

Do I need to be Saved?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I wonder what you make of your life story. If you had a Hollywood producer perhaps come to you, and maybe already some of you have offers like that, wanting to turn your life into a biopic, what would the grand narrative be that you would tell them?

Years ago, the rags-to-riches motif was a popular one. You know, poor person, against all odds, becomes a millionaire at 40. Nowadays, that's a bit passé.

Instead, the focus is more on finding yourself, becoming the best version of yourself. Have you heard of that one? It's a narrative of transformation, you know, realizing our full latent potential, and using it to change the world.

Well, tonight, what a joy it is, isn't it, to see our three friends be baptized, and we got to hear a bit of their own life stories.

Now, let's just call it the early years, shall we? Young people like you. Just the beginning chapters. But as we look at the Bible, what we find is a different but a consistent narrative.

[1 : 2 1] One that's actually aligned with the stories that Arden, Daniel, and Christy have told. It's different to what's popular today, but it's a consistent narrative that runs through the Bible.

And that story is a story of salvation. Salvation both of individuals, but also collectively, like Israel as a people.

And it's different to the popular narrative, because it speaks to human, not being people with untapped potential, but people in serious trouble, needing to be rescued.

It speaks to our helplessness, which means God needs to save. And so, even as we heard tonight, even from the beginning, as we saw in Exodus chapter 6, Israel as a people were caught in slavery in Egypt.

And so God declares on the slide, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, I say to the Israelites, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

[2 : 3 3] I will free you from being slaves to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with mighty eggs of judgment. And so you see, God rescued them, saved them, brought them to the promised land, just as He had told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now, if you keep going in the Bible, you'll find that Israel is exiled later for their disobedience. Because you see, despite very clear guidance from God, Israel weren't able to obey.

They were powerless to do what is right. And so again, God had to save them, and return them to the land. And so by the time we get to the book of Acts, which we're looking at, the theme of salvation has been running strongly throughout the Bible.

Israel themselves had been waiting for a Messiah. That's another name for Savior, which the apostles declared to be Jesus, because they've seen Him rise from the dead, and declared to be the Son of God.

And so in Acts chapter 2, on the next slide, the apostle Peter preached, as he stood up in Jerusalem, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[3 : 45] That's the language of salvation. Salvation requires calling on the name of Jesus, and putting our trust in Him. And likewise, when conversions are reported, later on in that same chapter, Acts chapter 2, verse 47, the language of salvation is again used.

For we read, the Lord added to their number, daily those who were being saved. Now two weeks ago, when the Jerusalem Council met, those of you here, you remember, don't you, that the apostle Peter then explained that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we, that is the Jews, are saved, see that word again, just as they, the non-Jews, are.

So again and again, we see this narrative of salvation. And there's no difference here tonight, in our passage. What we find here are three people again.

Two of them are baptized actually, not the third. Each with a different story, but, what it has in common, is that they all have a story of salvation to tell.

So let's meet each of them. The first in verse 14 is Lydia, who was a dealer in purple cloth. A purple cloth is an expensive textile, which means she's actually a person of some means.

[5 : 07] You know, a seller of luxury goods. You know, think Gucci. Something like that. Later on, we're able to see that she's invited Paul and Silas to her house, because she's able to host them like a well-to-do person.

And then at the end, we even see that a church is meeting at her place, in verse 40. And yet, there is a certain humility about her, because as Paul and Silas come to Philippi, she's found with a group of women outside the city, by the river.

So imagine, you know, those, down by the Yale, those picnic places, barbecue places. You know, imagine a place like that. That's where they were gathering.

It's a humble gathering, because they've gathered to pray, not having a real place of worship. You know, no synagogue, no other place within the city to gather.

They had to do it outside, by the river. Now, Lydia was already a worshipper of the God of Israel, because they gathered on the Sabbath, which is the Jewish day of rest.

[6 : 17] And so we know she's receptive to Paul and Silas' message. Still, verse 14, we see that it required the Lord to open her heart, in order for her to respond to Paul's message.

In other words, God had to save her. Her belief was God's doing. Just as we've heard with all the testimonies tonight, God had to make that first decisive move, before anyone is saved.

But when she did, she and her whole family, whole household, were baptized. That's how it happened in those days. The entire household followed their master or mistress.

And then, as I said, she invited Paul and Silas to her home, giving the following reason, in verse 15, if you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.

