

Sermon Podcast 630.MP3

Alright. We're continuing on this morning, Acts chapter 16. We're in week 11 of our series where we are going, talking about what does it look like for us to be the church in a post Christian, in a non Christian culture. And in order to answer that question, what I have said from week 1 was that we need to go back and look at the very beginning, and so that's what we are doing in this series, and today we get to a story of Paul and Silas. We're gonna dig in in just a few minutes, but I wanna invite you to simply follow along. The words are on the screen. Acts chapter 16 verses 25 to 34, and I'll read to us now. Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a huge earthquake which shook the foundations of the prison and at once all the doors flew open and everyone's chains became loose. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted at the top of his voice, don't harm yourself. We're all still here. The jailer called for lights and rushed in. Trembling over, he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside. Gentlemen, he said, will you please tell me how I can get out of this mess? Believe in the Lord Jesus, they replied, and you will be rescued. You and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and with everyone who was in his house. He he took them at that very hour of the night and washed their wounds. Then at once he was baptized and all his household with him. Then he took them into his house, put food on the table and rejoiced with his whole house that he had believed in God. So I wanna begin by just talking about something really interesting and fun in my life right now. I said I'm watching my girls grow up. I'm watching my girls Miriam, Evie, and Naomi grow up, and in the process of them growing up, they're developing their own style, and I love that because each of them has a very unique style. 1 a little more girly than the other, but all of them spicy to the maximum. Okay? I love watching them grow up. Watching them become the people that God created them to be, and and 1 of the things that I really love about watching them grow up is their what I did my doctoral work on. And I gotta tell you there are

moments what I did my doctoral work on. And I gotta tell you there are moments where I am deeply confused with the language that kids are using these days. Does anyone know sus? You you familiar with sus? Anybody with sus? Bruh, my kids just, hey bruh, you don't know man. This 1 these are some new ones that I, have been turned on to recently. Sigma, y'all know what sigma means? You wanna tell it? Sigma means you're cool. Right? Sigma means you're cool. But the best 1 of all is 1, I didn't know you guys were gonna be in here this morning. Skibbity toilet. Have y'all heard that yet? Skibbity toilet. Right? What does this stuff even mean? And I'm I could preach a sermon about that, but the the more interesting piece to me talking about language is how words that used to mean 1 thing now mean something else. And I could give you a 1, 000 different examples, but 1 in particular is the word literally. And that's not just kids but across the board. Literally, my kids will say, dad literally, and they do not mean the word literal literally. They mean it metaphorically, and that is And I go, oh, no. Is she okay? No. She's awesome. And I go, oh, no. Is she okay? No. She's awesome because sick now means awesome. And what happens when really important that words create worlds. That words create worlds, and we really need to focus in on something. It's really important that words create worlds. That words create worlds, and we really need to understand this central point, that if we do not understand language appropriately, then we misrepresent what people intend to say. If we misunderstand language, then we're going to misunderstand if we misrepresent it, if we don't wrap our brains around what language means in its original context, then we're going to miss out on what people are intending to say. We're gonna miss out on something central. And I'm gonna come back to this in just a moment because I think this is the interpretive key to understanding what is happening in this story in Acts chapter 16. Now what I did is I started with you guys where Paul and Silas are already in jail, but I need to back up for just a minute and help set the scene for why they got there in the first place. Because Paul and Silas, these 2 early followers of Jesus, they had made their way into Philippi. Philippi is this major Roman colony. It is considered a new Rome by many people in the 1st century and and it is populated primarily by retired Roman military soldiers. So it is a rough rough place to be. And Paul and Silas go to Philippi where there is already the foundation of a small church, and Paul and Silas are

preaching the gospel and they're doing their thing, and every single day, they make their way to a place of prayer where they get to share the gospel with people. And in the story in Acts chapter 16, what happens is that there is a woman who has the gift of divination, IAKA like she's a fortune teller. And every day she is following behind Paul and Silas and saying, these 2 men are pre these 2 men are prophets of the most high God, and she they're she's really giving them a rough time. Day after day, this is happening. And what happens in the story in Acts chapter 16 is ultimately Paul and Silas, they get tired of this woman trailing them. And so Paul 1 day turns around and very matter of factly says to this woman, in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out. And the spirit of divination leaves this woman's body, and that is a problem. It is a problem primarily for 1 reason, because this woman was owned by 2 other people, 2 men who used that gift of divination or fortune telling so that they could make money off of her. And when that gift is now gone, the woman is worthless. So what happens in the story is Paul and Silas are taken in front of the, the court, they're found guilty of sedition to Rome, and they are beaten, they are starved, they are thrown into the inner cell of a prison. And at any moment in the lead up to where I'm reading to us in Acts chapter 16, Paul and Silas could have lost their lives. And what we get to in the story is this climactic moment where it is past midnight, and they've been tortured and they've been beaten and they've been starved and they've been treated just awfully. And God acts in this miraculous way and there's an earthquake and the prison doors are open and the chains are taken off their feet, and in that moment y'all, I want you to be clear on this. Paul and Silas understand the gravity of their situation. They could be killed at any second. And when the prison doors open and when the chains are released, any sane and normal person, do you know what they would do? They would leave as quickly as they possibly could. But what happens in this story is that Paul sees the jailer, and we're gonna come back to this point because it's really the most important piece. What happens with the jailer, that he is about to kill himself because he knows that he is in deep deep trouble. And rather than leave, rather than get out of there as quickly as he possibly could, rather than treat that jailer in the same way that Paul and Silas had been treated with no mercy, with no generosity, with no forgiveness, What Paul and Silas do is absolutely

