

Acts 16

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Preacher: Douglas MacKeddie

[0 : 00] is the response of the church to those that are hurtling to a lost eternity. And Paul and Silas, seeing this man in his dilemma, cry to him, but I can only speak of as a great gospel cry, do thyself no harm.

Because let's face it, every soul that is outside of Christ this evening is in that perpetual state of doing themselves great harm.

They may not be involved with a suicidal activity as such, but yes, there is a suicide taking place in the lives of so many people.

They are doing themselves irredeemable harm by consistently refusing to accept the word and the testimony.

And if you think this man's condition and his plight was a dangerous one, but one that you would almost feel yourself holding back from, if you are outside of Christ, in a literal sense, you are in just a bad state as this man was on this occasion.

[1 : 37] And it's very interesting, I think, when you read this passage, to consider for a moment or two what is really driving this man. What is the driving force of the life of any one of us, even in this building?

What is it that is most important for my life? Who is making it so? Who is driving us forward to doing the things that, yes, we want to do, because a world that is lying in wickedness and sin is telling me to do it?

Oh, I don't mean to do what this man did, or was about to do, but just the world in its attempt to keep us away from closing in with the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what the world is doing. Look at the situation again, just for a moment or two. We take the situation as to why the Apostle Paul and Silas are here in this prison.

Primarily because they were preaching the gospel. That's what they were called to do. The Apostle Paul himself said, did he not, that he was ready to preach the gospel anywhere.

[3 : 02] He was even ready to go into prison for the opportunity to preach the gospel. Nothing was going to stop him from doing what he believed his master wanted him to do.

Even if that meant that he would end up in prison, which was the situation here. Himself and Silas find themselves in this prison with many other prisoners.

And I am sure for Paul and Silas, the language of that prison, the environment itself, was not very conducive, especially to those who had a concern for the things of Christ and the Spirit of Christ being within them.

There were criminals in that prison, but it did not hinder them in voicing what they wanted to voice, the praise of God. After all, it doesn't matter where we are in this world.

The opportunity was even afforded to Paul and Silas here to sing praises to God and to come before God in prayer. And all the other prisoners were listening to these two men as they enjoyed fellowship together.

[4 : 21] And as they enjoyed fellowship with their God and Savior, nothing was going to stop them enjoying that prospect.

But there was one there who didn't seem to give any consideration at all. He wasn't even thinking of Paul and Silas.

He's done his bit. And if he in any way at all represents the world at this stage, he's done the dastardly deed. He was an opportunist in many respects.

After all, you remember, they were put into prison and Paul and Silas had already been whipped. They'd already been beaten. And this man just takes the advantage and the opportunity.

Whatever kind of thing governed his mind and his heart and soul, all he wanted to do was meet out a little bit more punishment, a little bit more cruelty. There was almost an unrestraining in his heart and soul.

[5 : 22] Or there was some restraint. Maybe he would have gone the whole hog and killed them. Who knows? But he was in charge of them. But he didn't care how he treated them.

He would have treated them like animals. In many respects, is it not the case? That's the way that our world treats people like animals.

It's an indictment upon our own society. That government, even the very present government, will legislate things. That they wouldn't even begin to think about legislating upon the animal world, but they would do it upon the human world, upon man created in God's image.

Our nation, our government, is certainly bent in seeking to destroy. Here the apostle Paul and Silas find themselves in the providence of God in a situation in which God has placed them to be witnesses and to be lights, to be salt of the earth in this situation.

Now given the fact that these two men, Paul and Silas, had already been beaten, and even by this jailer. And when this great miracle took place of the earthquake itself, and I'm not going to go into that, but it has significance, don't get me wrong.

[6 : 58] But even as that earthquake had taken place, the concern of this poor jailer was he was given a job to do and he was afraid.

he was very afraid of man. Is that what we're afraid of? Could it be analyzed this way that many people tonight, maybe even in this building, are much more afraid of man than they are of God? What was it that drove this man to want to take that sword and drive it into himself and kill himself? What benefit was there going to be to him by doing that?

Of course, if he had no thought of an eternity, if all that there was to life was this present one, again, that's a sad situation for so many people, is it not?

That this is the all that there is about life? A Christless soul saying, this is all that there is to life? It is no wonder that there are so many people going over the edge.

[8 : 16] So many people being broken by the pressure of this present evil world. They are being broken and they are crying out constantly. This man was so beside himself.

He was so afraid of the world and the government and his employers. That he would rather kill himself than risk the punishment of the state of which he himself was part.

