

# JESUS' BAPTISM AND MINE

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Old Testament Lesson; Isaiah 49:1-6

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 2

Gospel Lesson; Mark 1:4-11

Sermon Text; Acts 16:25-34

One of my absolute favorite accounts in Scripture is the account we are going to read. It is about a family, an entire family, who in the middle of the night is converted to faith in Christ, and baptized. There is so much we can learn from this section, particularly how God prepares this group of unbelievers to hear The Gospel Message, take it to heart, and be ready for the sacrament of Baptism. Let's read this, in Jesus' name. It is take from Acts, chapter sixteen, verses twenty-five through thirty-four.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Instantly all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose. When the jailer woke up and saw that the prison doors were opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, because he thought that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted with a loud voice, "Don't harm yourself, because we are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling in front of Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and

your household.” They spoke The Word of the Lord to him and to everyone in his home. At the same hour of the night, he took them and washed their wounds. Without delay, he and all his family were baptized. Then he brought Paul and Silas into his house and set food before them. He rejoiced, because he and his whole household had come to believe in God.

These are your words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

I want to talk about how God prepares this man to hear The Gospel Message. I will talk about three things He does to prepare the man to hear The Gospel Message. So often, this is what happens in the lives of unbelievers, as God prepares them to hear The Gospel Message.

-The first thing that happens is God can take an unbeliever, and put that unbeliever in the presence of believers. Now, it is often in a very certain context. You know everyone has world view, whether you are a Christian, or some other world view. As long as everything is going fine, that world view seems to work just fine. But, when troubles and trials come, that is when a world view really gets tested. God often can take an unbeliever, and put him in the presence of a Christian, who is going through some very deep trials, and that unbeliever can observe how a Christian deals with deep and difficult trials.

It is exactly what happened here, in today's scripture reading. Paul and Silas had been thrown in prison. They had just been preaching The Word of God, preaching about Christ. And they had driven a demon out of young girl. She was a slave, and her owners were mad at Paul, because Paul had healed this girl of demon possession. She used to be able to tell fortunes, and now she could not do it anymore,

and they could not make any money from her. So, they had Paul and Silas thrown into prison, because they were upset with them. Paul and Silas are in prison, and now their Christian world view comes to the test.

What does a Christian do, when he is in trouble, when he is going through trials? Paul and Silas could have complained. They could have said, *“This is not fair. This is not right.”* They could have tried to rebel against the government, but that is not what they did. They did something very unusual. It was midnight, and all of the other prisoners, The Bible said, were listening intently to what Paul and Silas were doing. The Bible tells us,

**“Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...”**

There they were, praying and singing hymns to God! We don't know exactly the content, what they were praying. The Bible does not tell us. Nor what hymns they were singing. But, I will tell you this. I would be almost one hundred percent certain that what they were singing and praying about had to do with The Gospel Message. I am sure they were praying and singing the fact that Jesus died for our sins. He loves us dearly. He will never forsake us. He is always with us, and He will always watch over us. I am sure that is the message all of the prisoners were hearing. I am sure they were hearing the message in the prayers and hymns that God promises to work everything out for our good. God is our refuge. It was like they were witnessing what Jesus said, when He said,

**“Whoever hears these words of Mine, and puts them into practice, is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The winds came, storms blew, floods rose and beat against that house, but that house stood firm, because it was built on the rock.”**

Those other prisoners were seeing these two believers in Christ standing firm in their faith, as they were 'built on the rock'. They were taking it to heart. It did not convert anybody, but they were

taking to heart how these Christians were enduring hardship. Same when you go through hardship. I want to tell you what happened to me one time, when I went down to the hospital. I went down to the hospital, because I was visiting one of our members. A doctor came walking in, and our member said to the doctor, *“This is my pastor. I go to Holy Cross. He is a pastor at Holy Cross.”* Here is what the doctor said. *“Oh, you are from Holy Cross. I have had other patients here from Holy Cross. Holy Cross members always seem to do really well in dealing with trials and troubles.”* I thought to myself, *“What a wonderful witness of faith that members here at Holy Cross give, when they are going through trials and troubles. People take notice.”* They take notice. That does not convert anybody, but it certainly prepares people to hear The Gospel Message.

-So, the first thing that happened in today's scripture reading is this. God had these people in prison witnessing the foundation, the solid foundation of the Christian faith, and how that helps us endure, during trials. The second thing God did, (and He often does this in the lives of unbelievers), He brought circumstances in to this jailer's life that really prepared him, personally, to hear The Gospel Message.