And so on that basis, they couldn't refuse, could they? Because she was indeed a believer, saved by the Lord. So that's our first salvation story. The second is, we meet a female slave, who was clearly used by her owners, for their own gain.

[7 : 26] So this is how Paul and Silas come in contact with her, Acts chapter 16, verse 16, on the slide as well. 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, that 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.

Now, I think, when we read this, our heart does go out to her, doesn't it? Because, she's clearly oppressed, not just by the spirit, but by her owners, as well, who have effectively, I think, such a dehumanizing thing, isn't it?

To just use her, for their own personal gain. And the irony, of course, is that, what she declares of Paul and the rest, is actually true. Isn't it?

[8 : 33] Paul and Silas, are indeed servants, of the Most High God. That's right. And they're revealing, what is indeed, the true way to be saved.

So the spirit, was actually speaking the truth. And yet, funnily enough, the owners weren't willing to listen, were they? They were more interested, in the money, that she was able to make for them.

Something more valuable, than money, was being offered. And yet, they didn't care. Well, Paul and Silas, eventually intervened, to save this female slave.

She pointed others, to the way of salvation, but she herself, needed deliverance. Even though, she spoke the truth, she couldn't release herself, from bondage.

And so, Paul commised the spirit up, in the name, of Jesus Christ. And here we see, the authority of Jesus, that breaks that bondage. It's not Paul or Silas, they are simply messengers.

[9 : 33] Rather, it's the power, of Jesus' name, that the spirit recognises, and has to submit to. And the female slave, is there, thereby freed, and saved.

Now, we don't read, what her response is, but, observe that Jesus, really, frees her, not just from the spirit, but in the same stroke, from the, owners, as well.

Isn't it? Because once the spirit, has left her, she was really, no more use to them. No more money making potential. And so she's, you know, free to go, in one sense.

But of course, the owners, verse 19, weren't happy, were they? When her owners realised, that their hope, of making money, was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, dragged them, into the marketplace, to face the authorities.

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 all practice.

[10 : 34] This is basically nonsense, isn't it? Because, their claim, that Paul and Silas, are causing upheaval, is really just a cover, isn't it? For their own self-interest, of making money, which is now taken from them.

And yet, somehow, they managed, to get others, on their side, the magistrates, the crowd. And so, Paul and Silas, are thrown into prison. But, you know, if they were thinking, ah, we've got them now, really, it only gives them now, more opportunity, does it not?

To share, the good news of Jesus, with others, those in jail. Which, brings us to the third story, of the jailer, who was commanded, to guard them carefully.

So, he puts them, in the inner self, that is right inside the prison, fastens their feet, in stocks. And so, basically, what it's saying, is that there's no way, of escape, at all. Now, if you visited, ancient jails, you know, some of you, I've been to Europe, and gone to some of them, many of them, have really good acoustics, don't they?

And so, here's what we see, in verse 25. About midnight, Paul and Silas, were praying, and singing hymns to God. Concert happening. And the other prisoners, were listening to them, for free.

[11 : 48] Suddenly, suddenly, there was a, violent earthquake, that the foundations, of the prison, were shaken. At once, all the prison, doors flew open, and everyone's chains, came loose.

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

Everything was in the dark, you see, so they couldn't see, where they'd gone. Now the jailer thought, he was all done for. He was probably being paid, not sure how much, to guard the prisoners, with his own life.

But the price of failure, was high, wasn't it? He didn't just get the sack, he was about to lose his life. Talk about, occupational hazard. But to his surprise, Paul and Silas, didn't escape.

Neither it seems, that the other prisoners, perhaps they overheard, the prayers, and were so impressed, by Paul and Silas, then they followed their lead. Well, in verse 29, the jailer called for lights, turned it on, rushed in, and fell trembling, before Paul and Silas.

[12 : 55] He then brought them out, and asked, Sirs, what must I do, to be saved? Now if you ask me, that's a pretty strange question. Because, why did he need saving?

Because, all he could do was, alright, lock them back all up, nothing to see here, huh? Everything's good? Yup, fine. Back to business as usual.

But of course, I think, this whole incident, has deeply impacted him, hasn't it? But you see, here were two men, in prison, mistreated, for helping, a female girl, a female slave, and instead of being afraid, what they do is, sing, and pray, in their cells.

Then the earthquake happened, but instead of escaping, they stayed, to save his life, the life, of their tormentor.