remarkable because they stop. They stop in the midst of this chaotic situation and they say to the jailer, don't kill yourself. But there's a better way forward. And this is not the central point of the sermon, but I think this is absolutely crucial for us to understand. How are we gonna follow Jesus in a post Christian world? What should the posture relegate us to the margins of society? This is so important for us to get because Paul and Silas set a template and here's what it is. That the mark of genuine faith in Jesus is compassion for all people. Not just the people you get along with, not just the people that you enjoy spending time around, but the central mark of a follower of Jesus. I mean it. A genuine faith is ultimately rooted in compassion, and love, and forgiveness for everybody. Because while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, and we ought to give that same love and generosity to everybody else. But now we get to this moment in the story where I really want us to focus our attention. Because Paul and Silas could have left, but they didn't. They stopped, man. Don't kill yourself, but God has got a better and bigger plan for you. And what happens in the story is the jailer, right, he's freaking out necessarily so. Remember he is in Philippi, a tough Roman colony. All around him would have been retired military officials, and he would have known the implications and the cost of what he had done. If the city officials show up and if the jail is empty in the culture in which this is happening, that man, that jailer, he would not have been reprimanded. He would not have been demoted. But what would have happened in that moment with absolute brutality and force would have been that guy as a jailer, a mid level bureaucrat in the city governance structure, y'all, he would have been killed immediately in that moment. And that is so important for us to understand because Paul and Silas, dude, don't kill yourself because there's a better way forward in this moment. And what happened y'all is that the jailer takes Paul and Silas outside, and he asks a simple question. Now the the translation I read is a little bit different. If you grew up with the new revised standard version or the new international version, if some of you are here and you read like the King James version, every single 1 of those translations when the jailer finally comes face to face with Paul and Silas, the question that he asks is this, what must I do to be saved? What must I do to be saved? Now y'all, this is really really important for us to dig down and talk about for just a few minutes. Because every single 1 of

us, I mean it. Every single 1 of us who has grown up in the Christian tradition, whether you've been in church your whole life or whether you came to church later on in in your twenties, thirties, even every single 1 of us. When we hear that phrase, what must I do to be saved? We automatically think that the question that is being asked really means, what do I have to do to go to heaven when I die? That is the question that really began to be asked almost exclusively around the time of the reformation. Martin Luther and everybody moving forward. And I could nerd on on that for like 30 minutes, but we're not gonna do that. Right? I just need you to know, every single 1 of us, you should not feel bad about this. You have been conditioned to hear the phrase, what must I do to be saved and you immediately interpret it is what do I have to do to secure my salvation in an eternal sense of the word. And we need to stop right there and talk about this because the Greek word is the word And if you translate that literally, what it means is to be delivered, to be protected, to do well, to be whole, or to save. And every time we see this word interpreters have to make a decision. How are we going to put this on the page? And what I want us all to understand this morning is that when we put this phrase in its proper context, coming off of the lips of the jailer in Philippi, he categorically and 100% is not asking the question, what do I have to do in order to go to heaven when I die? But if you were paying attention, the translation that I read said, what do I have to do to get out of this mess? What do I have to do to be well in this situation? Because my life is on the line for something that I did not do, and now I'm going to pay the cost with my life. So, gentlemen, God is clearly working in and through you, Paul and Silas. So tell me, what do I have to do to be so soed, to get out of the mess that I am currently finding myself in. And y'all, those 2 different ways of reading this passage make all of the difference in the world. We're gonna come back to why that is so central in just a minute, but I wanna pause. I wanna pause because some of you when you hear me say say the words like, this isn't about going to heaven when you die, you you start freaking out a little bit. And what I want you to know is that if that's how you've always read this story and if that's how you've always interpreted the the words of the Philippian jailer or anybody else in scripture who's asking that question. It is entirely okay. It is entirely appropriate to think of it in terms of going to heaven when you die. Right? That that is a categorical

