

“The Summit’s Mission and Message” // Church at the Dome // Acts 16:13–34

Wow, wow, wow. That’s amazing. That’s like the heart of The Summit Church in a single story.

Well, could we just take a minute and take this in? Isn’t this amazing?

UNC and their staff have done so much to make this possible for us—could we take a moment and put our hands together to thank them?

I know worshiping like that for many of you in here was surreal ... you’re like:

- “Of all the amazing things I’ve seen in here, I never thought praising Jesus like that would have been one of them.”

On the other hand, for others of you, I know just being in here gives you the heebee-jeebies.

- You’re like, “This is the last place I’d expect the name of Jesus to be glorified.”

We had **a guy who came to faith in Christ a few weeks ago** here at the Summit, and he told us he wanted to be baptized, and **we were like, “Hey, we’re going to do a big baptism at the Dean Dome in a few weeks, what if you just did it there?” And he said, and I’ll use his exact words: **“I’m not getting in any (bleepety-bleep) water at the Dean Dome. Go Pack!”** (Except he didn’t say bleepety-bleep!)**

- **(By the way, how much do I love it that God sends people like this to our church, who come in with no church background and don’t even know the appropriate words to use when talking about BAPTISM? ... I’ll take it!)**

But here’s what this guy said, and I quote: “Finding Summit has been an answered prayer for me and my family. Today I am several months sober, and I solely credit this milestone to a newfound relationship with Jesus. I’ve learned more about Christ and myself since walking into the Summit in March than in the prior 36 years on this earth. This community and this church are special. My family is so thankful for this church.”

Well, this guy is getting baptized—but **needless to say**, it’s not gonna be today. He’s waiting until October :)

But TWO things I want to say from that story:

- ***First, Summit: THIS IS OUR 23-year legacy.*** Take this in: *Today, we will baptize our 10,000th person since we started as The Summit Church in 2002.*¹
 - (In fact, if you've been baptized at this church, would you STAND UP?) That's not to mention the thousands more who've been baptized in our church plants around the world.
 - And by the way, Summit, **it occurred to me as I was working on this:** This is our 23rd anniversary as The Summit Church—how appropriate that we celebrate our TWENTY-THIRD anniversary here, since that's the number of the basketball GOAT. That has to mean that the ceiling is the roof on what God wants to do in and through our church, amen?
- ***SECOND thing I want to say: We're going to be offering a chance for any of you who have never been baptized to do so at the end.***
 - **Maybe you're new to the Christianity thing** and you wonder, "What is baptism?"
 - **Baptism is your official declaration of faith ...** Scripture teaches that it's the first thing you should do after accepting Christ: It's like going public with your faith.
 - And maybe **you've never done that:** Maybe you've only newly trusted Christ, or maybe you'll do that today, and today you'll publicly declare that through baptism; or maybe you trusted Christ a while ago and you just didn't know you were supposed to do this. Either way, we're going to give you a chance.

So let me explain for the next few minutes why you would even consider that, and I'm going to use one of my favorite stories in the Bible to do so.

It's the story of the **gospel's first entry** into Europe: **ACTS 16** (if you have your Bibles and want to open them).

- It's the story of the Apostle Paul taking the gospel into Philippi.
 - Of all the cities in the Bible, I've always thought Philippi most resembled the Triangle.
 - You see, Paul meets three people there he brings to faith in Christ, and I feel like they are the same three kinds of people we meet in our city—the same three here today.

The first is...

¹ The total prior to today is 9,937.

