

Lesson 7: God's Plan of Salvation Confirmed

- I. In the last lesson, we searched the teachings of Jesus to discover what He said we must do to be saved from our sins and restored to fellowship with our Heavenly Father
 - A. That study uncovered four things that Jesus said were necessary for salvation
 1. The first step is to believe in Jesus as the Son of God whose death, burial and resurrection secured our salvation
 - a. Only deity in human form is able to live a perfect sinless life
 - b. It is that perfection that allowed Jesus to sacrifice Himself on our behalf taking the consequence for our sins to satisfy the justice of a Holy God
 - c. By paying our debt, He was able to create a path for our redemption, giving us an option for a solution to the problem of sin
 2. As a second condition for salvation, we must repent of our sinful lifestyle
 - a. The idea of repentance is to turn away from sinning by changing our heart to follow after the Holiness of God
 - b. It encompasses sorrow, regret and a desire not just to remove the sin separating us from God but to try our best to avoid sinning again
 3. Thirdly, Jesus said we must be willing to confess His name before men.
 - a. This is where we own up to our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, our Savior
 - b. It is an acknowledgement that we want to be a disciple of Jesus and offer this as an explanation for our change in heart and lifestyle
 4. The last thing Jesus mentioned is the need for baptism
 - a. From the Greek word in the early manuscripts, we know this to be an immersion in water authorized by Jesus Himself
 - b. Believers who had repented and confessed were baptized in the name of Jesus as the last condition necessary for salvation
 - c. A further explanation of the significance of baptism will be offered in Lesson 9
 - B. Jesus also specified these same criteria in His parting words during the Great Commission as He issued commands to His Apostles telling them how to implement the Plan of Salvation
 1. That consistency of message gives us confidence that we have correctly identified the steps involved in God's plan of salvation for humankind.
 2. In this Lesson, we shall investigate the teachings and actions of the Apostles and other inspired preachers as they followed the commands of Jesus
 3. This will serve as a final check proving we have accurately determined what we must do to claim Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins.
- II. The book of Acts contains the early history of the Church and with it a summary of what took place when people were saved by obeying the commands of Jesus.
 - A. The record of the Apostles' ministry begins in Acts chapter 2 where the Apostles received miraculous power as the Holy Spirit came upon them during the gathering of the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost
 1. This was the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to them to send a Helper who would teach them all things, guide them into all truth and bring to remembrance all

- that Jesus had taught them (John 14:16, 26; John 16:13)
- a. The Apostles had been instructed to go to Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49)
 - b. That power was to equip them for the task of being witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1:8)
2. On this occasion, the Apostles first preached the Gospel Message (i.e., good news) bringing salvation to the Jews.
- a. That preaching was to Jews assembled from many nations as the Apostles were able to recount the mighty deeds of God in the different languages of the people through the power bestowed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:5-11)
 - b. Peter explained this miraculous event as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32
3. Peter went on to describe how Jesus, even though affirmed by many signs and wonders from God, had been put to death on the cross by them, according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God
- a. Even so, God raised Him from the dead proving His power over death
 - b. And then exalted Him to the right hand of God (Acts 2:22-24, 33)
5. When Peter concluded his remarks by telling them this same Jesus was the Lord and promised Messiah, the Anointed One of Israel whom they had crucified, the people were "pierced to the heart" (Acts 2:37)
- a. At that point, they realized they had murdered God's chosen one
 - b. And were anguishing over what they had done
6. In a dire sense of panic, they cried out asking:
Brethren (i.e., countrymen, fellow Jews), "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)
- a. Foremost on their minds was determining how to obtain forgiveness and get right in the eyes of God
 - b. Specifically, they wanted to know what action and what steps they should take to restore their relationship with God
7. Peter responded by telling them what they were lacking and what they must do to obtain God's forgiveness (Acts 2:38)
- a. He said they must first repent - change their heart towards God's Son
 - b. The need for repentance prior to God's forgiveness of sins also was cited in another Gospel sermon recorded in Acts 3:19 where Peter said: "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"
 - c. Peter's second command was to ". . . be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38)
 - d. They were to be born of water and Spirit to gain entry into the Kingdom of God just as Jesus had told Nicodemus in John 3:3-5
 - e. Peter went on to assure them the Promise of salvation was not only for them, but also their children and all who are far off (Acts 2:39)
 - f. Those who accepted the word were baptized and about 3000 souls were added to the saved (Acts 2:41, 47)

8. This first account of the Apostles bringing salvation to the Jews contains all the previously mentioned conditions that Jesus said were necessary for salvation
 - a. The Jews believed in Jesus as evidenced by the fact they were pieced to the heart after being taught the Gospel message (Acts 2:37)
 - b. Peter specifically called for them to repent
 - c. And after doing so, they complied with Peter's command to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins
 - d. Although the text does not explicitly record their confession, it is implied in their submission to baptism in the name of Jesus
 - e. Hence, those who responded that day believed, repented, confessed and were baptized in the name of Jesus fulfilling all that Jesus required for salvation
9. The Promise of salvation and the steps to acquire it were henceforth to be made available to all humankind (Acts 2:39)
- B. In Acts 8:5-12, the evangelist Philip began proclaiming Jesus in the city of Samaria
 1. The multitudes were paying close attention to Philip's words because God was affirming the truth of the message by many miraculous signs and wonders (vs 6-7)
 2. Acts 8:12 says, "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike."
 3. A similar outcome is recorded for Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:9-13
 - a. He had astonished the people for a long time by performing magic arts
 - b. However, upon witnessing the indisputable miracles of God, Simon too believed and was baptized (vs 13)
 4. Here again, we see the affirmation that those who believe and are baptized shall be saved
 - a. Belief and baptism are recorded as the first and last steps in the path to salvation just as what was cited by Jesus in Mark 16:16
 - b. Although not explicitly mentioned in this brief summary verse, repentance is required by Jesus as the commitment of an honest heart and being baptized in the name of Jesus does involve confession
- C. Yet another salvation account is recorded in Acts 8:26-39, where Philip was sent to meet the Ethiopian Eunuch, a court official of the Queen of the Ethiopians, as he was returning home from Jerusalem
 1. While traveling in his chariot reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Philip approached asking him if he understood the things he was reading
 - a. Replying "how could I unless someone guides me", the Ethiopian invited Philip into his chariot to study with him
 - b. Beginning with Isaiah 53:7-8, Philip preached the good news of Jesus
 2. As they were traveling along the road, the Ethiopian spotted a body of water and immediately asked Philip: "what prevents me from being baptized?"
 - a. Philip responded by telling him: "If you believe with all your heart, you may"
 - b. To which the Ethiopian answered saying: "I believe that Jesus Christ is

- the Son of God" (Acts 8:37)
- c. After his confession, they both went down into the water, Philip immersed him and they came up out of the water to go on their way rejoicing
3. What is particularly interesting about this account is Isaiah 53 contains no reference to baptism.
- a. It prophetically speaks of Jesus bearing the sins of many and interceding on behalf of humankind but makes no mention of what is required for salvation
 - b. That teaching had to come directly from the evangelist Philip through the preaching of the Gospel message
 - c. Whatever Philip said must have tied salvation directly to baptism as immersion in water
 - 1) We know this because when the Ethiopian saw a body of water large enough to do the job, he recognized the urgency of acting immediately
 - 2) Unwilling to wait until arriving back home, he stopped the chariot right then and there asking to be baptized
 - 3) He associated his urgent need for salvation directly with the act of being immersed in water
 - d. Also note that prior to baptizing the Ethiopian, Philip accepted his confession of belief in Jesus as the Son of God
 - e. His repentance is inferred from the request to be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins
 - f. All of this took place along a remote desert road in response to hearing the Gospel
- D. In Acts 9:1-18, we find Luke's account of Saul's conversion; this description is repeated in the words of Paul recorded in Acts 22:1-16
1. Armed with letters from the High Priest, Saul was traveling to Damascus to arrest and persecute Christians
 - a. While on his way, he and his associates encountered a bright light from heaven with the voice of Jesus asking Saul why he was persecuting Him
 - b. After identifying Himself, Jesus instructed Saul to go to Damascus where it will be told him what he must do (Acts 9:5-6)
 2. Being now blind, Saul had to be led into Damascus where he spent three days without sight, praying and fasting neither eating nor drinking (Acts 9:8-9, 11)
 3. In Godly sorrow based upon this newfound belief in Jesus, Saul had repented
 4. Under the Lord's direction, a disciple named Ananias was sent to heal Saul and prepare him to bear the name of Jesus before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel (Acts 9:10-16)
 5. When Ananias arrived, he found a devastated man who had come to the realization he had been persecuting the Son of God, and Saul was now absorbed in prayer and fasting
 6. After healing Saul, Ananias asked: "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." (Acts 22:16)
 - a. Saul responded immediately by being baptized and took food and was strengthened (Acts 9:18-19)

- b. From this time onward, Saul became known as the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:9) who went on to write many of the New Testament letters
- E. Cornelius and his household were the first Gentiles to receive the Gospel message
 - 1. What makes him so special is prior to this, Jews had no dealing with the Gentiles, and the ministry of Jesus initially was directed only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24; John 4:9)
 - 2. Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian Cohort who was a devout, God-fearing man, who gave generously to the Jews and prayed to God continually
 - a. Finding favor with God, Cornelius was told in a vision to send for the Apostle Peter (Acts 10:1-6)
 - b. On the next day, Peter fell into a trance seeing a vision of an object like a great sheet lowered to the ground containing animals unclean under the Jewish Law (Acts 10:9-16)
 - 1) The vision was accompanied by a voice saying: "Get up, Peter, kill and eat" (Acts 10:13)
 - 2) Knowing that Jews were forbidden to eat such animals under the Law of Moses, Peter initially rejected the idea
 - 3) But the voice proclaimed, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15)
 - 4) After repeating three times, the vision ceased, and the messengers of Cornelius showed up at the gate to take Peter back with them
 - 3. As Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit told him to accompany the messengers without any misgivings about going to the home of a Gentile
 - a. When Peter learned about the vision of Cornelius, telling him to send for Peter, the conclusion became obvious: ". . . I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." (Acts 10:34-35)
 - b. Peter then preached the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:36-43)
 - 1) While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon these Gentiles, and they began speaking in tongues (i.e, different languages) exalting God
 - 2) Upon witnessing the intervention of the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles as had happened to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, Peter realized that salvation was to be offered to all humankind, Jew and Gentile alike
 - 3) He then ordered the believers to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ
 - 4. This account is unusual because the Holy Spirit fell upon these believers in a miraculous way that empowered them to be able to speak in a different language without any prior instruction
 - a. This mimicked what took place with the Apostles speaking different languages on the day of Pentecost
 - b. Through this miracle, Peter was convinced that God wanted the Gentile believers to be baptized in the name of Jesus just as those Jews were at Pentecost
 - c. Later, Peter was challenged by the Jews living in Jerusalem for what he

had done in visiting and baptizing the household of Cornelius (Acts 11)

- 1) They took issue even with Peter going to the Gentiles and eating with them
 - 2) It was only because of the way the Holy Spirit had intervened that Peter was able to argue his case before them saying: "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:17)
 - 3) "When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'" (Acts 11:18)
 - 4) Notice here is an example where repentance was linked to the baptism and salvation of Cornelius and his family even though it was not explicitly mentioned in the text
 - 5) This is because repentance is required of a true believer prior to baptism, and baptism leads to "life" through the saving forgiveness of sins
- F. In Acts 16:13-15, we have a brief account describing the salvation of Lydia and her household
1. While searching for a place of prayer, Paul sat down with a group of women and began teaching
 2. Lydia was there with her household
 3. The text explicitly says as she was listening "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14)
 - a. It is worth noting that in opening Lydia's heart, she believed what Paul was teaching about Jesus
 - b. Based upon that belief she took some action because the text says she responded
 - c. Verse 15 tells us how she responded; it says she and her household were baptized.
 - d. Yet again we see a salvation process that begins with belief and ends in baptism
- G. The salvation of the Philippian jailer is discussed in Acts 16:25-34
1. After being arrested and chained in prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God while the other prisoners were listening
 2. Suddenly, there was an earthquake and all the jail doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened
 3. When the jailer awoke and saw all the doors were opened, he drew his sword to kill himself assuming the prisoners had escaped.
 4. Paul, however, cried out to stop him saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here" (Acts 16:28)
 5. After calling for lights, the jailer brought Paul and Silas out and asked them "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30)
 6. They responded saying, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)
 - a. Paul and Silas confirmed that belief in Jesus would lead to his salvation
 - b. The Bible then says "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with

- all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household." (Acts 16:32-33)
- c. In order to believe, the jailer and his family had to be taught
 - d. And as a direct result of that teaching, they were all baptized immediately
 - e. Once again we see belief leading to baptism and salvation
- H. Acts 18:7-11 contain a brief report on the conversion of Crispus and many of the Corinthians
- 1. Paul was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath trying to persuade Jews and Greeks
 - 2. After Silas and Timothy joined him, he devoted himself completely to the task of convincing the Jews that Jesus was the Christ
 - 3. When they resisted and blasphemed, he moved on to teach the Gentiles
 - 4. However, "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized." (Acts 18:8)
- I. Another interesting account is found in Acts 19:1-7
- 1. Here Paul encountered a group of disciples in Ephesus who had been baptized into John's baptism
 - a. Paul asked them : " . . 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' " (Acts 19:2)
 - b. By those remarks, it became clear to Paul that they were unfamiliar with the Gospel of Jesus and the events that occurred on the Day of Pentecost
 - c. He explained that John baptized with the baptism of repentance telling people to believe in Him who was to follow, namely Jesus
 - d. "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5)
 - 2. There are several observations worth making
 - a. First, Paul thought it was important for these disciples to fully understand the Gospel Message and the role of baptism for their salvation
 - b. From the context, it seems like these disciples had been baptized into John's baptism sometime after the Day of Pentecost
 - 1) The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel did not take place until that time
 - 2) Likewise, baptism in the name of Jesus was not preached until then
 - 3) Moreover, aside from two special circumstances, one involving the Apostles and another the first Gentile converts, the Holy Spirit was received by believers only after they had repented and been baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38)
 - 4) Now, well past that time, these disciples were unfamiliar with both baptism in the name of Jesus and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit
 - c. When Paul realized their instruction was incomplete, he taught them correctly
 - 1) Furthermore, since the Age of Christianity had begun, Paul was committed

to see that these disciples properly complied with God's Plan for their Salvation

- 2) Paul attached particular significance to them being baptized in the name of Jesus
- 3) From this passage, we learn salvation depends not just on fulfilling God's requirement to be immersed in water but on doing so with the right heart for the right reason

III. So what have we learned by examining the Biblical record of what the inspired Apostles and evangelists did to bring salvation to the Jews and Gentiles?

A. Nine different conversion accounts have been reviewed from the book of Acts.

B. Although we do not have a detailed record of everything that took place in each instance, we do have a complete representation of the steps involved in salvation

1. Taken on whole, we found the good news of Jesus being taught to people who believed, repented, confessed and were baptized by immersion in water.
2. Upon doing so, the text says sins were forgiven and washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16), people were saved (Acts 11:14) and rejoiced (Acts 8:8, 39; 16:34)
3. Note also each and every conversion account ended immediately in baptism
4. Nothing that was said or done contradicts the earlier teaching of Jesus or His instructions delivered to the Apostles in the Great Commission
5. In fact, these accounts from the book of Acts confirm the steps to salvation derived from the teachings of Jesus

C. In conclusion, we have learned that even though we have all missed the mark of being Holy as God commanded, it is still possible for us to be forgiven of our shortcomings by claiming the perfect sacrifice of Jesus as the payment for our sins

1. We can claim that gift:
 - a. First, by Believing in Jesus as the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins and was buried and resurrected from the dead
 - b. Second, by Repenting of our sinful lifestyle turning our heart to pursue God's righteousness,
 - c. Third, by Confessing our belief that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins
 - d. And Lastly, by being baptized in the name of Jesus by immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins
2. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." (Titus 2:11-14)

- IV. We are now in a position to re-examine the three different Paths to Salvation being taught by various Christian organizations in the world today
- A. You will recall, these can be summarized in the following ways
1. Method #1 is:
 - a. First you are Baptized - then you are Saved - and later you are Taught and from that Believe
 - b. In this approach, you are baptized and saved without knowing how or why
 2. Method #2 says you are:
 - a. First Taught - then Believe - after which you are Saved - and later Baptized
 - b. Here baptism has no role in salvation
 3. Method #3 contends you must:
 - a. First be Taught - then Believe - after which you are Baptized - and then Saved
 - b. In this case, baptism serves a definite role that is essential for salvation
- B. Our goal was to determine which method, if any, is consistent with the ordering in the steps to salvation just derived from the previous Bible studies which looked at three things:
1. What Jesus taught about salvation during His earthly ministry
 2. What Jesus commanded His Apostles to do in the Great Commission and
 3. What the inspired Apostles and evangelists did and taught to implement God's Plan of Salvation at the beginning of the Christian Age
 4. From all three Bible studies we have reached the same conclusion
 - a. The Good News of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God was Taught
 - b. Those who heard the Word Believed - Repented and Confessed their belief in Jesus as the Son of God
 - c. Then they were Baptized by immersion in water for the forgiveness of their sins
 - d. And in so doing were Saved - Redeemed - Restored to fellowship with God
- C. These studies clearly point to the ordering in Method #3 where we note that Belief leads to Repentance and Confession prior to Baptism
- D. Much of the disorder in the religious world arises from differences surrounding the nature of belief and baptism
1. The source of that confusion can be traced to two things:
 - a) What it means to believe?
 - b) And why we are baptized?
 2. Please join me next time for Lesson 8 as we study how the Bible defines a saving belief