fact. When you read through what Jesus says. Right? When Jesus is with his disciples in the gospel of John, and he's meeting and sharing a meal with them in the upper room. There's this moment where Jesus says, hey guys, I'm not gonna be with you anymore. And I'm about to go to the father. I'm gonna go to the cross and I'm gonna be resurrected. And then I'm gonna go be with the father and he says, I'm gonna prepare a place for you when I go there to come and be with me. And Thomas, 1 of the earliest disciples who's a lot like me and a lot like you, he says, I don't know what you're talking about. And there's this beautiful moment in John chapter 14 where Jesus says, I'm the way, the truth, and the life, and no 1 comes to the father except through me. And so in 1 deep and meaningful sense, here's what we need to understand that Jesus is in fact the only way to the father. Jesus is the only way to secure eternal salvation with the with the God who created us in his image. As we talked about in week 1, we must as a church remain firm on the centrality of Jesus in our lives, not only for today, before eternity. Don't ever back off of the centrality of Jesus. However, when we read this story in Acts chapter 16, this isn't about eternity, but it is about today. It isn't about eternity, but it is about today. And y'all listen, we are in a post Christian culture. Yes, we are in the bible belt but that belt is starting to loosen a little bit. Okay? And as we continue to move into post Christian culture, we are doing a radical disservice by talking about the gospel only in terms of what happens to you when you die. Because there are people all across the United States. There are people right now in the city of Augusta who are dying to find joy, who are dying to find purpose and meaning. There are people right now who are wondering, why am I here on this earth? And so many people have bought into the caricature that Christianity only cares about your eternal salvation. But when we read this story in its context, listen. The gospel is concerned with today. Listen, man, Paul and Silas say, believe in the Lord Jesus and you and your family, they will be rescued. You will be made well today. And what is so beautiful about this story is the way that it ends. That Paul, Silas and this Philippian jailer, they don't part ways after saying a prayer, bow in your head, closing your eyes so you can go to heaven when you die. But they go to the Philippian jailer's house where they sit down and they share a meal and the story says that they all collectively in the moment, they celebrate. Because God is doing something right now.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be rescued. And for so many of us, we think when we hear the word, what must I do to be saved? We're talking about eternity and sometimes we are. But do not ever forget that in this story and in so many others, the gospel makes an immediate impact on our daily lives. And people need to hear that. People need to know that Christianity isn't a pie in the sky religion, but it is a boots on the ground force of revolution that can transform your life today. Think about this you guys. Go back and look in the gospels. Seriously. Go back and look in the gospels and what you will find, just 2 stories that I'm immediately thinking of. Right? If you go back and you look, there's the story in 1 of the 3, 4 accounts of Jesus' life. In Matthew's gospel where where Jesus is sitting having dinner with some Pharisees, you know the super religious people. And and this lady comes in and the story says that she is so in awe in the presence of Jesus. That she gets down on her knees and she starts weeping uncontrollably. And she uses her tears and her own hair to clean the feet of Jesus. And all of the religious people, right? They say that you shouldn't be talking to her. You shouldn't even allow her in our vicinity because she is a sinner. Remember going back to having compassion on all people? And the religious leader said, you shouldn't be doing this right now. But in this remarkable moment, this woman who is not talking about eternity, but this woman who is weeping in the presence of Jesus, overcome with awe and wonder, wiping his feet with her tears in her hair. Jesus looks at her, and what does he say? But your faith has saved you. Now go in peace. Your faith has made you well today. Now go, Jesus says, in shalom. Go in the wholeness of God. Go in the restoration of all things that is promised to you, not only when you die, but right here and right now. It's a story that isn't about a day across the sea, And a blind beggar comes to Jesus, and he says, lord lord, rescue me. And Jesus, in this incredible story, takes a little bit of mud, rubs it on the man's eyes, looks at him. What do you see? What do you see? I can see the beauty of God's creation. I can I can see in the way that god always intended? And once again, what does Jesus do? But he looks at this blind beggar and he says, go and be well because your faith has what? Zoso'd you. Your faith has saved you. And you can finally see as you always intended to see, as you always dreamed of seeing. And y'all, I could give you 15, 000 other examples of, of this sort of thing. But the point is this, that Jesus brings