Lydia: (And I'm gonna call her ...) **"The Seeker"** Look at **(vs. 14)**

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

- **Lydia was basically a high-end** businesswoman on a business trip.
 - She was put together. Professional.
 - **Religious**, but she'd never **met Jesus personally**. She had a lot of questions.
- **And how does she become a Christian?** Well, Paul basically engages her in an evangelistic Bible study.
- And as Paul is speaking, **vs. 14** says that **"The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."**
 - That word "pay attention" is the Greek word used for **addiction to alcohol**. There was something about Paul's message that stirred her deep in her soul.
 - That word refers to when God does something to get your attention.
 - We had a **girl last year that came to one of our Easter services**—this is one of my favorite Summit stories: Our college ministry at NC State went out and spread out little Easter eggs all over campus ... little plastic eggs with a treat and an inviter card. Grounds and facilities came along and took all of them back up—every single one—EXCEPT ONE.
 - The Lord "opened her heart to pay attention ..."
- Maybe your story wasn't dramatic, but there's something going on in your life that is awakening you to spiritual things.
 - Maybe you're at a time of disappointment in your life: **You joined a sorority** because you thought it would give you that meaning and belonging in life you've always wanted.
 - **But it's left you empty**, hurt, unsatisfied, insecure; something draws you toward Jesus this morning. Something in your heart is telling you, "This is the answer."
 - **One of my friends has a daughter in her mid-20s who just came back to Jesus** and she told her dad, *"Dad, I've spent my whole life loving things that didn't love me back."*
- Maybe **it's a health scare you've gone through**. Something that's made you think about what's important in life.
- **Or maybe it's just the awareness that something is missing** in your life.
- **Hear me: God is doing in your heart** what he **did** to Lydia's: He's opening it for you to pay attention.

The second person, **vs. 16**, was ...

The Slave Girl: (And I'll call her ...) **"The Captive"** (vs. 16)

- This girl is the **opposite of Lydia**. She's not a put-together businesswoman; she's a captive.

- Acts also tells us that she had **a demon**.
- **How does she come to Christ?** Not through one of Paul's Bible studies. She **couldn't have come to one of those** even if she wanted to.
 - **She's a captive.**
 - **Paul has to bring her to faith in Christ through an act of deliverance**—he got involved in her life and helped her find deliverance through Jesus.
- **Maybe that describes you:** There are things about Christianity that attract you, but you feel a barrier between you and God:
 - Maybe a spiral of bad relationship choices that have left you feeling trapped
 - Addictions you can't shake
 - Shame over past decisions. You think, "I'm surprised God doesn't strike me dead just walking in here. If other people could see the real me, they wouldn't even want me here."
 - Maybe you just found out you're unexpectedly pregnant
 - Your marriage has just fallen apart
 - Maybe you just feel like you're just unable to follow Jesus
 - **There's a guy on our staff who works closely with me who for a long time was interested in Jesus but just felt like he couldn't** come to Jesus because of personal temptations and weaknesses; he thought Jesus would never be interested in someone like him because of his weaknesses.
 - **What he learned** is that Jesus doesn't tell people to go and change and then he'll accept them; Jesus accepts them as they are, and then he changes them.
- **What Paul proclaimed to this slave girl is what we offer to you this morning:** the message that God knows you and loves you as you are, and he is willing to meet you where you are.
 - **He has the power** to set you free.
 - The church should be more like a waiting area for an emergency room than one for a job interview.
- The **gospel's message is not "go and change,"** and then God will accept you; it's that God accepts you as you are; he'll supply the power to change you. **(John 8?)**

The third person to come to Christ was ...

The Philippian Jailor: "The Cynic" (vv. 23–34)

I call him "the cynic" because **jailors in those days were usually retired Roman generals** who were given by Caesar a jail to run in their retirement as a reward for their years of service.

- In other words, they were part of the ruling class; they were battle-scarred and war-weary.
- They were usually pretty cynical. They'd seen it all; they'd been to Rome; they'd stood before Caesar.

- Rome had all kinds of religions represented in it; they'd seen them all and concluded they were all basically the same.

