



“What Must I Do to be Saved?” –
The Short Answer
Acts 16:16-24, 25-34
September 10, 2006

If someone were to ask you, “What must I do to be saved,” what would you say? Would you take the person through a reading of various scriptures? Would you make a list of fundamental beliefs? Would you say, “Let me take you to my pastor?” But what if that someone were to say, “No, no, I don’t have time for all that. Just tell me, tell me straight out, What must I do to be saved?” Could you tell someone how to be saved, say, in twenty words or less? What is the essence of becoming Christian? What are the basic requirements that cannot be left out?

Let’s put this in terms of a journey. If being Christian is the journey of following Christ, then what is the minimum that anyone will need to pack? Some of you have heard the rule of thumb for packing for an international trip: put together everything you think you’ll need, and then throw half of that away, and then throw half of *that* away. That’s true for the journey with Jesus. We tend to pack too much. We load onto new believers more than is necessary.

When the jailer rushed into the inner dungeon to Paul and Silas and brought them outside into the midnight air, he asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” He was in no condition to hear a long answer. He had just witnessed an earthquake unlocking the whole prison. He had just about killed himself, thinking that his prisoners had escaped, which would have meant the death penalty for him. But then he heard Paul’s voice stopping him from suicide and promising him that all inmates were accounted for. Caught between the horror of the earthquake and the comfort of Paul’s voice, the man was cut to the core of his being, “What must I do to be saved?” Out there in the dark after an earthquake was no time for a long explanation. Sometimes you’ve just got to get to the point.

So Paul did: “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” That was it. No recitation of scriptures. No referral to another authority. No listing of key beliefs. Just “believe on the Lord Jesus.” It was the shortest presentation Paul had ever made of the gospel. But it was all he needed to say. The Jerusalem Council had settled that one did not have to become a Jew first to become a Christian. The only thing that mattered was one’s trust

in the Lord Jesus, even for this pagan jailer in a Roman colony in northern Greece. This jailer knew little of the God of Israel. He had never set foot in a synagogue. He was probably a retired Roman soldier who knew nothing but a lifetime of battle and suffering for Caesar his lord. But if he could come to trust Jesus as his Lord, then that was all he needed.

If someone asks you for the short answer, just say, “believe on the Lord Jesus,” period. Do not say, “believe on the Lord Jesus, and also have the same kind of religious experience I have had.” Do not say, “believe on the Lord Jesus, and also have the same kind of political opinions I have.” Do not say, “believe on the Lord Jesus, and also have the same heritage and culture that I have.” One lesson that American missionaries have had to learn is how to pass the gospel on without passing America on. People do not have to become Westerners to become Christian. People do not have to become like you and me to become Christian. All they have to do is to believe on the Lord Jesus. Let’s not pack on anything more than that. But let’s do take some time to unpack the short answer:

“*Believe on.*” That’s an interesting phrase. For some reason the translators felt “believe in” was not quite right. “Believe ON.” That suggests to me leaning on, relying on, putting you life on the line. *Believe on...*

Believe on *the Lord.*” Believing on Jesus means making Jesus your lord. “Lord” is a quaint term, borrowed from the days of lords and ladies and kingdoms and castles. But I haven’t found a word much better. Maybe “leader,” for when you make someone your lord you are committing to make that one the leader of your life. Still, “lord” sounds more serious than leader. It was serious to that Roman veteran jailer. As I’ve said, up to then the only one he had called lord was the Emperor Caesar. But now, not even Caesar was his lord -- Jesus was.

Believe on the Lord *Jesus.* That name makes all the difference. To become a Christian is not to trust in a philosophy, it is not to follow a creed, it is not to believe in a list of principles. To become a Christian is to trust, to follow, to believe in a *person*. To become a Christian, you have to commit your life to following a specific person.

So much of popular religion today is so *non-specific*. A lot of people say they are really into spirituality. But ask them what they actually mean, and what they really try to do, and you'll find something so fuzzy, so malleable that you could not pin it to the wall if you tried. Vague spirituality is convenient. You don't have to submit yourself to any demands you don't want to. You don't have to submit to anyone other than yourself. This is spirituality that you make in your own image.

But when you believe on the Lord *Jesus*, you cannot make Jesus over into your image. You make yourself over into Jesus' image. He is the pattern for your life. He is the teacher of your mind. We cannot go through his teachings as if they were a buffet from which we are free to pick and choose; we are bound to take all that Jesus serves us. We do not follow him only on the paths that are pleasant and undemanding. We follow him all the way to the cross. That is perhaps the greatest difference. Vague, popular spirituality will never ask you to give yourself away. But the Lord Jesus will.

So, if anyone ever asks you "what must I do to be saved?", the short answer is "believe on the Lord Jesus." If he or she will do that, that will be plenty. They will need no more than that.

But then that someone might ask you a second question, namely, "If I believe on the Lord Jesus and am saved," what will happen to me then? And there is a short answer to that too. If you believe on the Lord Jesus and are saved, you will be LIBERATED, and then you will CHANGE.

You will be liberated, even as the slave girl was liberated from the spirit that possessed her. You will be liberated, even as the jailer was liberated from death the night of the earthquake. You will be liberated, even as Paul and Silas were free to sing praises to God even while the locks were still on their door and the stocks were still on their feet.

If you believe on the Lord Jesus, you will be liberated from whatever demons or ill spirits or powers or addictions or compulsions or fears or sins there are that haunt you. If you believe on the Lord Jesus, you will be liberated.

And if you believe on the Lord Jesus, you will be changed. The jailer was changed. After Paul offers him salvation, what is the first thing that he does? He takes his prisoners Paul and Silas and washes their wounds. After he washed his prisoners, they in turn wash him, that is they baptize him. And then the jailer serves his prisoners a feast. Around that table, “he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.”

The jailer believed, he was saved, and he was changed. And the change was obvious in his new found hospitality. Hospitality is the number one quality of a follower of Jesus Christ. Hospitality was what happened in Zacchaeus when Jesus changed him from a self-serving tax collector to a generous son of Abraham. Hospitality was what happened in the early church in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit entered them and they shared all they had with each other. Hospitality is the number one thing that happens in you when you believe on the Lord Jesus. You become the servant of Jesus as you serve others. You open your home to others, you share your table with others, you share your life with others.

Is there anyone here who needs liberation from whatever holds you captive? Is there anyone here who needs to be changed from selfishness to hospitality? Is there anyone here who needs to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

-- Douglas E. Murray