



The Power of Holy Baptism

Acts 16:16-34 Romans 6:3-5 Titus 3:4-7 John 3:1-6

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Have you ever been persecuted because of your faith?

One day, as Paul and Silas were preaching in the city of Philippi, a **demon possessed girl** kept harassing them day after day, saying, "**These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.**" While what she said was certainly true, St. Paul did not need a **demon possessed girl** advertising for him. In compassion for her, he cast the demon out of the girl and set her free from being **demon possessed**.

The girl's owners, however, who *exploited her* to make money as a fortune teller, caused a stir in the city. Paul and Silas were **arrested**, and without a trial, they were **beaten with rods** and **thrown into jail**.

Can you imagine that? They were **beaten with rods** and **thrown into jail** simply for setting a poor slave girl free from **possession by demons** and **exploitation by evil men**!

Someday, you may be persecuted for confessing Christ and doing the right thing in God's eyes. Repeatedly in Scripture, we are told to do two things if and when you are persecuted:

1. first, **remain faithful to Christ**! No matter what may happen to you, **remain faithful to Christ**! Never deny your faith.
2. Second, you are to **patiently endure** all suffering, knowing God's love and trusting His promises one day at a time.

Paul and Silas **remained faithful**, and they **patiently endured** their suffering and persecution.

Paul and Silas were **beaten with rods** and **thrown into jail** for setting the *demon possessed girl* free. While in prison, they patiently endured their suffering and pain, and they trusted in God as they sang hymns to the Lord. They knew they were in God's Hands...and that nothing happens outside of His will.

It is here, as they were chained like criminals, singing hymns and praising God in the middle of the night, that God worked TWO mighty miracles!

The first miracle was the **earthquake**. The **earthquake** was so *localized* that it shook the jail, opened the cell doors, and broke the shackles off every prisoner in the place. It was a “*Divine jailbreak!*” **Everyone was free, but no one escaped.** The Philippian jailer did not know that at first; he was terrified, because he knew that he would be held responsible for all those prisoners. As he was about to take his own life, Paul tells him that no one escaped; that all the prisoners were still there. It was then that Paul was able to tell that terrified Roman jailer about the Lord Jesus:

**“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,
and you will be saved, you and your family!”**

The Lord usually doesn't use a *localized earthquake* to make people aware of their sin and their need for a Savior --- **He uses His Word: Holy Scriptures.**

¹ In theology, a phrase like “*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)*” is called a **Gospel Imperative**. The Gospel Imperative . . . has within it the enabling power of God's will. **The Gospel imperative can indeed produce what it commands, without our assistance.** It is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). When the Lord says, “Believe,” He does not utter a demand, but issues an urgent invitation for man to take, to apprehend, to appropriate what He is giving, without asking anything in return for it. The gift must, of course, be accepted. Non-acceptance forfeits the gift, but not because there was a condition attached to it. . . . A beggar would be insane if he were to say to the donor: “What? I am still to do the accepting?” and would be told to be gone with his silliness. C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p 272. adapted
Thus the command to “*Believe*” is like the command Jesus spoke to Lazarus, “*Lazarus, come forth.*” Although Lazarus did indeed obey the command (dead as he was), no one would claim that Lazarus had within him the ability to do so. Lazarus could take no credit for his obedience, just as we can take none for our faith. **The Gospel imperative can indeed produce what it commands, without our assistance.**

The Bible teaches us about our sin in the **10 Commandments**. The Commandments teach us that we do not love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The Commandments expose our sins against other people in our thoughts, words and deeds. The 10 Commandments show you that you rebel against God and engage in all kinds of immorality. The 10 Commandments are written on your heart and your guilty conscience bears witness to that. **The 10 Commandments are the “earthquake” in our lives that make us aware of our sin and show us our need for a Savior.** The 10 Commandments leave us saying the same thing as the Philippian jailer said: “*what must I do to be saved?!*”

The answer is, of course, “**Nothing!**” Jesus did it all! There is nothing you can do --- even if you wanted to! Believe Jesus is the Savior God sent for you. Trust that His life, death and resurrection was the work that was needed for you and your salvation. Jesus did it all for you!

When you hear about Jesus, like the Philippian jailer heard, faith is created! The Gospel; the Good News about Jesus, is the power of God that creates faith and forgives sins! We are saved by grace; forgiveness of sins and eternal life is a gift from God; not a work of man!

**We do nothing because
Christ has done everything!**

After the earthquake, the second miracle in the story happened: the Philippian jailer and his family were **baptized!**

Holy Baptism is the miracle of conversion.

God works through Holy Baptism to create faith as He washes our sins away!

† Jesus said that Holy Baptism is being “**born again**” with water and the Spirit. Baptism is new life: you are “born” a second time--- this time into God's family! Holy Baptism brings you all the blessings of God's Family: including the forgiveness of sins and eternal life!

- † St. Paul teaches us that Holy Baptism connects us to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. The work of the Savior is given to you, and you receive all the benefits of His death and resurrection!
- † The New Testament says that Holy Baptism is the washing of renewal where you are justified by grace: that is, you are declared righteous in God's eyes; the verdict of "not guilty!" is pronounced over you!

Holy Baptism is the miracle of conversion!

If you or your family have not been Baptized, then let's talk and let's get that taken care of! There is an announcement in the newsletter about scheduling a Baptism. **Holy Baptism is how God works to bring eternal salvation to you and your children, just as He did the Philippian jailer and his family!**

Talking about Holy Baptism is also one way to share your faith. There are many people who do not understand Baptism, and how it connects you to the Savior's death and resurrection. When you ask someone if they have been baptized, it gives you an opportunity to share what it means --- even if the person has been baptized already.

The story of the Philippian jailer and his family is a conversion story! It was **unplanned, spontaneous, and seemingly even unimaginable**. Paul and Silas cast a demon out of a girl and end up bloodied and bruised in prison. As they are singing hymns to God in the middle of the night, an earthquake sets them free and brings the jailer to them! He and his entire family end up being Baptized! ***The Lord can work in mysterious ways!***

He can work in mysterious ways in your life as well. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to share your faith. We do not want our family, friends or neighbors to die in their sins without Christ. Rather, we want them all to believe in Christ and be baptized so they will be saved and have their sins forgiven! Amen!