*How did this **cynical jailor** come to Christ?*

- **Look at vs. 25:** "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."
- **Paul and Silas had been** tortured, their backs bloodied from being whipped, and put into an inner dungeon.
- Verse 24 says they were put into the stocks in the inner prisons.
 - *(When I say "stocks," don't think that contraption like you and your sister got your picture taken in on that field trip to Williamsburg; these were ...)*
 - This was cruel and painful treatment.
- **And yet vs. 25 says, after all that, Paul and Silas lay there in those stocks, singing.**
- **And** the other prisoners and the jailor sat there listening, wondering: **How can they have such joy?**
- And then, **while they were singing, God sent an earthquake that knocked their chains off and knocked open the prison doors ...**
 - *(I love how an old AA preacher named Tony Evans explained this ... He said, "Paul and Silas are there in that inner dungeon, just singing, and God was listening, and God started swaying, and God started tapping his foot along with the tune. Well, you know, the Bible says that Heaven is God's throne and earth is his footstool, and so when God started tapping his foot, it shook the earth, and the walls of the prison fell down.)*
 - **That may not be exactly how it happened, but whatever it was, the earthquake set them free.**
- **Vs. 27** tells us that when the jailor saw this, he planned to take his life.
 - **You see, in those days** any prison guard who lost his prisoners had to pay with his life; it was public humiliation for him and his family, so he's just going to end it ...
- But **vs. 28** says that when Paul saw what he was about to do, he went back in and ... "Paul cried with a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.'"
- **So get this picture:** Here stands Paul, who has been wrongfully imprisoned and tortured, and on his right hand is freedom—God-provided freedom. And on his left this jailor, who had probably been the one to beat him the night before.
- **And Paul turns his back on his freedom to go back in for the jailor.**
- *It WAS AN ACT OF INCREDIBLE, RADICAL GENEROSITY.*
- **Vs 29:** "And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas ... and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'"
 - The jailor seems to be more shaken by Paul's and Silas' joy and radical generosity than he had been by the earthquake!

OK, so we have three different people in three very different sets of circumstances, all of whom respond to Jesus and become a part of that first church in Europe.

- **Listen: The gospel has a way of uniting humanity** in a way nothing else can, because it teaches us that **at our core**, all of us have **the same** problem: sin. And only one hope of escape: Jesus' death and resurrection.
 - **Regardless of your background**, the source of all your brokenness, pain, and confusion is being separated from God.
- **By the way, something beautiful I'll point out here:** The **Siddur**, which was the official Jewish prayer book for Jewish men, records a prayer in it where every morning, Jewish men would thank God that they were not "a woman, a slave, or a Gentile." Get your mind around this: The first three people saved in Philippi are a woman, a slave, and a Gentile. The first church service in Philippi would have included a woman, a slave, a Gentile, and a Jewish rabbi!
- **At the end of the day, we're not Republicans or Democrats; Black or white or Hispanic; educated or blue collar; rich or poor; young or old; religious or irreligious; we're all just sinners in need of a Savior.**

You see, even though these were three very different people in three very different sets of circumstances, Paul preached the exact same message to them: **RESURRECTION**.

- **Acts 17:18 summarizes Paul's preaching this way:** "Paul came preaching the resurrection."

Because you see, in the Resurrection was the answer to all three of their problems. **Let me show you:**

A. To the seeker, the Resurrection offers confidence and completion

- **Maybe you're a Lydia**, and spiritual things interest you, but like her, you often find yourself wondering: How do I know what **is really true**?
 - Maybe you've thought to yourself: "Maybe the only reason I'm considering Christianity is that I was born into a Christian family." And you think, "If I'd been born into a Muslim country, I'd probably be Muslim, and if I was born into an atheist home, I'd probably be an atheist." Just because your parents believe something, that doesn't make it true. Right?
- **What gives you confidence in what you believe?** Is it simply that there's enough smart people who agree with you that that makes you feel confident?
 - *Your professors seem like they know what they're talking about.* They seem smart.
 - **I remember one of the most disorienting things** that happened to me in college ... I was a **pre-Law major**—and in one of my classes we had to read a lot of Supreme Court cases. I'd read some justice arguing his verdict on the case and think, "That's it. Case closed. The logic is perfect. How could you even begin to disagree with that?" And then I turned the page and another Justice would lay out the exact opposite case and I'd think, "Well, that sounds perfect ... and he came to the exact opposite conclusion as the previous guy."
 - **The lesson I learned:** Smart people can make anything sound convincing.

- Maybe that's you with your professors or the pundits on TV. They sound convincing.

So how do you know what is true?

