

Realize This Startling Fact

Reprinted from The NAHC Bulletin, Vol. 36, No. 1, Jan-Feb 08

"'What must I do to be saved?' was the astonished cry of the jailer of Philippi at the close of the midnight concert given by Paul and Silas in the city jail. This anxious inquirer was a rough, brutal jailer. A few hours before, he had whipped these very men and consigned them to the punishment of the stocks. But now he asks them in tones of anguish, this tremendous question. What a change had come over this wicked man!

What had so changed his nature as to cause this man to cry for mercy, who himself had shown no mercy? How did he know that he needed to be saved? Paul and Silas had said nothing to him about salvation. The jailer was under conviction. The Holy Spirit had been preaching to him and convincing him of sin and his lost condition. His tear was about his soul. It was not fear of losing his prisoners for they were all there. He was not afraid of losing his life for the earthquake was past. He had come into the presence of the eternal, invisible world. He had come to believe that he was not ready for an exchange of worlds. He realized that there was some connection between the praying and praising of his prisoners that night and the God who rules the world. God has set up in even' man's breast, His judgment seat-the conscience. Every man on earth knows that he is a sinner. No one has to tell him this. It is the universal consciousness of the race. This feeling is the cause of the different kinds of religion throughout the world.

To answer this question and appease an accusing conscience, all sorts of religious ceremonies have been invented. Pilgrimages over sandy, burning deserts, bathing in sacred rivers, bodily tortures, penances, erection of costly shrines and temples, the invention of beautiful forms of worship, prostration before blocks of wood and stone, the worship of beasts, birds and reptiles are all evidence that man feels himself a sinner and seeks in some way to save himself from the consequences of his sins.

The cry of the soul is often stifled, but the providence of God frequently awakens the guilty conscience of man, and he cries out for salvation.

When the earthquake shook the city of Charleston some years ago, men cried for mercy from every direction. It was unnecessary to ring any church bells to summon men to pray that night. Many cried out to God for mercy. The jailer at Philippi was in just this condition. He felt that he had come into the presence of God. He realized that these prisoners had something to do with it, too.

If man were not a sinner he would be full of praise at such an hour when he beheld proofs of his Heavenly Father's power and presence. This sense of the invisible, eternal world is what causes the sailor to pray in the storm and the soldier to pray as he goes into battle. Thousands attempt to sneer at religion when in health and strength, but they will pray in the time of danger.

Reader, you know you are a sinner, but must you wait until the hour of danger, or death, to acknowledge it?

You may say, as some foolish persons have said, "I want an earthquake conversion, like that of the jailer." Yes, but the Holy Spirit has given you opportunities and light that the jailer never had. He will not take an earthquake to arouse a person who already

sees his duty. So do not expect it. God converted Lydia in the same city a few days before. Her conversion was entirely different as far as the outward manifestations were concerned. It says, "whose heart the Lord opened." It was the same work as when He converted the jailer. All conversion is the same. But the manifestations were different in each case. It was as real in her case as it was in that of the jailer.

God has given you light, suited to your need, just as He did to the jailer and Lydia. There is to be a greater earthquake later when unsaved men shall call for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them and hide them from the face of the judge of all the earth. If you wait for an earthquake, you may have to wait for the last day and it will be too late. Are you waiting for that?

The jailer came to a sense of his personal responsibility. Many seek to hide behind someone else. They hold up the faults of others as a shield for their own disobedience to God. Because someone else has been untrue, they make it an excuse for neglect in their own salvation. Such people usually seek out some poor, scrawny member of the flock of Christ and hold him up as an excuse for going to hell themselves. They never hold up the best Christians, for such are a condemnation to them. How foolish! Is it a good excuse for refusing to take the remedy, because someone else only pretended to take it?

Would it be fair to go to your neighbor's apple barrel and pick out the rotten ones and judge the whole lot by them? All are hypocrites because some are? Is all money counterfeit because some of it is? Is it a good excuse for not doing any business because some have proved rascals in business and others have failed? Will it help the sick man to refuse to take the medicine because some have pretended to have taken it who did not? How foolishly people act in the matter of religion. They would not act that way in the ordinary affairs of life. We have never forgotten the couplet that we learned when a boy, which reads thus:

"Dare to be right! Dare to be true! Other men's failings will never save you."

Some years ago we were conducting a social service at a camp meeting. A stranger arose and told us that he had become a Christian after resisting many years. The excuse he had all these years was that he had been living on the failings of others. We innocently replied, "That is poor food."

"Yes, ' was his reply. "I was a poor fool."

The man arose soon after, very hastily and left the room. The next day we were accused of calling him a fool. We met him and learned that he understood that we had called him a fool publicly. We explained to him that we said that he was living on poor food. His own conscience had made the application quite correctly. Is there not much truth in this after all? Is it not a foolish thing for a judgment-bound soul to miss his opportunity of salvation by this unreasonable excuse? If you are lost, no one will be responsible but yourself. Every lost soul is a suicide. Every man that is lost might have been saved if he would. Remember the last invitation of the Bible is, "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely."

From "Saved and Kept", The American Holiness Journal
Printed in the NAHC Bulletin, Vol. 36. No.1, January-February 2008