

The  
Lord's  
Way  
of  
Salvation

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# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

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**Topics subject to change without notice**

## **FEB 7 - GOD AND SALVATION**

"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). But, by God's amazing grace man can be reconciled to God, the Father. This message is about what God has done to make it possible.

## **FEB 14 - MAN AND HIS SALVATION I**

If you were asked by a friend about how to be saved, what would you say? "Accept Christ?" "Answer the altar call?" "Repeat the sinner's prayer?" Do you suppose Christians in the New Testament were ever confronted with that question? What did they say? Would their answer be a suitable response for people who are asked the question today?

## **FEB 21 - MAN AND HIS SALVATION II**

Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9), but is there nothing man can or must do in response to the Lord's love and grace? Scores of Bible verses say "Except a man be born again. . .," "Except you believe. . .," "Except you repent. . ." and "Whosoever will. . ." Do these verses, or don't they, make salvation conditional? We shall see.

## **FEB 28 - SALVATION IN THE NAME OF CHRIST**

One of the favorite stories Jesus told was about a prodigal son in which He depicted the story of a Jewish youth who rebelliously demanded his rights and left his father's house. Later he came to himself or his senses and returned home. The message is for all of us that our Heavenly Father anxiously awaits our return from a life of sin. He will forgive and restore, if we will come home.

“GOD AND SALVATION”

1 Timothy 2:1-6

I heard the story the other day of the young man who had received his law degree, passed the bar exam, and had set up his law practice. In his very first case, in court he began his opening statement by saying, "Before God created the heaven and the earth..." And at that point he was abruptly interrupted. The judge banged his gavel and said, "Young man, we're pressed for time here today, could you at least skip over to this side of the flood to begin?" Well, perhaps he could in his case, but to tell the whole story of man's salvation, we simply must go back to before God created the heaven and the earth. The Bible speaks of God's eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11). Paul also wrote in I Timothy 1:9 that God "saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity (KJ says, "before the world began). And in Titus 1:2 he spoke of that "hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

The first sentence of the Bible says "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." It's interesting that some scientists who were formerly atheistic, are now convinced of God's existence, not by the necessity of creative power particularly, but by the necessity of creative design. Granted the power, it could never have come into existence as it is, without an intelligent Designer/Creator. And from the Scriptures we noted a moment ago, there is also intelligent purpose in the universe.

Ultimately, it was God's eternal plan to create man for His companionship. He wanted family, offspring of His own image and likeness. So first, He created the heaven and earth, then He prepared planet earth for man's dwelling. When it was ready, He created man, male and female He created them, a little lower than Himself (Psalm 8), and put him here and gave him charge of it all. Genesis 3:8 indicates that in some way God came down and walked and talked with the man and the woman in the garden. I confess I don't understand all that verse means, but that is what it says. The idea is that there was a loving and peaceful relationship between the Creator and the created. Until, one day a great tragedy happened. Adam sinned; he disobeyed God. And for that disobedience, he and the woman were driven out of the garden and separated from God who is the source of all life --they died -- spiritually. Death is separation. In physical death, the spirit departs (is separated from the body) and in spiritual death, the sinner is separated from God. This is referred to as the "lost" state in the Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit says in Romans 5:12 that "just as through one man (that is Adam) sin entered into the world, and death through sin, (that's what we've been talking about) and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."

God knew when He created man, he would sin, but as we read awhile ago in I Timothy 2:4, He desired all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. So He pre-planned a way of reconciling man to Himself. That is salvation. God's plan which He had before the foundation of the world was to send His son, Jesus Christ to ransom lost man. What we read in the Bible from beginning to end is the revelation of that plan. He would send His Son whose name was Jesus who would give Himself a ransom for the world of lost sinners. And the Holy Spirit says in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Why do you suppose, even after we had sinned, God would send His Son to be born of a woman, to take human form, to live like a mere man, and to die a shameful death on a Roman cross to ransom sinful, lost people like us? It certainly was not because man had done anything to deserve or to merit such a sacrifice, or to have earned it. No, it was none of that. Man had sinned. God's offspring had rebelled against the Father. So, why a second chance? Why wouldn't --or why shouldn't --it fall upon us to desire and to initiate a way of reconciliation? Well, it was by grace, wasn't it? Our salvation, yours and mine, is an unearned, undeserved gift. That means that it's by grace and that's the only explanation for it. That's exactly what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:8-10. He is not arguing the case for salvation by grace alone. He's telling us just what he is saying in our text for today, that God desires, and despite man's sinful rebellion, has made salvation (reconciliation) possible.

John 3:16, probably the Bible verse familiar to more people than any other, sometimes called "the golden text" of the Bible says the same thing: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him (there is the human response) should not perish, but have everlasting life." Paul's statement in Romans 1:16 says the same thing: I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (human response); to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Oh, there are hundreds of such passages.

Our Scripture text says, "God, our Savior, desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony born at the proper time." "For there is one God..." Some people view such a thought as bigotry. But on this thought, Dr. Charles R. Erdman says, "The unity of the divine Being indicates that God stands in the same relation to all his creatures and that all mankind must be embraced alike in his mercy and his love." So, the truth of the matter is that "One God" is good news! Suppose God stood favorably toward some of His creatures and unfavorably toward others, so that they stood in need of another god?

It isn't surprising, since they both wrote by the Holy Spirit, that Peter agrees with Paul on this matter. In 2 Peter 3:9 he says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (there is the human response to His grace." Despite the fact that "God, our Savior, desires all men to be saved," not all men are saved. That is not being judgmental; it is a simple truth to which God wants all people to come. The difference between the saved and the unsaved is not with God, for we have just seen that God stands in the same relation to all His creatures and embraces all alike. Why then, will some be saved and reconciled to God while others will not? It must be obvious to any thinking person that there is a necessary response to God's love and mercy and grace, which some people will make and others won't.