- For Paul and the apostles, there was one answer: *the Resurrection ...*
- The Resurrection gave them certainty even when there were questions they didn't know how to answer. There's a story in Acts 4 where a lot of the smartest people in Jerusalem called Peter to come and stand before them and answer all these questions about Jesus, saying, "There's no way that Jesus can be the Messiah, because what about this and this and this ..."
- And eventually, Peter was like, Listen, I don't know what to tell you. But see, here's the thing:
 - This guy, Jesus, whom we followed for 3 years ... we saw him killed. I mean, we saw it with our own eyes.
 - We saw a Roman soldier pierce his heart with a spear.
 - And then they put him into a tomb with a big rock on the front, and a whole garrison of Roman soldiers stood guard, and then ...
 - 3 days later he pushed the rock aside and knocked all the Roman soldiers unconscious, and he walked out. And then he came and found us.
 - And then he talked with me like I'm talking with you.
 - (And at first I thought it was just a ghost, but then he ate a piece of fish in front of me ... and then hugged me ... and I knew it couldn't be a ghost ... and a lot of other people saw it too.)
 - So Peter says, listen, no offense to your degrees. I know I'm not smarter than you (when it comes to education, you guys have more degrees hanging on your wall than a thermometer, and I was the kid who took remedial recess.)
 - But here's the thing: If you've got a choice between believing a bunch of smart guys who got all their information from reading books and one who rose from the dead ... *I'm going with the guy who rose from the dead.*

Listen: The Resurrection is one of the most well attested to events in history.

- This is not the place for me to go into a full-scale defense of the Resurrection, but I'd invite you to **study it out**: It's the **only satisfying explanation for how a bunch of scared, blue-collar fishermen** from Galilee defied the Roman empire and started the largest religious movement in history.
- It's like the German scholar **Wolfgang Pannenberg** said: *"The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way that you live."*

Listen: Becoming a Christian does not take away all your questions—I still have a lot of my own—it just gives you a rock to hold onto in the midst of those unanswered questions.

- When I don't know the answer to a question, I hold onto the evidence of an empty tomb.

To seekers, the resurrection **offers CONFIDENCE. It also offers COMPLETION.**

- You see, like Lydia, maybe you know deep down that something is missing in your life.
- **All of your life has felt like a quest to find some missing piece.**
 - You thought you might find it in the sorority or in the frat parties or the job or the perfect body or the boyfriend or the marriage or the kids or the drugs—but you’ve spent **your whole life loving things that don’t love you back.**
 - **The Resurrection shows you that** what you’re looking for is found in eternal life, in the love of God.
 - That’s why the **early church father Augustine said**, “Our hearts will always be restless until they find their rest in you.”

So to the seeker, the Resurrection offers confidence and completion.

B. To the captive, the Resurrection offers freedom

- Paul’s message was **not just one of forgiveness**, but one of freedom.
- I said this a minute ago, but I know for some of you, you feel like there’s an obstacle between you and God.
 - Shame for past choices
 - Addictions
 - An inability to find happiness. It always seems to be just beyond you.
 - An inability to be the kind of father or husband or person you want to be
- Christianity is **not just a new worldview** or a **new set of morals, beliefs, and behaviors**. It’s the **power of an empty tomb**.
 - It’s not **turning over a new leaf**; it’s the **power of new life**.
- Let this **BOOK illustrate** your sin ...
 - **Salvation is not you reforming your behavior**; it’s the life of Christ himself coming into you and making all things new.
 - **This is all pictured, by the way, in BAPTISM**. In baptism, you are being put under the water, showing your sin was buried with Jesus, and then you are raised up out of the water, showing that you are raised in him and the power of his new life comes into you.

To the **SEEKER**, the resurrection offers confidence and completion;

To the **CAPTIVE**, the resurrection offers freedom.

Finally ...

C. To the cynical, the Resurrection offers hope

- There was **something about Paul's and Silas' unshakeable joy** in the midst of suffering, and their radical generosity in the midst of it, that got the cynical jailor's attention like nothing else could.
- **Several years ago, I was flipping through the TV channels one Saturday morning with my daughter** when I came across one of those televangelists who is always trying to get you to give him your money. And this guy was on a roll, and at first I was entertained. He informed us about some big ministry need he had—probably like a private jet or something ... SEED GIFT

I don't think Christians should make a habit of cussing, but if there were ever a time I felt like it was justified, it was this moment. First, just the greed of it all, but also that, the illogicality of it all. Why would your neighbors be amazed to see a smile on your face as you drove a new BMW? Wouldn't anyone smile in that circumstance?

