

## WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT SALVATION

(Taken and adapted from 'The Red Bits – A Study Guide' by Michael Button)

We have seen that sin leads to devastating effects. Since all have sinned,<sup>1</sup> this would be bad news for all people had not Jesus come to bring *good* news (which is the meaning of the word *Gospel*). The good news is that sinners can be saved from sin and its consequences. Jesus taught how this salvation can be achieved, and He made the way of salvation possible.

Jesus said that He came "*To save that which was lost,*" and illustrated God's concern for a lost sinner with an example of a shepherd saving a lost sheep (*read* Matt 18:11-14).

By piecing together things that Jesus taught in a variety of contexts, we can see what is involved in salvation:

**1. Conviction** (*read* John 16:8). This is a work of the Holy Spirit in a sinner's heart. Without it, a sinner will not feel the need of repentance and may be content to remain in his or her sin.

**2. Confession** (*read* Luke 18:11-13). In reality, both the Pharisee and the tax collector were sinners. However, only the tax collector went home justified (declared righteous), because only he recognised and admitted his sin. John states specifically that confession is a prerequisite to forgiveness (*read* 1 John 1:9). Confession is the sinner's acknowledgement (public or otherwise) that he or she is guilty of the sin of which they are convicted.

**3. Repentance** (*read* Mark 1:15). Repentance means a change of mind, leading to a change of direction. If we are to be saved from our sin, we must make a conscious decision to leave our sin behind. Otherwise, we shall be like a drowning man who, when the rescue helicopter arrives, refuses to be airlifted because he wants to enjoy the swim!

**4. Faith** (*read* John 3:16). (Note: to *believe* means 'having faith'). We shall be studying the subject of faith later. As regards salvation, faith is believing the Gospel sufficiently to trust oneself to it: believing that what Jesus said about salvation is true, that His death is the means by which our sins will not be held against us, and that He will keep us safe for eternal life. Faith goes hand-in-hand with repentance. Using the drowning man imagery again, the man shows faith when he trusts himself to the harness and winch-man to lift him from the water. Though faith is something we ourselves must exercise, the Holy Spirit helps us by implanting faith in the heart.<sup>2</sup>

Our trust must be in Jesus, in particular we must ...

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 3:23.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 12:9

**5. Trust in the blood of Jesus, poured out for the forgiveness of sins** (*read* Matt 26:28). Jesus spoke of the blood of a *New Covenant*. Formerly, Jews had to put their trust in animal sacrifices, in which the shedding of blood featured prominently. Their identification with the animal in its death (signified in the shedding of its blood) assured the faithful that a death had taken place which God would accept as a substitute for their life that was forfeited by sin – that thereby their sins would be forgiven and the penalty of death removed.

That was under the *Old Covenant*, given to Israel when they were under the leadership of Moses. The Old Covenant was a representation of the death of Jesus that was still to come. In itself it had no power to save people from their sins,<sup>3</sup> but it was a means by which the faithful could put their trust in something that had not yet come to pass, i.e. the death of Jesus under the *New Covenant*. His death, with the shedding of His blood on the Cross, *does* have power to save.

Jesus said these words when He instituted the Communion. Therefore, every time Christians participate in the Communion Service, we follow in the tradition of the laws of the Covenant given to Moses, and indeed from the earliest times of mankind, since blood sacrifices were made by Abel, the son of Adam and Eve.<sup>4</sup>

**6. Being born again** (*read* John 3:3-7). These words were spoken to a rather puzzled rabbi who seemed to be a genuine seeker after truth but who struggled to grasp the concept that Jesus was teaching. There are two ways of looking at this, but both are true:

- (i) The change of life that is required by a sinner who has repented and is now following God's way instead of his or her own, is so radical that it is as if the former sinner were a new person.
- (ii) The Holy Spirit creates new life in the soul of the Believer. This is spiritual life, that will never end. The Bible calls this *Eternal Life*.<sup>5</sup>

The former definition is an inadequate description of what it means to be *born again*, but it shows what ought to be the outcome of the new birth in terms of the change of life to be manifested in the person *born of the Spirit*.

The theological term for *born again* is 'regeneration.'

