts 16:25-34

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The title of my message today is “From Jailer to Jesus Follower” and I’ll be reading from Acts 16:25-34. We have a powerful story here of the conversion of a man and his household.

Here are the three points to my message today:

- The jailer had lost all hope.
- The jailer’s circumstances led him to a crisis of faith.
- The jailer’s joy was contagious.

There is so much in this story that it is not possible to unpack it all in one sermon. I could preach every Sunday for a month from this one passage of scripture.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:25-28

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

THE JAILER HAD LOST ALL HOPE

EXPLANATION: Believing the prisoners had escaped, the jailer knew he had failed at his job. Ending his life with a sword would have been better than being executed by the authorities. At this point, his job was more important than his family. He had a temporary moment where he lost his mental faculties. Had he committed suicide, he would have left behind a grieving family. He probably didn’t

think about that. He probably didn't consider that perhaps he could argue that the earthquake created a circumstance beyond his control.

APPLICATION: Folks, suicide is never the answer. The difference between his attempt at suicide and not following through was someone cared and intervened.

There are a lot of myths about suicide. The Jason Foundation is a suicide prevention organization here in Tennessee. I encourage you to go to jasonfoundation.org and see their resources. Listen to some of the myths they educate people about:

“People who talk about suicide won't really do it.”

False: Almost everyone who attempts or completes suicide has given warning signs through their words or behaviors. Do not ignore any suicide threats. Statements like “You'll be sorry when I'm dead,” or “I wish I was dead.” — no matter how casually or jokingly said — may indicate serious suicidal feelings.

“If a person is determined to kill him/herself, nothing is going to stop him/her.”

False: Even the most severely depressed person has mixed feelings about death, wavering until the very last moment between wanting to live and wanting to die. Most suicidal people do not want to die; they want the pain to stop. The impulse to end their life, however overpowering, does not last forever.

The jailer was overcome with a suicidal impulse. At that point, he wanted to die.

“Talking about suicide may give someone the idea.”

False: You do not give a person ideas about suicide by talking about it. The opposite is true. If a person is depressed or unhappy, discussing their feelings openly and allowing them to express how they feel is one of the most helpful things you can do. Even if they have had suicidal thoughts, giving them permission to express those thoughts can relieve some of the anxiety and provide an avenue to recognize other ways to escape their pain and sadness.

The jailer's plans to end his life were interrupted by someone who cared and listened to what he had to say.

“People who attempt suicide and do not complete suicide are just trying to get attention and are not really serious.”

False: To a certain degree, they are trying to get attention and help for the pain that they are experiencing. A suicide attempt, even half-hearted, is an attempt to seek help. If the person perceives their action to be a suicide attempt, then that is what it is. Any attempt, regardless of severity, must be taken seriously and help must be sought for the individual.

In our story today, the jailer’s actions were taken seriously. Because of what happened, he had lost all hope.

APPLICATION: Even though I’ve heard numerous sermons about the Philippian jailer, I don’t think I’ve heard the topic of suicide mentioned. This is a serious subject and it affects people of any age. It is the tenth leading cause of death in our country, according to the Center for Disease Control. I encourage everyone to memorize a number that’s easy to remember. 1-800-SUICIDE.

If you know of someone considering suicide, be the person who cares and speaks up. Be the Apostle Paul who makes the passionate appeal: *Do not harm yourself, I am here.*

THE JAILER’S CIRCUMSTANCES LED HIM TO A CRISIS OF FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:29-30

And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

EXPLANATION: Before the earthquake, the jailer had a hard job. He was a tough guy and could handle it, or he would have never been able to get and keep the job. He knew what he was doing. In fact, he was so confident all the prisoners were detained that he went to sleep. No one would escape under his watch. He was an old pro.

When he fell asleep, he didn’t know he’d be awakened by an earthquake. He didn’t plan for that. With all his training and experience, the earthquake was something he wasn’t prepared for.

APPLICATION:

- It's important to be prepared for the unexpected. The Boy Scout motto is "Be prepared." Our firefighters, policeman, military, Civil Defense spend their lives rehearsing for scenarios they hope will never happen.
- We've had drills here...we've talked about what to do when. Our church is a fallout shelter for the community, and we review a routine here once per year.
- In your own life, you have contingency plans, don't you? One thing we don't plan well for, however, is the unexpected. How do we plan for the unexpected if we don't know what we are planning for? The jailer knew the routine, he knew what to do when, but he hadn't planned for an earthquake.
- God knows the unexpected and he has a way of using the unexpected to bring us to a crisis of faith. That crisis of faith usually changes our direction.

THE JAILER'S JOY WAS CONTAGIOUS

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:31-34

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

EXPLANATION: Here, the Gospel message is very clear. "Believe in the Lord Jesus." Your translation may say "Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus." The literal Greek order of his words is this: "Sirs, what of me is necessary to do, that I might be saved?"

They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus." The word for believe is **pist-yoo'-o** which means to put your trust in, to be persuaded.

We know who Jesus is, but what is the meaning of "Lord"? Here it is, according to the original language: A person exercising absolute ownership rights. When they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus," they were telling the jailer that believing meant surrendering himself completely to the absolute ownership rights of Jesus.

So what happened? The jailer took them to his house, cleaned them up, and he was baptized along with his family. Then he fed them. Not the typical thing a big tough jailer would do for his prisoners.

Why was his whole household converted and baptized? Because he was a changed man and the miracle of a new life in Christ sent a spiritual earthquake through his family.

ILLUSTRATION: When I served as a youth pastor, I took some high school seniors to the Galapagos Islands in South America. We volunteered in a school. I reflect on that trip as one of the highlights of my career. We took a couple of days to sightsee and visited an island about two hours away by boat. We were going to see a volcano that had been recently active.

We checked into our rooms for the night and the next morning we met our guide, a man named Julio, as I recall. His last name is too long for me to pronounce and it is said twice. Julio's English was basic but good. We rode horses and looked over the world's second largest volcanic crater, 7 miles across. We got off the horses and walked to see some of the most incredible landscapes I've ever seen in my life.

On the way back, two of us rode our horses close to Julio. In the conversation, he learned why we there and he said the words, "What must I do to be saved?" I was blown away because he said the exact words of the Philippian jailer. That day, Julio was saved. One of my students gave him a Bible. A year later, I returned and saw him again. He was full of joy and said he was having church with his family at home. He said the Bible taught him he didn't need a priest, he was his own priest and could go straight to Jesus. Julio's joy was obvious.

CONCLUSION: The joy of salvation is contagious.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com. Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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