

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 16 and 17

What We Found

The Spirit steered the mission by closed doors as truly as open ones, funneling Paul's team to the coast until a night vision, the man of Macedonia pleading "come over and help us," pulled the Gospel onto the continent of Europe. And at verse 10 the pronouns quietly changed to "we": the author, whom the Church has always known as Luke, boarded at Troas, and stretches of Acts from here on read as eyewitness memoir.

At Philippi we met the first European converts. Lydia, of whom Luke wrote one of the great sentences on grace: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (16:14). As she listened, before any resolve of her own, God unlocked the door from the inside. And the jailer, at midnight, after the hymns and the earthquake, asking the most important question in the world, "Men, what must I do to be saved?", and receiving the full apostolic answer within the hour: faith, the word spoken to all in his house, baptism "at once, with all his family," a shared table, and joy. Three households enter the Church whole in these chapters and the next, Lydia's, the jailer's, and (in 18:8) Crispus's, and the Catechism points to exactly these texts on the ancient practice of baptizing households, within which, the Catechism carefully notes, infants may well have been baptized too (CCC 1252): the covenant God has dealt in households since Abraham, and grace has always gone first.

At Athens, Paul showed the Church how to speak to a culture that has never read her Scriptures: begin at their own altar "to an unknown god," quote their own poets, honor every seed of truth as preparation for the Gospel (CCC 843), and then refuse to soften the summit: repentance, the appointed Man, and the resurrection. Some mocked, some delayed, and some believed. Even a perfect sermon converts some, not all, and the apostle's peace never depended on the percentage.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles (4th century)

Chrysostom pauses over Lydia: the Lord opened her heart, yet she gave heed; grace did not force the door but unlocked it, and her freedom walked through. And the opened heart immediately opened her home. Hospitality, for Chrysostom, is faith's first reflex.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage, Letter 64, to Fidus (AD 253)

Asked whether baptism should wait until an infant's eighth day, after the pattern of circumcision, St. Cyprian answered with a council of sixty-six bishops: do not wait even that long. The mercy and grace of God is to be denied to no one born of man. For Cyprian and those sixty-six bishops in AD 253, whether to baptize infants was not the question at all; the only debate was how soon.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr, Second Apology (2nd century)

St. Justin taught that seeds of the divine Word were scattered among the pagans, so that whatever has been said

truly by anyone belongs to us Christians. What Paul did at Athens, claiming the pagans' own altar and poets for Christ, Justin turned into a method the Church has carried into culture after culture.

Live It This Week

Two assignments, one for your house and one for your city. First, the household practice: institute one realistic practice of faith at home this week, grace before meals, a blessing at bedtime, a weekly decade of the rosary, and hold it daily; households are converted by rhythms more than by arguments, and yours is the first Macedonia you have been called to. Second, the Athens bridge: with the most secular person you genuinely like, have one conversation that begins on their altar, asking sincerely about the true thing they already love, and listening for the unknown God behind it. Do not force the summit; walk partway up the hill together.

Memory Verse

"And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'" (Acts 16:31)

Before Next Session

Read Acts 18 and 19, once. Watch for a discouraged apostle given a staggering promise in the night, a brilliant preacher humbly corrected over dinner, and a city where the Gospel gets expensive.

Catechism References

CCC 1252 (households and the baptism of infants) · CCC 27-28 (the desire for God) · CCC 843 (preparation for the Gospel)