NO: It's when everything in your life goes wrong and that smile stays on your face that the world pays attention.

- That's what got this jailor's attention!

You see, here's the thing: YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND A WAY TO EXPLAIN AWAY A MIRACLE. But deep in our hearts, we all know we're going to die one day, and we all want to know if there's a hope beyond this life, because deep inside we know we're created for something more.

Steve Jobs said, in the days leading up to his death, that he found himself thinking about God more and more, because it couldn't just all end by fading to black. **It was why, he said, he didn't like to put easy on-off switches on Apple products.** He just didn't like the idea of being able to flip a switch and everything just turns off.²

And that's where Christianity gives a **unique answer: There is One who faced death and overcame it, and** who says, "Those who live and believe in me will never [truly] die."

- There's a place in Medina, Saudi Arabia where you can visit the grave of **Mohammad**. (It's kept in a small room just off the side of the mosque that bears his name.)
- The **Buddha's remains** were scattered in sacred burial mounds across India and Nepal, mounds Buddhists still visit today.
- You can go to **Nauvoo, Illinois** and visit the grave of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism.
- If you travel to Rocken, Germany, there's an old church graveyard where you can visit the grave of **Friedrich Nietzsche**.
- You can go to **Alta Mesa Memorial Park in Palo Alto, California**, and visit the crypt that contains the body of Steve Jobs, who did more to advance technology than anyone in history.

² Walter Isaacson, Steve Jobs, Chapter 41: "Legacy," published 2011.

- **But there is no grave where you can find the body of Jesus**, and that's because he didn't stay in a grave; he resurrected, and that empty tomb is the only thing on which to build your life.

So hear me, friends: The message of Acts 16 is that the risen Jesus meets every kind of person in every kind of place—no matter where you've come from, the resurrected Jesus has something for you.

- **To the seeker like Lydia**—the one who has questions, who feels a restlessness even in her success—he offers confidence that what you've been searching for isn't an idea but a Person, a resurrected PERSON, and completion for your restless heart is only found in him.
- **To the captive like the slave girl**—the one who feels trapped by shame, addiction, or chains you can't seem to break—he offers freedom, not as a reward for finally getting it together and cleaning yourself up, but as a gift of his grace and power to break chains you cannot break yourself.
- **And to the cynic like the Philippian jailor**—the one hardened by life, skeptical because you think you've seen it all—he offers hope, a joy that sings in the midnight of suffering, a generosity that disarms even the coldest heart, and a resurrection that proves death itself doesn't get the last word.

*This is the gospel: one message for every kind of person in every kind of circumstance—confidence for the seeker; freedom for the captive; and hope for the cynic, **ALL in the resurrection of Jesus**. And, friend, if the resurrected Jesus can meet each of these people in Philippi, he can meet you right here, right now, today in the Dean Dome.*

The story of Acts 16 ends by showing us how the Roman jailor responded to the message about Jesus:

[29] And the jailor called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [31] And they said, Do? There's nothing you can do. Salvation is not something you do; but something Jesus has done for you. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

- I love that word "**belief**." In Greek, it's the word pistis, and it means more than just mental assent. It means "lean your weight on."
- Chair

The Christian gospel is this:

- God loved you so much that he came to earth to save you.
- He loves you as you are, and he died to pay the penalty for your sin, and he will fully and totally forgive you—you can't earn your way to heaven; you can't be good enough, go to church enough, it's a gift you have to receive. If you receive it, he will give you forgiveness.
- And even more than that, his Holy Spirit will enter you and infuse into you the power of new life.
- There has to come a point where you accept Christ for yourself. (SIT DOWN) Where you receive Christ on your own.

Here's what happened next: Vs. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family ...

- He got baptized, and he led his family to that too.

As I said at the beginning, **baptism is the public sign that you've made the decision to trust Christ.** And today, I'm offering you the chance to do that if you never have.

