

Repentance and Belief

QUESTIONS TO LEARN:

- 49. Who will be saved?**
Only those who repent of sin and believe in Christ.
- 50. What is it to repent?**
To be sorry for sin, and to hate and forsake it because it is displeasing to God.
- 51. What is it to believe in Christ?**
To trust in Christ alone for salvation.

* * *

When an earthquake shook the Philippi jail in which Paul and Silas were imprisoned, God used them to bring the frightened Philippian jailer to an earnest trust in Christ. As a teenage boy, the nineteenth-century pastor Charles Spurgeon had long hated and grieved over his youthful sins. After much fruitless searching for relief from this guilt, he was given faith through the simple gospel message – “Look to Christ.”

The Earthquake and the Jailer's Broken Heart

On most days the jailer could tolerate his job as the head warden of the Roman prison in Philippi. After all, he had a family to feed, and the pay was good. One could always make more doing a job that no one else wanted to do.

Today had not been such a great one, though. The prison was already overcrowded, and then they had brought him those Christians — Silas and Paul.

As the two severely beaten men were dragged in unconscious, the magistrate had warned the jailer dramatically, "These men are troublemakers; their teaching has provoked rioting throughout the city. Watch them carefully."

Wondering how two such battered men could cause any more trouble, the jailer nevertheless obediently had them taken to the center of the prison and locked into the most secure cell. And, though they were still unconscious, he had their feet shackled, just to be safe. "I hope no one makes me torture them further," he thought.

The jailer decided he had better stick close by since he had been given such strict orders. So he sent the other guards home and settled down for a long night. Soon he was asleep in the outer room.

Some hours later, Paul and Silas awoke and began to sing praises to God. The other prisoners who had seen the pair brought in near death a few hours earlier could not believe their ears. Such melodies had never been heard in these cells before. They listened, quiet and thoughtful.

At midnight, the jail began to tremble. Plaster crumbled from the ceiling in the inner cell, dropping onto Paul and Silas as they began another hymn. Soon, the shaking grew more violent. The prisoners' chains came loose and their prison doors fell open.

The sleeping jailer awoke when he heard iron clanging against iron. Disoriented, he wondered where he was. Then came the horrible moment when he saw that the cell doors stood wide open and he recalled how heavily the prisoners outnumbered him. If they had not already escaped through the back door, they could easily overpower him now.

"This will cost me my life," he thought. The rule for operating prisons was a simple one: if a criminal escaped, the careless jailer responsible for it would pay for the crime in his place.

"But," the fearful jailer thought, "I will not put my family through a disgraceful trial. I will carry out the sentence on myself." Pulling the sword from his belt, he pointed it at his own chest and was just about to thrust when a shout came from within the inner cell.

"Don't harm yourself! We are all here," Paul called out. Thinking himself delirious, the jailer lit a lamp, looked in, and found that his prisoners

were indeed all still there, though not one of them remained chained.

He fell trembling at Paul and Silas' feet, his shocked mind vividly recounting all the things he had heard about these men and their master, Jesus Christ. They said Jesus was the Son of God and forgave sins. Should he have listened more closely to their message? Instead he had unwittingly taken part in a Roman quarrel against God. How could he have helped to persecute them so, shackling them when they were too weak to stand up? Yet here they stood, beaming at him amidst the rubble of a jail that could no longer hold them!

In the face of Silas and Paul's joy and faith, the jailer was acutely aware of an eternal need in his soul. He thought about how long he had pursued his own selfish course. Where was it leading him? Though he now saw what a sudden, certain thing death was, the jailer had never before considered what lay beyond it. He asked desperately, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, my friend," Paul answered him. And the Philippian jailer did believe.

Then he took Paul and Silas back to his own house, washed their wounds, and woke his household. They listened to Paul explain the whole truth about Jesus, and every one of them repented and believed in Him. That very night, Paul and Silas baptized them.

At daybreak, the rejoicing jailer received an unexpected order from the magistrate to release the apostles. "Why, it is almost as if they were

sent to my jail just for me," he thought joyfully. "Imagine all the suffering on my behalf. How much God has loved me, even while I ignored my sin and persecuted my Savior!"

(Taken from Acts 16:16-36)

FROM THE BIBLE:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17)

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

TALKING IT OVER:

- 1. One way God leads us to repent of our sins is to show us His holiness and power so that we can see how sinful and weak we are in comparison to him. How did God show the jailer his holiness and power? How did the jailer feel about God and Himself as a result?*
- 2. Another way God leads us to repent is to show us His mercy and love so that we turn away from our sin and seek to please Him. How did God show the jailer His mercy and love?*
- 3. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas how he could be saved, what one thing did they tell him?*
- 4. Can we be saved from our sins by believing in anything else but Jesus, or by doing anything else besides believe in Him? Why not?*