

Humor - slave gas
surgery in stocks (Mel Brooks)

HIS ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD REJOICED THAT HE HAD BECOME A BELIEVER IN GOD

acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson
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7th Sunday of Easter, May 20, 2001.
Confirmation Sunday

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

We rejoice this morning with Whitney, Jaimie Chimchirian, Jason, Albert, Jordan, Ben, Charley, Jamie Sarver and Ryan on their confirmation. Just as the Philippian Jailer and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God, we rejoice with their families. Today you will be asked to make the most important decision in your life. I'll ask you questions. You'll profess your belief in Christ. You'll make a commitment to the community of the church. You'll promise to do what Christ leads you to do. Over the last several months these young people have learned that Christianity is Christ. It's a personal relationship to Christ as our Savior, Lord and Friend. But how does one become committed to him in this way? Let me suggest that there are four steps for us to take, which (to help fasten them in memory) begin with the letters A, B, C, and D.

A stands for asking. The Philippian Jailer asked the most important question anybody can ever asked. "What must I do to be saved?" I'm not sure what he meant by that question. The Greek word for "save" can mean "deliver from death" but the jailer's life wasn't in immediate danger once he knew the prisoners had not escaped. The Greek word for "saved" also means heal. But there's no indication the jailer was sick. There seems to be a more profound meaning to his question. "What's the purpose of my life?" "Where am I heading?" "Does life have any meaning?" "What's my destiny?" Maybe the jailer had heard the fortune teller screaming that Paul and Silas were teaching the way of salvation. Maybe the preaching of Paul and Silas awakened a desire to know and worship God. At any rate, he was asking one of the greatest questions any of us can ever ask, "What must I do to be saved?"

If A stands for "asking", B stands for believing. Paul answered the Philippian Jailer's question, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved." Believing doesn't mean we have all our questions answered. Believing doesn't mean absolute certainty. Believing doesn't mean proving. Almost nothing that makes any real difference can be proved. I can prove the law of gravity by dropping a shoe out the window. I can prove that the world is round by jumping on an airliner and flying until I end up where I began. But the most important things can't be proved, we just have to believe. I can't prove that my wife and children love me, and

God's unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness of sinners is what enables us to *do*; enables us to ask the important questions; enables us to believe in Christ; enables us to commit to the community of the church

God's unconditional grace, love, and acceptance also enables us to serve others. The Philippian Jailer, after he asked the most important question, after he believed, after he committed to the community of the church through baptism, did something. He brought up Paul and Silas into his home and set food before them. His faith in Christ influenced what he did, made him, like Christ, a person for others.

We may think there's not much we can do. We may think nothing we do has much value. For example, a basketball in my hands isn't worth much. But a basketball in the hands of Allen Iverson, when he's healthy, is worth taking the 76ers to the playoffs. *It depends on whose hands it's in.* ^{A golf-club in my hands} ~~A baseball in my hands is worth~~ *is worth whatever it costs.* ^{A golf-club in the hands of Tiger Woods is worth millions.} ~~It depends~~ *about \$6.* ~~A baseball in Roger Clemens hands is worth millions.~~ ^{else} ~~It depends on whose hands it's in.~~ A tennis racket is worthless in my hands. A tennis racket in the hands of Venus Williams is worth millions. A sling shot in my hands is a kid's toy. A sling shot in King David's hand was a mighty weapon. *It depends on whose hands it's in.* Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches. Two fish and 5 loaves in Christ's hands fed thousands. *It depends on whose hands it's in.* Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse. Nails in the hands of Jesus Christ produce salvation for the entire world. *It depends on whose hands it's in.* The value of what we do depends on whose hands we're in. You can do something valuable and beautiful for Christ if you put yourself into his hands. Put your concerns, your worries, your fears, your hopes, your dreams, your families and your relationship in Christ's hands and you will see what great things you will do for him in his service.

I can't really prove that I love them. I heard of a man who loved his fiancée but wasn't sure if he could trust her absolutely. So he hired a private detective who followed her for a whole year observing everything she said and did and all the other people she met with. At the end of the year the detective assured the man that his fiancée had been faithful in word and deed. But what kind of foundation had been laid for real love and trust? Love can't be proved. Neither can we prove that our faith in Jesus Christ is well grounded. G.A. Studdert-Kennedy asked, "How do I know that God is good?" He went on to answer, "I don't. I gamble like a man, I bet my life." Believing on Christ is betting our lives that God has come to us in Jesus Christ to save us.

A stands for "asking", *B* stands for believing, and *C* stands for committing to the community called the church. The Philippian jailer and his household were baptized without delay. Baptism joins us not only to Christ but to the church. A Christian is someone who not only believes in Jesus but commits to a community called the church. Think of joining the church as joining a swim team. Some people learn to swim all by themselves. They just jump in, splash around, and eventually figure out for themselves how to swim. But really good swimmers usually have a coach and belong to a swim team. The whole team supports and encourages one another to be the best swimmers they can be. In the same way, we Christians can figure out for ourselves, through reading the Bible and prayer, what's right and wrong, but most likely we'll never really live up to our calling as a Christian unless we're on a team. It's important to belong to a team (the church). God wants each Christian to commit to the community of the church so that we can all become the best swimmers (the best Christians) possible.

A stands for *ask*. *B* stands for *believe*. *C* stands for *commit to the community of the church*. *D* stands for something to *Do*. The Philippian Jailer asked, "What must I do?" Now I don't believe there's anything we can do to earn God's love, acceptance and forgiveness. I believe in God's unconditional love, welcome, and acceptance of sinners. This is part of the reformed theological conviction in the Westminster Confession of Faith and all our credal statements. I believe it's what the Bible teaches. God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness is not dependent on what we do. It's not dependent on our faith or repentance or behavior. Rather