I am going to tell you something. Many of you can tell this is absolutely the case. You have been in my office, talking about a family member who has strayed away from the faith, or a friend you have who is not a Christian, and you want them to become a Christian. Certainly, we want to share The Word of God with them. I know I have told many of you this. I have told many of you to pray God brings a circumstance into their life that would really prepare them to hear The Gospel Message.

I am going to show you how this happened in the life of this jailer. Here is the circumstance God brought. He caused an earthquake in the middle of the night. In this earthquake, The Bible tells us, the

prison doors flung open, and the chains fell off of the prisoners. Well, you know what the prisoners could have done. They could have escaped.

The Bible tells us the prison guard took his sword, and he was about to kill himself. He was about to take his own life. How come? In Roman law, if you were a prison guard, and you let a prisoner escape, it was your life for his life. So, he knew the next morning, in all likelihood, if he let these prisoners escape, he would be put to death. And, in his world view, the Roman world view, there is a sense of false bravado. The sense was, *“If you have done something deserving of death, then be a man, be a man, and just take your life.”* That is what he felt like he had to do. So, he was about to kill himself.

Now, we find out later, The Bible says, he fell before Paul and Silas trembling. So there was false bravado there. He was about to kill himself. He was looking straight in to eternity. I am sure he was wondering, *“What is going to happen, if I kill myself? What is going to happen, when I die? Where am I going to go? What is going to happen to my family?”* He was terrified.

Now, that did not convert him, but it certainly prepared him to hear The Gospel Message. He saw how Paul and Silas' foundation stood firm in trials and troubles. And, he saw how his own foundation crumbled, when he was going through trials.

-Then the third thing happened that prepared this man to hear The Gospel Message. He experienced profound Christian love. He heard a voice call to him, as he was about to kill himself. It was Paul's voice. He said,

**“Don't harm yourself,  
because we are all here!”**

Now, the prisoners certainly could have taken advantage of the situation. They could have let that prison guard commit suicide, and they all would have been able to escape. But, look what happens.

Look what happens! This prison guard experiences profound Christian love. The Bible says,

**“Your attitude should be the same  
as that of Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Jesus humbled Himself.”**

The Bible tells us we should consider others better than our self. So, Paul now, instead of looking out to his own interest is more concerned about the interests of this man, this jailer, who had been their enemy.

And, he says,

**“Don't harm yourself...”**

I am assuming that jailer had never experienced that type of unconditional love before.

Now, that did not convert the jailer, but this was all preparing him to hear The Gospel Message. So often that is how the Lord works in the hearts and lives of unbelievers.

After he had seen the strong foundation of Paul and Silas, and how his crumbled, and he had seen the love these Christians had for him, now, he comes before them, and it says he

**“fell down trembling...”**

and asked them the most profound question that anybody could ever ask in the entire world. It was a simple question.

**“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”**

What must I do to be saved?

Notice how Paul answered. Paul did not preach one word of what we call Law. He did not tell the man he had to do anything. He did not say, *“You are going to have to reform your life, and make some big changes. This is going to happen, and then that is going to happen. You need to give money to this, and pray this way.”* None of that. None of that. He simply, in ten seconds, ten seconds, told the man how to be saved. It is nothing but Gospel. It is nothing but Good News.

**“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and you will be saved...”**

We call that salvation by grace alone, through faith, alone in Christ alone.

There is a book that every young pastor should read. It is called, *'Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel.'* It's a series of lectures given by a man by the name C. F. W. Walter back in the 1800's at a seminary. Here he teaches young men how to preach The Law and Gospel. I just love this section where he talks about the effects of The Gospel, when it is preached. He says,

*“The first effect of The Gospel is it offers and gives us faith. We preach to people, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved'. God gives them faith, through our preaching. It is indeed, not the mere physical sound of the spoken Word that produces the effect, but it is the contents of The Word.”*

That man had heard about Jesus. He had heard about the forgiveness of sins. Through that simple message, “Believe...”, the Holy Spirit brought him to faith.

