

but outside—wild terror! The streets, deserted five minutes ago, are now filled with frightened people. They stand trembling, for where can one run to? I notice one man runs, though—see how he runs! Can he have found a place of safety? Why, it is the jailer! His conscience, which has slept soundly through so many years, woke wide at the first tremor of the earthquake. A long line of unpardoned sins rose before his sight, and not the least one was the last one—the cruelty with which he had treated the prisoners committed to his care last night. It is to these prisoners he is running. He cries out for help to the men whom yesterday he bound, and receives an answer which guides him in the way to peace. This very night his soul enters into liberty, and he receives the baptismal token, confessing Christ. In an hour he has trodden the steps upward to light, from Satan's power into Christ's service.

Verse 22. The multitude rose up. A mob excited by prejudice observes neither law nor justice. (1) *Crowds never stop to reason or to judge impartially.* **The magistrates.** For the sake of a moment's popularity they submitted to the clamors of a riotous crowd. **Commanded to beat them.** According to the Roman usage the victim of the scourge was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs upon a wooden frame, and, lying upon his face, was beaten with rods to a degree that always covered his body with blood, and often resulted in speedy death.

23. Many stripes. By Jewish usage only thirty-nine stripes could be inflicted; but the merciless Roman law had no limit. **Into prison.** The worst jails in Christendom are, no doubt, far in advance, as respects comfort, of the best in ancient heathendom. They were foul, unventilated, pestilential places, where the manacles rusted on the prisoner's limbs, and where not a ray of light penetrated.

24. The stocks. A heavy beam into which the feet were fastened wide apart, compelling the victims to lie on their backs, all sore and wounded, on the hard dungeon floor.

25. At midnight. Paul and Silas were fettered in the stocks and unable to stand or to kneel, yet their hearts and their tongues were free. **Sang praises.** Perhaps the psalms of David, familiar to all Jews; perhaps some newer Christian song. **Prisoners heard.** These were not generally in separate cells, but in large rooms; perhaps some in the dungeon with the apostles. (2) *A prison may be made happier than a palace if Christ be there.* (3) *What men are is of more importance than where they are.*

26. There was a great earthquake. This was God's answer to their prayer, and was the divine sign that the prisoners were not unnoticed from on high. **Foundations . . . shaken.** (4) *God knows how to deliver his people from the power of their enemies.* **All the doors were opened.** Flung apart, perhaps off their hinges, by the shock. **Bands were loosed.** As the prisoners were chained to rings or staples in the wall, they were set free when the stones were loosened.

27. Keeper of the prison . . . would have

killed himself. Suicide was considered an honorable death in the ancient world. At this very city Brutus and Cassius killed themselves to avoid falling into the hands of Augustus. (5) *Christianity has educated the world to higher views of the value of human life.* **Supposing that the prisoners.** By the severe Roman law he would be required to receive the same punishment as his prisoners if they escaped while in his keeping.

28. Paul cried. That is, said in a loud tone. In the confusion, as everywhere, Paul was calm and self-possessed. **Do thyself no harm.** Perhaps some utterance of the jailer showed his purpose. (6) *This is the message of the Gospel to every one who harms himself, as every sinner does, by a life of wickedness.* **We are all here.** The prisoners may have been terrified by the earthquake.

29. Called for a light. Lights were needed to know the condition of the prison and bring it to order. **Sprang in.** Into the cell where the prisoners were confined. **Came trembling.** Overwhelmed with the consciousness that there must be something supernatural in the event, and that it was connected with the two men whom he had fettered. Thoughts move quickly in such exciting moments.

30. Brought them out. From the dungeon into the hall or vestibule. **What must I do to be saved?** As in the storm the sailor feels the need of prayer, so in all great and sudden crises souls awake to spiritual realities and spiritual needs. Perhaps, too, Paul and Silas had spoken to the jailer about his salvation, as we know persecuted saints often did to their captors. It is clear that it was the salvation of his soul which he sought, not any temporal relief.

31. They said. Silas, as well as Paul, took part in the conversation, which was doubtless longer than the mere sentence given, though that sentence embodies its essence. **Believe.** The word means more than a mental process. It includes an act of the will, the complete surrender of self to Christ, with submission to his will and dependence on him for salvation. **The Lord Jesus Christ.** He had called them "lords" (translated "sirs"); they answer that there is one Lord. **Thou shalt be saved.** Taken out of sin and placed in a con-