**7. Being converted** (*read* Matt 18:3). *Converted* is a term that covers the whole of what we have seen so far – the change from a carnal person (a sinner following his or her own way and bound for death) to a spiritual person following God's way and bound for life. It is sometimes used in conjunction with the word *repent*, as in "*repent and be converted*." Here, it stresses the actual act of turning towards God, whilst *repent* stresses the change of mind which leads to the act.

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<sup>3</sup> Heb 10:4.

<sup>4</sup> Gen 4:4 and Matt 23:35.

<sup>5</sup> See Section A.

**8. Baptised** (*read* Mark 16:16). This is not a *condition* of salvation (or else Jesus could not have promised a place in His Kingdom to the dying thief on the cross, who had no opportunity to be baptised before he died) but it is an act of obedience by which a converted person makes a public declaration of his or her faith and conversion. Jesus did not say to anyone directly, "You must be baptised," but He did indicate it was the right thing to do, and He commanded His disciples to baptise converts (*read* Matt 3:13-15 and Matt 28:19).

**9. Freedom** (*read* John 8:34-36). We saw earlier that sin brings the sinner into bondage. Jesus *proclaim(ed) liberty to the captives*, as Isaiah had prophesied. When our sins have been forgiven through the death of Jesus, we are released from that bondage.

**10. Justified**. We saw earlier how the Tax Collector who confessed his sin went home *justified*.<sup>6</sup> It refers to the state of being declared righteous by God (a declaration based on a person's standing with Jesus as saviour of their sins, rather than by one's actual state, for the Bible tells us that no one is righteous by his or her own merit<sup>7</sup>).

The doctrine of *Justification by Faith* is the understanding that God's declaration of the repentant sinner as 'righteous' is based on the righteousness of Jesus, received by faith in Him as the sinless Saviour. Sinners benefit from the merits of Jesus, who was *without sin*,<sup>8</sup> as God regards us as if we were the ones who did not sin.

*Justified* and *righteous*<sup>9</sup> both come from the same Greek word.

**11. The need to maintain faithfulness to the end** (*read* Matt 10:22). Though the initial act of conversion through repentance and faith is a one-off occurrence that brings new life and does not need to be repeated, there is a need to remain faithful to Jesus. It is possible to deliberately turn ones back on Jesus, spurning the salvation He offers and choosing the old carnal life of sin. It has been pointed out that the Bible sometimes speaks of the Christian's present state as *being saved* rather than *saved*,<sup>10</sup> indicating that salvation is an ongoing process. As such it can be terminated without being brought to completion. However, to turn back in that way must be an act of the will and one can be sure that the Good Shepherd will do all He can to bring such a defector back into the fold.

**12. We are safe with Him once we are being saved** (*read* John 10:29). Though we can take ourselves out of His hand by an act of the will (for God never takes away our freewill), no one else can remove us from His hand by an act of *their* will, be they human or spiritual forces. This is our eternal security, which gives us confidence we shall live forever in His Kingdom.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:14

<sup>7</sup> Rom 3:10.

<sup>8</sup> Heb 4:15.

<sup>9</sup> Section C.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. 1 Cor 1:18.

Activity 1: Which of points 1 to 12 above are acts of the will on our part, which are on the part of Jesus (or God) and which are on the part of the Holy Spirit? (*Note*: There may be more than one in some cases.)

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|-----------|------------|
| (1) _____ | (7) _____  |
| (2) _____ | (8) _____  |
| (3) _____ | (9) _____  |
| (4) _____ | (10) _____ |
| (5) _____ | (11) _____ |
| (6) _____ | (12) _____ |

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Salvation from our sin does not mean we can continue in the sins of the past. Being made right with God we should seek to live righteously. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything in which you are not right with God. Whatever He reveals, repent of it and seek, with His help, to put it right.

Activity 2: Read the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in Luke 15:11-24. This is an unusual parable in that there are several points of comparison with the spiritual truths it illustrates, rather than just a single point. In discussion, or on your own if you are working alone, can you spot the parts of the parable that represent various aspects of salvation, as listed in E.1-12 above? If you are in a group and **you feel able to share your own experience of any of these points, please do so**, but do not feel under pressure to speak about things that are personal between you and God.