

*TO TELL
THE STORY*



Tonight He Dies

Tonight, he dies. God has decreed it.

The jailer had heard of Paul, of course. Pretty much everyone in Philippi had. Some preacher from Palestine. He'd gotten a following. Worshipped some God. Been around, what, two years now?

And then one day, a mob carried Paul and his preaching buddy Silas to the jail. "Secure them on the inside! Heaviest chains! They go on trial tomorrow!" And the jailer knew his business. He locked them up tight. Inner cell. Didn't ask questions.

And that's when the jailer knew there was something wrong with these two. The entire time, they're singing.

The jailer ignored it. Strange, sure, but it was better than getting cursed at or attacked like normal.

The thing that unnerved the jailer most, though, was the other prisoners. They weren't trying to rile the newbies. They listened.

He checked the chains. He checked the doors. Prisoners secure. Time to go home for the day.

His wife had dinner waiting. His children were ready to report what they had done for that day. His mother-in-law complained all through dinner, just like normal. He slept that night with his wife in his arms.

And he is awakened by the earth itself trying to kill him. The room violently shakes, trying to hurdle their bed out the window. His wife screams.

The prisoners. If they escape, he's a dead man. And his family, too. All dead. The earth falls silent, its rage past. His wife sobs beside him in the sudden silence.

The jailer, though, he leaps out of bed, sprinting for the stairs. To the jail. He grabs his belt and sword, ready to strike down anyone trying to escape. He bursts out of the house. The prison! In the shaking of the earth, in the shaking of the foundations, every door burst open. Every. Single. Door.

He draws his sword. It's shaking.

Tonight he dies. And if the prisoners have already escaped. If they've escaped, the jailer is responsible. And his superiors will make sure he pays. And that his family pays.

That Paul. That Silas. They were attached to someone with power. Someone with enough power to drive out a demon. Someone who was displeased with the jailer. Someone who shook the entire prison not only to save his followers, but to show his fury that someone would dare imprison his followers. The jailer had displeased a god.

His best option. His best option. He can't face his superiors. He can't catch the prisoners. He turns the sword on himself. If he drives the sword through his stomach, it'll look like the prisoners got him on the way out. His family won't be responsible. It just means he needs to kill himself.

God has promised: Tonight he dies.

The jailer braces himself, takes the hilt of the sword, and –

A voice cuts through the deathly silence of the night: "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!"

He drops his blade. It's not possible. That voice. It's Paul's. The one who should be angry at him for what he did. The one whose God shook the prison.

The jailer calls, summons, screams for lights. Finally the guards show up, lanterns in hand. They race through the prison. Every prisoner is there. Every. Single. One.

The jailer stumbles to Paul and Silas's cell. This is the man who speaks for the God who is angry with me. This is the man I must appease. And the jailer falls on his face, in the dirt and filth of the cell. "What must I do? What must I do to be saved? What must I do to clear my name before your God? What must I do so you're not angry at me? What must I do?"

Paul and Silas answer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved – you. And your household."

The Bible says, "Then they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his household."

Paul tells them: "You've seen the wrath of God. You know that you've failed. You know that you've done wrong. And his fury is great. But this Jesus, who is God's Son, lived the life you never did. He never tortured his prisoners. He never hurt anyone unjustly. His anger came only at injustice. And when he died, he exchanged himself. He put himself in the line of his Father's fury. He faced the judgment you have earned. There is no punishment left."

And at that hour of the night, the jailer and his entire family... they die. God keeps his promise. They die. They are drowned.

The Bible says, "At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds; and immediately he and all his family were baptized."

It's too late to go to the river, but there is water enough here, in pitchers left over from supper; it is water enough. And Paul and Silas pour water over the jailer, and they speak the words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And as surely as the jailer met the wrath of God in the earthquake, he meets the wrath of God again. And God works through the promise he has made, through water and Word, and he drowns the jailer. He takes the man the jailer was, that sinful nature, that enemy of God, and God releases all his pent-up fury and drowns him. In baptism, the jailer is united with the death of Christ.

And he is raised again in new life. He is not who he was; the old has gone, and the new has come. The jailer is totally new, united not only with the death of Jesus, but in his resurrection as well. Here the jailer has met with God: in water and Word, in drowning and new life, here the jailer sees who God is: One who is pure and holy and cannot stand sin, but took on the sin he hated to save us who sinned. And now, in baptism, the jailer is God's son, too.

And it's not just the jailer. His wife. His children. They all drown. They all die. And they are all reborn by water and the Word.

The Bible says, "He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family."

Brothers. Sisters.

Remember the day you died. Baptism isn't just some ceremony. It's the day God drowned you, and brought you to a new life. Celebrate the life he gave you on that day.

And this story is true.

Acts 16:25-34
<http://www.breadforbeggars.com>



BREAD FOR BEGGARS