Now, who would do something like that? where does this, calm, and peace, love, and care, come from? The jailer, didn't just experience, a physical tremor, did he?

[14 : 10] He also experienced, a psychological jolt. Something happened, to make him sit up, and think, what's going on here? You know, I think many of us, are not too different, to the jailer, you know, like us, he was stuck, wasn't he, as a mere cog, in the system.

For him, the system, was the Roman Empire. For us, it's post-modern, western society. You know, Philippi, as we read, was a Roman colony, and that means, it's a Roman city, through and through.

The laws, and the systems, of government, they were all the same, as would have been, in Rome. And you know, the jailer, he was just part of the system, he had his work, assigned to him, was taught to follow orders, stay out of trouble, don't ask too many questions.

But Paul and Silas, had shown him, another way. He has caught a glimpse, of a different narrative. A narrative, that's not like, what the Roman Empire, was telling him.

One that was, a bit more attractive, very much so. One that allowed him, an escape from, the system. It was a really, harsh system, wasn't it? The Roman system.

[15 : 24] If you fail, you're gone. No mercy. No forgiveness. That's why he asked, what must I do, to be saved? And what a scene, then plays out, doesn't it?

Because the jailer, falls to Paul, and Silas' feet, asking that question. See how the roles, have been totally reversed? A jailer, trembling humbly, before his captives.

And what does, Paul and Silas reply, verse 31? Believe, in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you, and your household. Now again, to me, that's an interesting reply, to an interesting question.

Because, notice, there's nothing in there, about the answer, that gives them, any, gives him any advice, you know, this is what you should say, to the magistrate, this is how you're going to, keep the job, this is how you're going to, you know, stay safe in the system, all that kind of stuff.

No, Paul and Silas, was giving to the jailer, an answer, to the question, that he really needed. Real salvation. And the Bible tells us, isn't it, that what we all need, and we've heard, Daniel, Christie, and Arden share, that what we really need, is salvation, from our sins.

[16 : 47] Like the jailer, what we need, is forgiveness, for all the wrong we've done. Not from the system, not from the magistrates, but forgiveness, from God. What Paul is saying is, you don't worry, about the empire.

It's God, that you need to contend with. Now friends, I know that, many of us, do see ourselves, beholden to the system, don't we?

Whether it's our job, or our work, or you know, just society in general. I mean the values, and the narrative, of our society, has got a big hold on us, doesn't it? You only have to turn on the TV, or for many of you, clicking on Insta, or something like that.

And we're constantly fed, aren't we? Without even knowing it. It's almost like being in the matrix, and you don't know that you're, in the matrix. Do this, if you want to be happy.

You know, be like those famous people, see how they look. Success. Here's what fulfillment, and satisfaction, is all about. And so we, and our fellow citizens, we often don't question, the need to be saved, do we?

[17 : 54] How silly of us, to think about that. Who needs salvation? No, you just need to work harder, try harder. Look within yourself, to see what you're truly made of.

It doesn't occur to us, does it? That actually, the system, traps us in. This culture, the values, binds us, isn't it? To a way of thinking, and there's no way out, on our own.

Dois Soyevesky, once said, the best way, to keep a prisoner, from escaping, is to make sure, he never knows, he's in prison. And that's what, the matrix was, isn't it?

And our society. Now of course, I know that there are some people, who do see the evils, of our system. They're often at the, steps of parliament house, protesting, about changing the system.

But that's, not going to cut it, is it? They think, changing the system, will solve it. You know, capitalism, is the rotten system. If only we had, a socialist system, then everything, would be okay.

[18 : 59] Well, if you've ever lived, in communist Russia, or China, you know that, that's not the answer. No, the problem, with the system, whatever it is, capitalist, I'm not saying, capitalist system is great, capitalist or socialist, the problem, with the system, is actually the people, who create it.

Us. We're the problem. You can change the system, but as long as, people are in charge, it will keep failing. These systems, may be perfect, in theory, until you introduce, humans.

So, for example, just think about, the message, that our society, is offering us. Some of you, are pretty young still, so you might remember this. You know, at school, there was always, the dream, or the promise, that they hold out, that you know, you've got the right year 12 marks, you get into the dream course, or the dream vocation.

Then from there, you get the dream job, and we'll give you the dream life, after that. Find the right guy, or the right girl, and you have the dream marriage. Then the dream family, that will set you up, for the dream career.