What kind of state had things developed into in that part of the world that such fear had taken hold of him that he would kill himself? Paul is the answer.

Paul is the answer. You and I have the answer to every soul in this world that is like this and not just like this.

Not even to the depth of the predicament of this man. But we have the answer. whatever you do don't go down the route that this man was going down.

[9 : 31] There is hope. There is hope no matter what this world wants to do to you. No matter how worked it is in everything that it seeks to do there is hope.

And that's what Paul is shouting out to this man before he would destroy himself body and soul before he would find himself in a lost eternity Paul cries out.

He's not waiting. Paul is not waiting for someone to come and say to him what must I do to be saved? Is that what we're doing? Are we waiting for someone to stop us in the streets and say what must I do to be saved?

Do we not recognize yet in the face of so many people the very plight that they are in? Do we not have the gospel of Jesus Christ as a great person for every single man, woman and child and before people would have the opportunity even to do themselves harm let us proclaim that gospel and be fearless in it not to be afraid of it.

Paul and Silas were bearing testimony they were praising God they were praying were they praying for this man? I'm sure they were they were praying for every other prisoner in the prison they were praying to God the Father that in his will Paul wasn't asking to be freed from prison all Paul wanted was that he might be a useful vessel in the master service wherever he was even in prison and he takes the opportunity along with his companion at midnight here to praise God that this poor man is asleep what does this man sleeping suggest to us?

[11 : 29] I think it's got a message for us all to those who are outside of Christ and those who are in danger of falling asleep even in Christ you remember what Paul said to the church at Ephesus in

chapter 5 awake he says thou that sleepest and rise from the dead and Christ shall give thee life now Paul's address there is to the church of Christ and he is concerned that the church herself will fall asleep in what she is about in the commission that she has been given he is concerned that the church at Ephesus and any other church would not find itself coming short of the glory of God and this very thing that Christ has asked us to do to go into the world and to preach the gospel and Paul announced to that man the necessity of doing no harm to himself he was setting before us a pattern that you and I should follow wherever you see a soul don't be afraid to speak up not only for Christ but also for the good of that soul as well if Paul had said nothing within seconds that man was dead and he was in a lost eternity

Paul saw the gravity of the situation and he did something about it can you identify with something of what the apostle Paul is saying here and how he is responding to this situation how many people do you come across every day that are in effect doing themselves untold harm whether it's drinking themselves into oblivion whether it be taking drugs whether it be coming to the end of their tether doesn't matter what age young old or like it's a fearful situation that people get themselves into to end up like this now remember the church must never forget this before the man pleaded with Paul what must

I do to be saved Paul had already invited him to receive what would be for his spiritual well-being don't do yourself any more harm and if I can cry out that one to anyone here this evening that is bent on doing themselves harm by refusing to accept the Lord Jesus Christ then I would spend the rest of my time doing it because it's of a paramount importance it's all very well for me to stand in this building knowing that there are people who are here some with a deep interest in the things of Christ others with maybe a casual one or maybe some with no real direct interest but you're here anyway my friend if you are here as an unbeliever and if you get any concern whatsoever at all to where the next life will be for you this man didn't know anything about the next life not at all not a thing did he know about the next life you've heard about it in fact your situation in many respects is worse than his because you know the truth you've heard the truth the truth has been given to you time and time again but do you recognize your fearful state how do you identify a fearful state of a soul that is without

Christ and without hope in this world this man didn't know the answer he had no answers no one was giving him an answer until Paul spoke up his life was hardly worth living because his life was bent upon regulation upon the instructions of his superiors he had the thumb in him there was no life there was no freedom in that man's life are you who are in Christ this evening are you not thankful to God that you have liberty and freedom I would hope we are all thankful to God for that this man knowing nothing else what can I do I can only kill myself but

Paul full of compassion and Silas doing exactly what their master would want them to do tell them tell him it's almost as though you cannot feel the spirit of God driving the apostle Paul and Silas to speak to this man tell him not to go down that road of self destruction how many there are on that road the broad road that leads to where life everlasting full life whatever it might be for you one thing is sure it is not a life of bliss it's a controlled life and how many people are controlled however this man knew he had a problem he knew he had a problem but again it was the gospel of [17:50] Jesus Christ that awakened his heart and soul again something like what we said this morning with the thief on the cross it wasn't the thief that made the first move generally speaking it's not you and I that make the first move it's the spirit of God that makes the first move towards us even in our intransigence even in our unbelief it's the spirit of God that generally makes the first move towards us can we identify that spirit is that spirit challenging the heart and soul of any soul young or old here this evening I hope it is it is the prayer of every believer and every saint of Christ in this building that those who are outside of Christ might receive him and might be set free and not be in the total grip of sin and condemnation and Paul and Silas spoke it made all the difference of the world because they spoke like Christ did but he heard and he comes then rushing with a different intent he comes rushing before