- **Some of you say: "Well, do I really have to do this? I don't want to get wet in front of a bunch of people."**
 - o Well, getting baptized is not what saves you. Receiving Christ as your own is what saves you. But if you really believe this, you should be willing to do what Jesus asks you.
 - o Jesus was stripped naked, publicly humiliated and died on a cross for you; you can get wet for him.
- **Others of you have other excuses popping into your head right now. You say:**
 - o **"Well, I rode with people and they won't want to wait."** Listen, if you drove a car today, raise your hand. **If you are unwilling to wait for whatever person who rode with you who wants to get baptized, leave it up ...**
 - o **"I don't want to walk up there by myself."** That's fine. Ask your friend to go with you. Shoot, bring your whole row with you. In fact, right now, look at the person next to you (everyone ... even if you don't know them) and say: *If you go, I'll go with you.* (See, now they're obligated to go with you; you don't have to go alone.)
 - o **You say: "I don't have the right clothes."**
 - o We have everything you could need: **shirts, shorts, bras, drawers, hair products, blow dryers ...** you name it, I promise we've got it. This ain't our first rodeo.
 - o And if you need more stuff than we have, then you're probably vain and too high maintenance, which is another reason why you need to be baptized.
 - o Here's a big one. You say, **"Well, I was baptized as a baby."**
 - o Like I said, Scripture always presents baptism as a confession of your faith.
 - o If you were baptized as a baby, that was your parents' faith. I'm inviting you to come and ratify their decision by being baptized of your own accord.
 - o You say, **"Well, I'm not ready to switch denominations ...** I'm not even sure what denomination The Summit Church is, but honestly, you make me nervous, J.D."
 - o Listen: I'm not asking you to switch denominations. **You don't ever get baptized in the name of a denomination.** You are getting baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are not going to baptize you as a Baptist, or a Presbyterian, or as a Catholic, but as a follower of Jesus.
 - o **"I just don't want to do that here; I'm a Duke or NC State fan."** OK, honestly, that's between you and Jesus. But what greater act of defiance is there than to come right into Satan's territory here and declare your allegiance to Jesus?
 - o Also, if it makes you feel better, we're baptizing **outside**, so technically you're not doing it *in* the Dome. They'll be just outside to the left of the building.

Listen, even if you're unsure whether you are 100 percent ready or not when you walk forward today, what's going to happen is that you're going to talk with a counselor **who will help determine if you're ready.**

- Stepping out doesn't mean you have all your questions answered ... but it means you're ready to have the conversation ... and there are people ready to help you make that determination.
- **The question is simple:** *Would you say Jesus is your Lord and Savior and that you've repented of your sin?* Then you're ready.
- Now, I will say: For kids, we like to take a little bit longer to make sure they understand, so if kids come forward today, and we would invite that(!), that will start a conversation that will lead to being baptized, though it won't be today.

In just a moment, I'm gonna give you the opportunity to come forward—literally you're going to come forward, down onto the court here and go to my right, into this tunnel.

- **For those of you in the upper decks,** there are people out in the concourses wearing orange shirts and holding signs, who will point you the best way down here.
- **Down here, you will be immediately met by our baptism team,** and they will take you every step of the way from there.

This is not a great time to slip out early and beat the traffic: Through a series of misunderstandings, you might end up in the baptismal pool.

Now, there is one other invitation I want to give—those of you who just need prayer. Maybe when I was talking about the slave girl, you said, "That's me ... bondage. Addictions. Things I can't escape." You say, "I don't know, J.D., maybe it's even demonic. But I know I need prayer and deliverance. Come down here and ..."

For right now, I'm gonna ask everyone **to BOW THEIR HEADS...**

- Pray this prayer ... *amen*
- If you just prayed that prayer OR if you prayed it before but have never been baptized, **I'm gonna count to three** and we're all gonna stand together, and if you need to be baptized, you're gonna step out and come right down here to my right. In one motion, you stand and start to move your way to the closest aisle and make your way down here. We'll have ushers in the aisles to help guide you, OK?
- ***If someone starts moving in your aisle, make it easy for them.*** OK?

YOU READY? 1 ... 2 ...