Then the dream retirement lifestyle. I know many of you, are not there yet, but, then what's that after? The dream death? It's a mirage, isn't it?

[20 : 25] There's always the promise, tantalizing though it is, that, if you only get there, you'll be there, but anytime you get there, and you think you've got it, you've got that promotion, you'll discover, no, no, no, there's actually a bit more to go.

Just that next step. It's always out of reach, isn't it? There's never true contentment, or satisfaction. But you know, God, in his mercy, has shown us another way.

And what he tells us, in the Bible, that's like, reading the Bible, is like taking the red pill. Okay? It's that psychological earthquake, that we need, to make us sit up, and re-evaluate things, to see our lives, as it truly is.

Not as the matrix tells you. And when that happens, we have a chance, don't we, to experience what the jailer did. So if you look at verse 32, when he and his household, received the word of the Lord, that's the red pill, see?

When the good news of Jesus, was explained to him, he believed. And then he took Paul and Silas, out of prison, to his house, to bind, what a wonderful picture, they bind their wounds, to care for them.

[21 : 34] Then he, in turn, was baptized, and they all celebrated together. And verse 34, look at the transformation. The jailer was filled, with joy, because he had come, to believe in God, he and his whole household.

Now for us, many of us here today, who have already believed, we all have our own story, don't we? Just like Christy, Arden and Daniel. Just like Lydia, the female slave, or the jailer.

All the details, are slightly different, but the core, is really the same, isn't it? First, the Lord, needed to open our hearts, to respond. God, as I was saying last week, is the first mover.

He is the one, that always, is the one, to initiate, so that he saves us. Second, we find that, it's the power of Jesus name, that saves. In Jesus, and what he's done for us, on the cross, is the thing, that we ask, to believe in.

And then of course, lastly, our response, in order to be saved, is to believe in him. Those three things, God moving first, the power of Jesus name, and then believing in Jesus.

[22 : 47] Those are the three things, that's common to all, our salvation stories, isn't it? Now if today, you come, and you have not quite, believed, then, you know what?

God may, be giving you, this opportunity, to open your heart, to him. But like the jailer, it begins, by realizing, you need to be saved.

You know, if you're a good doctor, or any doctor, even, you know, that the right diagnosis, is needed, before you can give, the right treatment, isn't it?

Because if you have, the wrong diagnosis, the treatment, that you then prescribe, will not, only not save you, but it can kill you, isn't it? And so that's the same here, isn't it?

We need to start, by realizing, what the true need is. It's not about, trying harder, or finding yourself, but realizing, that actually, you need salvation.

[23 : 48] You need God's help. You need to be free, just like the female slave. Do you know that, actually, if you look at the passage, tell me, who the true prisoners, in our passage today are?

It's not Paul and Silas, is it? Because, even when they were, able to escape, they didn't need to. Because they knew, didn't they? That they were already free.

In fact, later on in the passage, when the magistrates, ordered them to be free, they said, no, no, no, you, account for your actions. Because we don't have any need to, you know, be free.

We're not, we're not afraid of you. They knew, Paul and Silas, didn't they? That they were truly free. Instead, it's the jailer, isn't it? Who's the one who's trembling, falling at their feet, and asking, what must I do, to be saved?

Now, if this is all new to you, because you're here, first time, and hearing this, for the very first time, that's fine. You know, believing in Jesus, is not something, that we can force upon you.

[24 : 53] But if you want, to find out more, then please, talk to me, talk to, the brothers and sisters, that have been baptized. We're running actually, a small group, at the moment, on Wednesday, is that, looking at the big picture, of the Bible, come to that, if you like.

But whatever it is, if today, you've heard something, that almost, equates, to the red pill, is that, tremor, psychologically, then this is your chance, to find out more.

To do just what the jailer did, and ask that question, what must I do, to be saved? And as we've heard, the stories of Arden, Christie, and Daniel, they did ask those questions.

And as they've shared, they believe in Jesus, because it makes sense. And that has brought them, great joy in their lives. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the faith, that you've given to Arden, Christie, and Daniel, and to all of us, who have believed in Jesus. May you grant, the same gift to all, by opening their eyes, to see that only Jesus saves.

[26 : 06] Help all of us, to see our need, to be saved. And, who believe in Jesus, find freedom, and forgiveness, for our sins. So that we can be restored, to relationship with you.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.