

Sermon – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2016

WHY ARE YOU Still STANDING HERE...?"

Acts 16:25-40 + John 17:20-26

Two weeks ago I was preaching on the Acts passage that was all about Peter preaching to the Gentiles and daring to baptise them into the church. And in this week's story we see once again that Jesus's followers/disciples are also doing what Jesus has asked them to do: Preach the Good news and baptise people into the faith. But before we look more into this story I want to briefly consider the Ascension – which was on Thursday last week. In Acts chapter one, we hear how Jesus spoke to his disciples for the last time before He was taken into heaven in a cloud to be with his Father.

After he is gone the disciples' remained, looking into the sky when two angels appeared beside them and they ask the disciples 'Why are you still standing there?

Well I suppose if we had been there we might have been doing just what they were doing and asking 'what next?'

But God sends his angels to bring the disciples back to their senses. The disciples see and hear.

1. Angels marked the importance of this event. They did not come very often during Jesus' life – a.. Birth b. Wilderness temptation c. Garden of Gethsemane d. Resurrection e. Ascension

And they ask this question of the disciples precisely because the disciples have much more to do than just looking into the empty sky. They have been commissioned by Jesus to go and 'make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'(Matthew 28)

And in Luke we hear that the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy – though they had seen Jesus ascend to heaven they knew he would be with them always. And he promised to send them power to help them do what they

had been asked to do. They also knew that he would return in the same way – they didn't know when but they were sure he would.

So now we come to today's reading. We have moved on to the acts of Paul after his conversion. In this story the servants of God-Paul and Silas-were unceremoniously arrested, cruelly beaten, and then thrust into an underground dungeon. Paul and Silas had been falsely charged.

1. There was the RACIST CHARGE

They were Jews; as Jews they did not worship the gods. Jews were not like other people.

They were guilty of turning people from the gods of Rome.

2. There was the RIOT CHARGE.

These two Jews were accused of making trouble in the city. They are accused of instigating a riot. They were accused of disturbing the peace. They were accused of sowing discord.

3. There was the RELIGIOUS CHARGE.

Their teaching was unlawful. It interfered with the state's public worship. It incensed the people against the apostles that they taught a religion destructive of polytheism and idolatry, and preached to them to turn from those vanities.

The jailer was not ignorant of the nature of the charges on which these men had been imprisoned, seeing they had been publicly whipped by order of the magistrates. After putting many stripes upon them, the magistrates charged the jailer to keep the prisoners secure, apparently with the intention of treating them even more severely later on.

This jailer shows his character by not just putting them into the inner prison, but thrusting them there. The inner prison was a dark, damp, windowless, underground hole. In this prison they were put into the stocks.

Later during the night there was a huge earthquake – the doors flew open and the chains of the prisoners fell off.

Roused by the mighty earthquake which made the building to rock; the jailer was gripped with despair the sight of the open doors – the prisoners must have gone! He was about to fall on his sword when Paul shouted out 'do not harm

yourself, we are all still here. Though we are not told I'm quite sure the jailer would have responded - WHY ARE YOU still STANDING HERE?

After falling at their feet he then asked -

"What must I do to be saved?" He knows that he needs to be saved, he wants to be saved, and seeks to find out what he must do to be saved.

This question speaks of a deep longing of his heart to be right with God.

The Philippian jailer did not ask, "What must I do to join the Church?" He did not ask, "What must I do to be a good person?" He did not ask, "What must I do to be religious?" He asked what he must do to be saved! He came to the understanding that HE needed to be saved.

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" There was a new respect and awe in his voice for these two men. All the jailer knew was that his narrow escape from death, in some way, was related to these men. He fell at their feet overcome by awe and gratitude.

A greater miracle than the shaking of the prison had taken place, he was shaken himself and ready to be saved.

Saved from suicide, no danger of death because the prisoners are there, awed by the wonderful events, aware that these men preached a new religion and salvation, he asks the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

There is simplicity here

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This was a simple, a plain, and an effectual direction. The brevity, simplicity, and directness of this reply are uniquely beautiful. The answer was quickly given, and in a few words.

This simple answer stands apart from all of the religions in the world. They all offer complex plans of how a person can work his way into heaven.

Believing is not a matter of human effort, but rather of ceasing from our efforts and relying on God alone.

It is also interesting to note that in the Ancient world – salvation didn't mean 'going to heaven' and it is not how the NT writers used it. Tom Wright says 'Jesus himself frequently speaks of someone being saved when he means 'healed' – has made you well , rescued , delivered from whatever problem be it sickness, financial disaster, personal catastrophe that might be threatening.'

The jailer showed the reality of his salvation by the instant change in his conduct. He brought Paul and Silas out of the dungeon, washed their wounds, brought them to his house, and made them a feast - all sure proofs that something had happened to him. And when he took them to his house – the whole household was baptised!

Just like the followers of Christ then we are also commissioned to do the same; tell others about Jesus

But how should we tell others about Jesus? I think there are lessons to learn from this story:

1. Paul and Silas were being put in chains by the jailer – they could have told him then about Jesus but they didn't
2. They could have waited till he had finished his task but they didn't
3. They bided their time – they were waiting for the right time
4. There was an earthquake and the jailer thought they had all escaped. Just as he about to fall on his sword, Paul cries out that they are all there. Once he sees this he falls at their feet and asks – what must I do to be saved? You see he had got to the point when he needed an answer and asked the question.

Sometimes I think we jump in too early and get the timing wrong. It is not the right time to ask a new visitor or potential member of the congregation as they get through the door - are you saved? Do you believe in Jesus as Lord? Or do you come to church often? People need to feel welcomed; they need to feel that they belong long before they will believe.

We have to learn from Paul – we need to wait for the right time – we need to be guided by God before we launch into our evangelism strategy. And how we will know the timing? It's about trusting and listening to God. In the gospel reading today we see Jesus praying to the Father that all his disciples will be one with Him – that he will be with them always in Spirit so that they will know how much he loves them but so that 'the world will know that you have sent me and they will know that they are loved by you.' Jesus is in us and we can be filled with his power – the Holy Spirit . Jesus will prompt us with the right

timing and will give us the right words to say. Are you willing to trust and listen to His prompting?

As I mentioned at the beginning of the service, we are all going to pray for 5 people to come to know Jesus for the first time or to go deeper with their faith. Would I tell them that I am praying for them ? – Probably not. But when the conversation turns to Jesus at some point or when they are beginning to ask questions – I would tell them then.

Sometimes God has to wake us up just like the angels did for the disciples. It comes back to the questions asked by the angels of the disciples and the jailer to Paul and Silas - Why are you standing or we might say sitting here? Thoughtless thousands and many millions still sit in darkness. To be comfortable in sharing God's kingdom of grace takes work. Even the early prophets were not always so willing to go out in the name of the Lord. They knew that God's calling could not be taken lightly. They learned that God's call was compelling. "But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (JEREMIAH 20:9).

“WHY ARE YOU STANDING HERE...?” The Lord God Almighty calls each of us into his kingdom of grace so that we might share his gospel with others. We never give up as we constantly watch for the return of Jesus and his kingdom of glory. Amen