He goes on, and says,

*“The second effect of The Gospel is it does not reprove the sinner, but takes all terror, all fear, all anguish from him, and fills him with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. At the return of the prodigal son, the father does not with a single word refer to his former, abdominal conduct. He says nothing, nothing whatsoever about that. But, he falls on his prodigal son's neck. He kisses him. He prepares a splendid feast for him. That glorious parable exhibits to us the effect of The Gospel. It removes all unrest, and fills us with a blessed heavenly peace.”*

*“In the third place The Gospel does not require anything good that the man must furnish. Not a good heart. Not a good disposition. No improvement of his condition. No godliness. No love of either God, or man. It issues no orders. The Gospel is simply good news.*

*It doesn't give you any orders. It simply tells you that Jesus is your Savior, and your sins are forgiven.”*

Listen to this.

*“The Gospel issues no orders, but it changes a person. It plants love in his heart. It makes him capable of all good works. It demands nothing, but it changes everything. It demands nothing, but it changes everything, and it gives everything. Shouldn't this fact make us leap for joy?”*

That is exactly what happened to this jailer. He came to faith in Jesus, as his Savior. He came to believe that his sins were forgiven, and it was a free gift. Nothing was demanded of him. Just believe. And, it changed everything. It changed his heart. It changed his heart. This man who was imprisoning Paul and Silas takes them home, washes their wounds, puts a meal before them, and most of all, he wants his family to hear that Gospel Message, and come to faith in Jesus, as their Savior. He wants nothing more than that. And so, here in the middle of the night, middle of the night, the jailer wakes up his whole family.

I have seen some very moving Baptisms. Can you imagine watching as Paul, this great Apostle, in the middle of the night, one by one, goes to those family members, and he says to the jailer,

**“I baptize you in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.”**

He says to the jailer's wife,

**“I baptize you in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.”**

Then, he says to the jailer's children, by name,

**“I baptize you in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.”**



What happened there? It is The Gospel. God doesn't demand anything from us in Baptism, but He gives everything.

**He gives everything!**

The Bible says,

**“We are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
All of us who have been baptized into Christ  
have been clothed with Christ.”**

Let's go back to Jesus' baptism for a second. When Jesus went to be baptized by John, John said, **“You don't need to be baptized by me. I need to be baptized by You.”**

Who is baptism for? It is for sinners. Jesus was not a sinner, so why was He baptized? We believe when Jesus stepped into the waters of baptism, *(even though He was perfect and sinless at that point)*, since baptism is for sinners, He was taking the sin of all of the world. It was like He was taking all of the sin upon Him in that water.

John the Baptist pointed at Jesus, and said,

**“Behold the Lamb of God  
who takes away the sin of the world.”**

In Baptism, His Baptism, He took all of our sins to Himself. He walked down into that water with all of our sins. Then, He took them straight to the cross. We say Jesus sanctified the waters of Baptism, and now Baptism is cleansing water. It is cleansing water. It says,

**“All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus  
have been clothed with Christ.”**

He gives you everything. He gives you the forgiveness of sins that He won on the cross to you personally. God, the Father, adopts you as His child. We are all sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. He says, *“You are my child. I am going to watch over you, and take care of you, be with you and bless you, and make you a member of my family. You are a member of my family.”*

And, the Holy Spirit does everything. Be baptized, and wash away your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He comes into our hearts, and causes us to believe that what Jesus did, He did for me.

That whole family got baptized!

In our baptism rite, we have added a little ceremony that I really like. Before we baptize, we say this, especially to a little baby.

***“Receive the sign of the holy cross upon your forehead,  
and upon your heart,  
signifying you have been redeemed by Christ,  
the crucified,  
and risen Savior.”***

Then, when we baptize, we make that same sign of the cross, and say,

***“I baptize you in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.”***

When we begin a church service, how do we begin it? The pastor makes the sign of the cross, and says:

***“In the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.”***

It is to begin right away, and call to mind, *“I am a baptized child of God.”*

When we announce the forgiveness of sins, the pastor makes the sign of the cross, and says:

***“I declare to you the gracious forgiveness of all of your sins  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.”***

That reminds us we are a baptized child of God. He gives you

everything.

When, we end the service the pastor makes the sign of the cross, and says,

*“The Lord bless you, and keep you.  
The Lord make His face shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you.  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,  
and give you peace”*

Then, we make that sign of the baptismal cross, and send you home knowing this. In baptism, God doesn't demand anything. He gives us everything. Everything is ours personally, and that changes, it changes everything. It changes our hearts.

So, let's go home, and let's live as baptized children of God.

Amen

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts, and minds in our Savior.

Amen