Paul and Silas having somewhere or another identified even like the thief on the cross that here there was some truth how much he understood who knows but there is no doubt that the spirit of God was leading him and he comes to Paul and Silas and he appeals he makes the appeal think of it now for a moment or two this was the man that put Silas and Paul into the innermost parts of the prison and we can recognize in the very language scripture the way that he did it in a very uncouth way he thrust them in now he finds himself responding to these men for whom he had not given a

thought except treating them like animals and he comes to them and he says to them sirs what must I do to be saved is that ringing out from the soul of anyone here this evening are you a young person with a life in front of you as you think great opportunities maybe you are at that stage in your life when you are longing for the day when you are grown up please I have not been disrespectful to you at all but maybe you are thinking to yourself once I am of a certain age

I love freedom I love liberty I will be able to do what I like oh please don't be deceived for one moment the devil is waiting for his opportunity when as you say you are going to have freedom and you are going to go straight into his clutches he is the greatest opportunist out and he will take you he will open his arms to you and he will yes he will gratify you with everything that you would be gratified with in your own thinking but what is he doing he's setting you on a slippery course at this moment as covenant children as covenant young people you have to a degree the protection there your parents who love the Lord who are praying for you and they will never give up praying for you they will never give up praying for you longing for you to be brought to this faith to Jesus

Christ you are privileged you may not think it at this moment if you're a teenager sorry for the expression if you're a teenager thinking that all is looking well you spend time in your own room listening to your own music longing for all these things that this world is offering it's pouring it into you just for that moment when I can be free free to serve Satan free to serve the evil one you have an opportunity even now this man didn't he was brought up in a situation without Christ he didn't know anything about this Jesus he was governed by the principles of a corrupt regime but you're not not if you love your parents and not if you love the

Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart and with all your soul don't end up like this man you have your youth and you have a bright future but would it not be better to look forward to a bright future with Christ on your side with Christ as your hope for time and for eternity do you not want as a young person to love the Lord Jesus with all your heart and with all your soul if I can speak a little bit personally here I wasn't brought up with a Bible in my hand I didn't know anything of worship in the home no one ever talked about it it was embarrassing my parents were not interested in church going and none of my family and when I look back on it yes I feel sad in many respects

[24 : 24] I thank God for the way that he has led me but I think this evening of many of my family as I'm sure some of you here do as well that don't have Christ what harm are we doing to ourselves what harm without Christ and without hope a young girl 13 great future to look forward to full of life great ideas and one night she thinks she has a bit of freedom and she can do what she wants and she decides to meddle with some drugs and with some drink and before the morning came she was gone 13 it's tragic what harm people are doing to themselves and the thing is it may not even be deliberate with some it is a great danger to leave yourself exposed to the one who is ready willing and waiting and able to destroy you that's what he wants to do as Paul says

I say it this night again don't do yourself any more harm flee to Christ flee to the rock of your salvation flee to the one that doesn't matter whether we're young or old flee to the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved if I were to ask you any one of you what's the thing you desire most the side of eternity what would it be it all depends upon your answer to that question what is the greatest desire of your heart and of your soul and the whole being will determine in many respects where you are going we are thankful that this man received Christ and his response to it was overwhelming what he received of the Lord Jesus Christ was overwhelming if you think that Christianity is dull and there is no doubt that there are many of us who can give that impression that Christianity is dull it's not it's the most lively life that you could ever think about because a life full of Christ is a life that is going somewhere not only here but also in eternity and I would hope that none of us would exchange or ever want to exchange what we have in

Christ Jesus Paul says to this man do yourself no harm and he received Christ would you like to receive Christ this night I can't change you I can't make the difference all that a preacher is called upon to do is to tell people of this Jesus but I plead with you before you go to sleep tonight if you're without Christ plead with him plead with him that he would save you save you from yourself save you from this untoward generation save you from the corruption that the devil is seeking to engender in your heart and in your soul may God grant unto us all a living lively and joyful awareness of a savior who has done so much for us that we could never ever repay even one part of it shall we pray go to be