

Dear Friends,

This past Tuesday, the first reading was from the Acts of the Apostles 16:22–34. It tells the story of St. Paul and his companion, Silas, being beaten and arrested in Philippi for spreading the Gospel, which was obviously falling on hostile ears. Paul and Silas were shackled by their feet to a post in the center of their prison cell, singing hymns and praising God when there was a violent earthquake. The prison shook so hard that all of the prisoners were freed from their shackles. Because of this, the jailer was about to take his life when St. Paul told him the prisoners were still in their place – even Paul and Silas who had done nothing illegal other than proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then the jailer asked an important question, one every Christian needs to ask, “What must I do to be saved?” St. Paul said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you and your household will be saved.” So the jailer took Paul and Silas into his home, bathed their wounds, gave them a good meal, and then he and his family were baptized.

What must I do to be saved? This is a necessary question every Christian must ask. The answer is as simple as what St. Paul told his jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” That is the starting point. What we do beyond that starting point is also important.

The jailer, in taking Paul and Silas into his home, and in being baptized and becoming a Christian, risked his life, not to mention the lives of his family members. Remember, Paul and Silas were beaten with metal rods and arrested the day before for proclaiming the Gospel. Is this the kind of risk we are willing to take in our response to the call of Christian discipleship?

Thanks be to God it is not illegal for us to be Christians. We are well within our rights to proclaim our faith from the mountaintops or in the privacy of our souls. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are saved. Remember, though, that believing is just the starting point. What we do with our faith is also important. Believing means that our lives will reflect our willingness to abandon our sinful lives, as much as we possibly can, so that we can live in obedience to God's will. God's will commands us to "Love one another as I have loved you." Jesus loved us in a sacrificial way by laying down his own life so that we might know the forgiveness of our sins.

Obedience to God's will is risky because we are going to look strange to others. Forgiveness looks weird in this vengeful age. Faith, which our culture tells us is very private and ought to feel comfortable, looks radically odd when it is lived out in an authentic and generous way.

If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the good news is that we are already saved; our lives are already in the loving care of God. In making the commitment to living our faith, we already have the grace of eternal salvation in this life simply because we turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God. Are we willing to take that risk?

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel