

THE WAY OF SALVATION

"The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." (Acts 16:17)

Salvation! What a blessed word it is. What precious memories it stirs in Christians. What a challenge it presents to God's children everywhere to carry the "good tidings of great joy" to the uttermost parts of the earth. What hope it holds out to the unsaved throughout the world.

God's Word tells us that man was created holy or without sin. But man willfully yielded to the temptations of Satan, transgressed the law of God, and ran counter to the will of God. Thus he became a sinner, for the transgression of the law is sin. Every child is born with a tendency to sin. However, he is not accountable for his sins until he reaches the age of accountability. Sin, has caused a real and painful separation between God and man, is a source of grief to God, and frequently is a grief to man also.

The Bible plainly teaches that all have sinned. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is no man that sinneth not." There are vast differences between men such as culture and ignorance, riches and poverty, morality and immorality, respectability and reprobation, but there is this feature which is common to all -- the consciousness that there is a gap between that we are and what we ought to be. The best as well as the worst are aware of this gap. All have sinned. Your own hearts corroborate your experiences and observations have verified it.

Since all are menaced by that human failing which is called sin, and all are sinners, salvation is their greatest need.

In this service we shall think of the experience of salvation in the initial sense, meaning with reference to the beginning of the Christian life. While using the term in this sense, we need to remember that salvation in the complete sense of the term includes more than is involved in the initial experience of becoming a Christian. In its general sense, it includes all of the riches of fellowship with God in Christ that will ever grow out of that initial experience. But the term is used in the New Testament with reference to that initial experience, and it is perfectly legitimate to speak of one who has come into fellowship with God in Christ as one who has been saved, as Paul does in Ephesians 2:8, provided we remember that the term salvation is also used in a more general sense in the New Testament. Therefore, in speaking of salvation in the sense of this initial experience of the Christian life, we must not allow ourselves to fall into the habit of thinking that in this experience we have gotten all there is for us to get in salvation.

The act of salvation and the life which follows both involve action on God's part and on man's part. Which side should be presented first? What is the order of salvation? A certain cause is here at work, producing certain effects. In describing this work we may begin with the effects and trace them back to their

cause. In the strict sense, the more logical method would be to begin with the cause and conclude with the effects. But from the point of view of our experience of the grace of God, the way in which the knowledge arises in us, it is better to begin with the effects and trace them back to their cause. We might discuss the divine causality in saving us and regard man's experience in being saved and then see behind that experience the divine efficiency in producing it. Since we are not so apt to see the plan and power of God operative in our lives until we have experienced them, we shall begin with the effects and trace them back to their cause.

I. The Human Side Of Salvation.

Looked at from the point of view of the man who has the experience, there are certain factors, or steps, in the transaction.

1. A knowledge of gospel truth.

This is the first thing that is necessary. This knowledge can come through many avenues and in many forms. For most people who are reared in so-called Christian lands it does come in various ways. Under the best religious environment this knowledge comes as a part of the heritage of the child.

A knowledge of Christian truth is necessary before one can become a Christian. One is not a Christian by virtue of the fact that he belongs to a certain nationality, or family, or comes within a certain range of culture. Being a Christian is a personal matter in life can be. One cannot receive Christ as his Saviour if he does not know about Him. As Paul said, one cannot believe in one of whom he has not heard.

2. A consciousness of sin.

The realization of sin consists in knowing that one is a sinner in the sight of God. One of the most noticeable effects of hearing the gospel of Christ is that it brings to one a sense of sin.

By saying that a sense of sin is the effect of hearing the gospel, it is not meant that one who has not heard the gospel is wholly lacking in this respect. But before one is awakened by the gospel message this sense of sin is rather a sense of uneasiness, a sense of the "wrongness of life" as we stand by nature, rather than a definite sense of sin. But, when one hears the gospel message, this vague feeling of the "wrongness of life" becomes a definite sense of sin against God.

One function of the Holy Spirit in relation to men is to awaken this sense of sin in connection with the gospel message.

Sometimes this sense of sin may be a rather gradual development; soetimes it may come to one suddenly. In some cases it is like suddenly opening the doors and the window blinds and letting a flood of light into a darkened

room; sometimes it is gradual like the dawning of the morning in a forest. It is more likely to be a gradual in the case of a young person who has been reared under the influence of the gospel, when he does come under the preaching of the gospel. It sometimes occurs that one who has been under such influences all along may all at once have a keen sense of sin awakened in him. Of course, this "conviction of sin" does not take the same form in every person. The form and intensity of this sense of sin may be somewhat determined by personal temperament. An emotional temperament may manifest more intense feeling than a person of more quiet and unemotional temperament.

3. A repudiation of sin.

Repudiation of sin is necessary if one is to enter upon the Christian life. Christ came to save us from our sins. He cannot save us from our sins unless we are willing to turn them loose. Repeatedly the New Testament emphasizes the importance and necessity of repentance. Christ told the people that, unless they repented, they would perish. Peter at Pentecost and Paul on various occasions emphasized the necessity of repentance.

