

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. (NIV 84)

Theme: The Hidden Power of God is Revealed

1. It can be found in nature
2. It is better found in the gospel

There are certain places that some people will refuse to live in because they are they are afraid of the natural disasters that take place there from time to time. There are some who refuse to live in Great Plains states such as Oklahoma or Kansas because of tornados. Some are afraid of hurricanes so they won't move to Florida. And then there are those who won't live in California because they are afraid of earthquakes.

Why is it that so many people are afraid of natural disasters? They are relatively rare, they don't happen all that often, and really they don't affect too many people, and yet many are afraid of natural disasters.

Why? Partly because they can rarely be predicted—at least not more than a few days at best—at that only for earthquakes. But also because they are powerful, cause a lot of damage, and even kill from time to time. Many people will cower and tremble in fear of nature.

Paul and Silas were on Paul's second missionary journey. During this journey they made their way to Macedonia, which was part of modern day Greece and stayed in the city of Philippi. On one Sabbath Paul and Silas met a slave girl who was able to tell the future because she was possessed by a demon. For days this demon led the girl to follow Paul and Silas around town giving them an endorsement. But getting an endorsement from a demon isn't exactly the type of endorsement that you want—it would do more harm than good. So eventually Paul had enough and he cast the demon out of the slave girl. There was one problem with that, however. The owners of this girl made good money on her fortune telling skills. They were upset that Paul and Silas had ruined their livelihood so they had them arrested. Charges against Paul and Silas were trumped up. So Paul and Silas were beaten and then bound and chained and thrown in jail. That night Paul and Silas worshiped the Lord and sang songs of his praises. But then in the middle of the night God sent an earthquake. The foundations of the jail shook, the doors were opened and the chains fell off. The Jailor was terrified. He ran into the jail saw the destruction and figured that all the prisoners had escaped. And at that time, if a prisoner escaped the jailor's life was taken as punishment. So he intended to kill himself to spare an execution until Paul cried out to stop him.

An earthquake is one way to see God's power. Natural disasters show us just how powerful God is. The God who created the world and watches over his creation is the one who sends natural disasters and he is far more powerful than all of us. The jailor saw and felt God's power first-hand. And it left him trembling!

That's just the thing about God's power. We can see it in nature. We can see and feel just how powerful God is. But the result will leave us trembling. The result will make us afraid. For God to display his power and might by sending natural disasters leaves us weak sinful human beings with nothing but dread and fright.

So there is a better way to see God's power. It can be found in Paul's answer to the Jailor. It's found in the gospel, it's found in our baptisms.

Paul and the other prisoners didn't leave. When the jailor realized this he fell down before Paul and Silas and asked, **what must I do to be saved?** That's a question we all ask by nature. What must I do?

Because by nature, we all think there is something we can do.

Whether just a little bit or a lot, there must be something, in some way, whether big or small that I can contribute to my eternal life. So we ask that question and we say, "give me something to do and I will do it. Just tell me what it is and I'll make sure it gets done."

Throughout the centuries men have come up with things we can do to earn our way to eternal life. In fact that is what every false religion is all about—setting up rules trying to earn our own way to eternal life. What exactly someone has to do varies from religion to religion of course. For some saying certain prayers, showing love to those in need, or giving a certain amount of money. There are those that demanded a life—like sacrificing a child, or killing others who believe in a different religion. We could go on and on talking about what different religions have demanded their followers to do in order to earn for themselves their own version of the afterlife. That is what every false religion is all about. They are religions of works, all trying to answer that question, **what must I do to be saved?**

There is a big problem with such thinking, however. We can't do anything to be saved. As Paul said in Ephesians, **as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.** If you are dead you aren't able to do anything. That is what we are all by nature—dead. Spiritually dead. We are unable to do anything spiritually by nature.

Truth be told, there is a way to earn your own way to eternal life. But you have to keep all of God's law perfectly. One time an expert in the law asked Jesus essentially the same question, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?** Jesus led him to the summaries of the 10 commandments, love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and put him first at all times; and love your neighbor as we ourselves—and everyone is our neighbor, even our enemies. Then Jesus said, **do this and you will live.** In other words, if we live a perfect life then we'll live in heaven forever. It's as simple as that. But it's impossible for us to do. For we sin against God countless times a day—too numerous to count. And even if we didn't. Even if we did a good job of obeying his commands, even if we weren't born into sin, we still wouldn't be able to earn our own way to eternal life. As James says, **Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at**

just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. And each and every sin deserves nothing but God's wrath and punishment. So if we try to earn our own way to heaven, we would fail miserably and end up in hell.

So what's the solution? Look at Paul's answer to the Jailor of Philippi.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Believe. Faith.

How can this be the case? Because faith is the hand that receives the blessings of salvation. Faith takes hold of and grasps the blessings already won and given to us. The blessings of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life won by Christ by his suffering and death and resurrection from the dead. It is faith that receives Christ's perfect life and obedience that he gives it to us. So by faith salvation is ours.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. And make no mistake about it. Faith isn't a work. It's not even a choice that we have. As Jesus said, **you did not choose me, I chose you.** And Paul is 1 Corinthians, **no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.** Faith is a gift of given to us by the Holy Spirit. He works faith in our hearts through the gospel. So when Paul said Believe...and you will be saved, he is not telling the Jailor that he has to do something, but just the opposite. He is saying, you don't have to do anything to be saved; it's all been done for you already.

Including faith. It is worked in you through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacraments. Look at the Jailor. He heard the gospel when Paul and Silas were worshiping and singing hymns to God in the prison. That witness obviously struck a chord with him—here are these prisoners not acting like criminals, not complaining or denying what they did, but happily rejoicing in their God! And then after the earthquake, Paul and Silas **spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.**

And they baptized them—the Jailor and everyone in his house, servants and possibly infants included. Why? Because of the blessings given to us through baptism. Peter, on the day of Pentecost said about baptism, **Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Through baptism our sins are forgiven as the Lord washes them away. And through baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit—that is faith. In baptism the Holy Spirit works faith into our hearts and welcomes us into his family.

In Galatians Paul says about baptism, **You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** In baptism we are closely connected to Christ who was baptized as our substitute. Through our baptisms we are clothed with his perfect life and obedience, a robe of righteousness. And since we are closely connected to Christ through baptism, what the Father said about him at his own baptism stands for us at ours: **You are my (child), whom I love; with you I am well pleased.**

So we rejoice in the Lord instead of being afraid of him and his power. We are like the Jailor who **was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God.** We rejoice for our sins are not counted against us, but by the work of Christ we are declared not guilty by our Lord. There is no reason to fear the Lord in his power because his power is his love. His power is seen in our baptisms. That he took us his enemies who were completely dead in our sins and he made us his own child through faith and washed away our sins through water. His power is that he graciously saved us.

God reveals his power through various ways. You can see his power in nature. But be afraid and shudder. But he also reveals his power—and his love in our baptisms. So daily we return to our baptisms and treasure it. For through it God's power in saving you is revealed. Amen.