restoration. Jesus brings joy to people in the present moment. And for far too long, you guys, the church has continued to offer people only an eternal destination, Only joy when we get to the other side of the river. Right? If you grew up in traditional church environments, yes, we'll gather at the river. Or when the role is called up yonder. And everything that we have been conditioned to think is that being saved is about something else, but y'all being saved is about now. Being rescued is about today. Listen guys, we live in a world and we live in a culture that is desperately seeking meaning. More so now than ever before. I'm reading a book. I really recommend this book to you. It's got by a man named David Brooks. David writes for the New York Times. He's an opinion columnist and a really great sociologist, and How to Know a Person is the name of his most recent book. And in that book, he talks about just how in the world in which we are living, we are lonelier than we've ever been. In men in particular, rates of addiction and suicide are higher than at any point in modern history, and people are searching for a reason to keep on going. People are desperate to find a reason to live today. And I wanna be clear that in a post Christian culture, there are all sorts of alternative answers. Right? In the 1st century, you could go to the temple of Apollos. You could go to the temple of Zeus. You could go to the temple of Aphrodite and you could seek to find purpose and meaning there. And if I can translate to the 21st century in the United States of America, you can go to the temple of Victoria's Secret and think that through sexuality that you can find purpose. You can go to the temple of Wall Street and stand before a literal bull and think that money and success will ultimately lead to your happiness. You can go with the illusion throughout the whole of your life that even the good things. Right? Mike talked about this when he was singing. How many of us? How many of us? And we do we condition people to think this way even in their wedding vows. Right? Hey, now that you're married, you're finally gonna be happy. Now that you're married, you're not gonna be alone. And we teach people to believe that the nuclear family, your wife and your children, ultimately, they will be the source of that happiness and that source of being well and whole and so soed in our day and age. And please hear me, while I love my family and I love my wife and my kids. We are not designed to carry that sort of burden. We are not designed to carry that sort of weight. And we can go throughout the whole of our lives

looking at a 1, 000, 000 different things that promise us satisfaction, that promise us well-being, that promise us wholeness. And what I am here to tell you this morning, is that if we take acts chapter 16 seriously, if we take what Paul and what Silas said seriously, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not only the key to eternal salvation, but it's the key to joy right now. Believe in the Lord Jesus, you guys. This is essential. It's always the answer to the question of how we can be rescued. Both in life and in death. But today today, I'm talking about life. Today, I'm talking about how you can find joy. Today, I'm talking about how you can find purpose. And if y'all, if we can get the answer to this question right, and we can understand that Jesus is at the center of every single question. What is wrong with the world today? I know it sounds cliché, but we need Jesus. What is wrong with the state of your own soul that even though you don't wanna have that drink, you still go home and do it? Ultimately, it might sound cliché, but you need Jesus. What is that nagging feeling deep inside of your soul that says there has to be more? Ultimately, you need Jesus. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. Let me be clear. This isn't just a mental ascent. This isn't just checking a box. But when Paul says those words, believe, he's talking about giving your life. Giving your life to something that is bigger than yourself. Giving your life to the 1 who was crucified dead and buried and was resurrected on the 3rd day. Giving your life to be rescued to the 1 who says that you can have life, abundant life right here and right now. Believe in the lord Jesus. It's the answer to the question of how we can be rescued both today and for eternity. And as I have said in every single sermon that we have preached so far, 11 weeks in, it is so tempting to read a story from the book of Acts and simply say like, okay, well, that's about something that was happening then. But I want you to hear me. It's not about then, it's about now. And ultimately, the question is this, where do you? Where do you need to be rescued? I'm serious. Where do you need to be rescued? Where do you need to experience the extravagant generosity of Jesus because the jailer said, what do I have to do to get out of this mess? What do you have to do to find healing? What do you have to do to finally come to peace with that thing that broke your heart a decade ago? What what do you have to do? Where do you need to be rescued? And what I want us to understand this morning, 1 thing, plain and simple, is that the answer is, believe in Jesus and

your life can be transformed. Put your hope in the resurrected Christ, and the process of restoration and reconciliation and wholeness can begin. See how powerful a word can be? You, my friends, can be saved. Yes, in eternity, but also today. And that is at the heart of the good news. Y'all take a couple minutes and before we enter into worship, which I hope you will all stay and celebrate with us, join me and let's pray together. God, right now so many of us are in this space and lord we need rescue. So many of us are in this space this morning, and lord our lives, if we are willing to be honest, they're a mess. God, our lives, if we are willing to be honest, maybe only with ourselves, God, we are wrapped up in situations and settings that we know won't bring us joy, that we know won't won't bring us fulfillment. So god, so many of us are just like that Philippian jailer. What must we do to get out of our mess? God, on this day, speak Jesus to us. God, on this day, help us to trust that he is the 1 who he said he was. The 1 that not only promises us eternity, but promises us life today. God, work in our hearts. Work in our lives. And however cliché it may sound, Lord may we trust in Jesus. Be with us as we continue to worship you this morning God. This is our prayer and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.