The word repentance is the translation of two Greek words in the New Testament. The word "metanoia" literally means a change of mind. But the change of mind expressed by this word is more than a mere intellectual change. It carries with it the idea of will. The word "metamelomai" expresses the emotional element in repentance. It means regret.

Genuine repentance has three elements. First, there is an intellectual element. When one repents, he undergoes a change of mind with reference to sin and to God. His thought of sin changes from approval to disapproval. His thought about God changes from indifference or hostility to reverence and love. Second, there is an emotional element in repentance. When there is a change of mind there inevitably follows a change of feeling about them. A penitent person genuinely regrets that he has sinned and displeased God. He is not only sorry for his sins, but he also has a real hatred for them. Third, there is a volitional element. A change of thought and feeling always results in a change of will and action. One who truly repents thinks differently, feels differently and acts differently with reference to sin and to God.

This change is internal rather than external. This proves that repentance must never be identified with what is often called reformation, or the discontinuance of vicious habits. One's life may be free of vicious habits, and hence may not need reformation, yet this would by no means signify that he did not need to repent. All need to repent.

Repentance carries with it two things. The first is that the love of sin shall die in one's heart. He will leave off his sins because he hates sin, when the love of sin dies within him. The second is that repentance means a repudiation of sin by the will. One cannot hate sin and have a contrite heart over it without renouncing it. Furthermore, this spirit or attitude

of penitence goes through the Christian life. It is not something that belongs to the beginning of it alone. If the spirit of penitence and humility is not in one's life, he is not a Christian.

4. A faith in Christ as Saviour.

Repentance and faith are inseparable. They are not two acts, but two aspects of one act. One does not repent and then believe in Christ. One cannot turn from sin without turning to Christ any more than he can turn his face from the north without turning it toward the south.

Faith is trust in Christ as Saviour and surrender to Him as Lord. One cannot trust Christ as Saviour without making a committal of one's self to Him as Lord of the life. The principle of obedience is at the heart of faith, an essential constituent of faith. Obedience is the inner spirit and the outward expression of faith. Faith is the soulful response of the whole being to Christ in loving self-surrender and trustful obedience.

5. A consciousness of salvation.

Salvation is a conscious transaction. It is a consciousness of acceptance with God. The sense of sin and condemnation is now displaced by a consciousness of sins forgiven and consequent peace with God. Before salvation and surrender to Christ there was a sense of turmoil, or what the psychologists call the divided self; but after trusting Him there is a rest and sense of unity within one's self. There is also a sense of relief from the burden of sin. There is joy in the soul, sometimes intense joy. It is wonderful to have the awareness of relief from sin and acceptance with God.

II. The Divine Side Of Salvation.

There are different phases of divine activity in saving man.

1. God loves man.

God's holiness in abhorring sin and His justice in punishing it do not restrain His love from going out to sinful man. God is the source of love and man is the recipient of it. God loves and man is loved with a love that passes comprehension. Because of sinful man's deep need and God's gracious love and pity, and on the basis of the mediation of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, the work of saving man from sin proceeds.

2. God calls man.

Since man cannot inherit, earn or purchase salvation, God uses the preaching of the gospel, the influence of the churches, the correct living of Christian people, and providential events to call man and invite him to accept salvation as a gift. Salvation is offered freely to all who hear the gospel, repent of their sins, and believe on Christ as Saviour.

3. God forgives man.

God forgives the sins of man, remits them, or puts them away. They do not stand any longer as a block to man's fellowship with God, after he has repented of his sin and believed on Christ. Man cannot be saved from sin until his sin is forgiven by a holy God. When sins are forgiven they are blotted out. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins" (Isaiah 44:22). When sins are forgiven they are not remembered any more. God has said, "I will put them behind my back and remember them against thee no more." This blessing alone is enough to cause every man to desire salvation.

4. God saves man.

It is clearly impossible for man to save himself. Salvation is by the grace of God, and comes from the Son of God. At every point in every case the Son of God is the Saviour of men, and there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby people can be saved.

5. God justified man.

Justification is a judicial act of God in which He declares the sinner, hitherto condemned on account of his sin, free from condemnation, and restores him to the divine favor. Justification takes place when the sinner trusts in Christ and His merits for salvation. It is instantaneous, ir-reversible and eternal.

6. God reconciles man unto Himself.

When a man is justified and reconciled to God, he is so completely restored to the favor of God that it is as though the man had never sinned. It is truly wonderful when one can come into the presence of God as though he had never sinned at all.

7. God makes man an heir.

When God adopts a man into His family, He makes him an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ Jesus. That man will share with Him all the riches and joys of heaven.

To those of you who have not been saved, it is a joyous privilege to say that full provision has been made for your complete salvation. If you will repent of your sins and trust Christ as your Saviour, you will be forgiven, saved and blessed. If you refuse to accept the pardon that is offered to you, you will remain lost throughout the endless ages, and there will be no one to blame but yourself.