

The fortune-teller didn't see that coming!

Acts 16¹⁶⁻³⁴; Psalm 97; Revelation 22^{12-14,16-17,20-end}; John 17^{20-end}

*What must I do to be saved?
[Acts 16³⁰]*

The story in Acts (in our readings for today) is fascinating. As so often happens, the people of Philippi were quite happy for Paul and his colleague Silas to preach anything, until it affected their income!

How often people think that faith is a good idea - even a safe thing - for as long as it doesn't affect their income or their possessions!

I am not sure that I am very impressed by the foretelling powers of this slave girl if she didn't see this coming, even if she did earn her 'owners' a great deal of money!

It is interesting that the owners didn't tell the truth about why they were objecting to Paul and Silas, but the authorities were obviously keen to maintain order - especially when the crowd became vocal - and summary justice was executed in a public flogging and then Paul and Silas were imprisoned.

That should have been the end of the matter - and perhaps the end of Paul and Silas (the innermost cells - complete with their stocks - were not designed to conform with an individual's human rights or civil liberties!).

Their response was to sing - and to sing loud enough to be heard. (as John Stott says here) *It is wonderful that in such pain, with lacerated backs and aching limbs, Paul and Silas about midnight were **praying and singing hymns to God.** Instead of cursing men, they blessed God.* In doing this they involved God: that always changes things!

The earthquake must have been a bit of a surprise, but it opened so many doors, not least the door to faith!

The response of the jailer is credible - all of these prisoners had open doors and he was responsible for them. Instead of taking the 'easy way out', once he was assured

that his charges were all accounted for, he asks the key question, **what must I do to be saved?**

This ties back to the fortune-teller who had said: **these men are slaves of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation.** If this was what led to Paul and Silas being beaten and imprisoned and also led to an earthquake, no wonder the jailer asked them.

The answer is simple: **believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.**

The earliest Christian creed was simply **JESUS CHRIST IS LORD.** If you can say that, everything else falls into place.

The response was immediate: water washes the wounds and water washes the soul - and they **rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.**

In the week that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have issued a call to prayer it is important to get back to basics:

The dream is this: imagine every Anglican, perhaps even every Christian, in this nation praying that prayer together with the specific intention that all may come to know Jesus as Lord... Evangelism is the work of God, and it begins as we seek him in prayer. It is always good for the Church to pray.

The basics are these:

- ✦ We, just as Paul and Silas did, are to call people to proclaim that Jesus is their Lord. We cannot lose sight of this for this is what makes us Christian. It is something that we should all be praying for and working towards.
- ✦ People will be offended when we share this message - it does mean that we are saying that people cannot save themselves. When people get offended that can be costly for us - and this is a cost we must be prepared to pay.