The only conceivable way a person can read the Scriptures and arrive at the conclusion that man is saved only and solely by the grace of God, apart from any response on his own part, is to ignore, blot out, disregard all those hundreds of passages such as we've seen today, that say that God wills for all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth, and those passages that plainly state some men are lost. Either the one God does not hold the same relation to all men, meaning, that He has predestined some people to salvation and others to be lost, or the human will may and must be exercised in salvation.

In his 1991 book titled, The Grace Escape, Dr. Bailey E. Smith, former President of the Southern Baptist Convention says, "From creation to consummation, the Bible emphasizes the grace of God freely bestowed on the repentant and believing sinners. It should not surprise us, therefore, that some

try to use grace as an escape from human responsibility" (page 22). He says further, "To argue that God's grace precludes any human response is ludicrous" (page 23). Well, he's right about that, isn't he?

In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, the prophet discusses the problem of sin. The people were blaming their foreparents for the impending national captivity. They accused God of being an unjust judge. Ezekiel was sent by the Lord to tell them they were personally responsible and they could yet repent and be saved. He said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?...For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye" (Ezekiel 18:20-23, 32).

"Oh but, "someone says, that's Old Testament, and in the New Testament God is different; The New Testament God is a God of love and mercy and grace." No, no, my friend. In Malachi 3:6 God Himself said, "I am the Lord, I change not..." He is the great "I am that I am" (Exodus 3:14), which means simply that with God there is no past or future. With God there is no such thing as time.

In the society of the 90s so permeated with the liberal accent on "tolerance," and "nonjudgmentalism," it is difficult for many people to accept the importance of assuming responsibility for their personal lives. Therefore, when some of them come upon such Bible verses as John 3:3, John 8:24 and Luke 13:3 --and others --that say such things as, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he (meaning, Christ), ye shall die in your sins." And, "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," --in every instance the words of the Savior, they just can't handle them, so they just pass over them and go to the easy verses. Perhaps we, or someone we love has not done these excepts and unleses, and we simply refuse to face up to reality --the truth. But, we must, my friend, we must!

The sum of the things of which we've spoken today is that even before the world began, as God was planning creation, he knew man would sin and need a Savior. So, by His grace, He planned for it, and when the fullness of time was come, He provided it. What we read in the Bible from the first verse of Genesis to the very end of Revelation is the gradual unfolding of that plan of grace for our salvation. It was not because we earned it or deserved it. He didn't have to do it. He was under no obligation whatsoever to reach out to man in the person of Jesus, to save us. But He did.

However, His salvation is not unconditional. To receive salvation, each of us must first acknowledge we need it. We do not acknowledge our sin --and need of salvation --by blaming others for what we are and what we do. We cannot argue, as the Jews did in Ezekiel's case, that God is unjust and too demanding. It has been our purpose today to show clearly what our very gracious God has done for our salvation and why, and that there necessarily follows the need for a positive response on the part of the sinner. That response in no way earns or merits our salvation, but we do it to receive it. It is difficult for some of us to forget the old cliches and easy explanations of these things, but we must in order to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, as our text says.

## "MAN AND HIS SALVATION"

The theme of the Bible from beginning to end is "redemption," "salvation," man's "reconciliation" to God. While each of those terms and others such as "pardon" and "forgiveness of sins" are technically different, they add up to about the same idea. The Bible is the revelation of God's plan for redeeming fallen man. Oh, there is a lot of history in the Bible and poetry and prophecy, but all of it is important as it relates to God's plan to redeem mankind. The history of God's dealings with the nations is essentially related to redemption or salvation. The same is true with prophecy and poetry, and the letters of the New Testament. When man sinned in the Garden of Eden and was driven from the presence of God, God immediately set in motion the series of events which led to reclaiming him. It culminated in the gift of His Son on the cross as "a lamb without blemish," an offering for man's sin. It is sad that that plan has been lost in much of the preaching and teaching of modern churches. It is sad, but true, that in many churches whose steeples and altars are decorated with a cross, sin isn't mentioned any more. Why the cross if there is no sin? Is that being judgmental and censorious? I don't think so. It was the thrust of last week's message that God's grace is His response to man's sin. No sin, no grace. It is foolish to speak of grace and deny sin.

If a loved one --or a friend --were to ask you how to be saved, what would you say? Some people would tell him to "simply accept Jesus into your life, and He will save you." But, that is rather vague, wouldn't you say? Try to be a little more specific; what do you mean "accept Jesus into your life?" Do you mean just to "say it, I accept Jesus into my life?" It sounds simple and easy enough, but it leaves a lot of questions unanswered and a lot of problems unsolved. What about my past sinful lifestyle? If I am on alcohol or drugs, or in an illicit sexual relation, or am a kleptomaniac or a habitual liar or --oh well, any other sin, what do I do about that?

If asked by a friend how to be saved, others would likely say something like, "You need to come to the altar, confess your sins, and pray and we will all pray with you." A viewer wrote me recently and said she had been to the altar and wept and agonized for weeks, even months, and nothing had happened. She was still in sin and lost. And from the tone of her letter, I know she was suffering. No, now, she wasn't being critical, she was just wondering why she couldn't get any forgiveness or help from God. Billy Sunday popularized that way of salvation. He called it "The Sawdust Trail." (Because you see, he held his revivals under a tent with sawdust scattered on the ground.)

Well, it is altogether probable that if some others were asked by a friend how to be saved, they would say, "You repeat after me the sinner's prayer." Now these sinner's prayers are not all the same -- I think they're spontaneous, but they're all similar to the one that was mailed to me recently that went something like this: "O God, I come confessing that I am a sinner and believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for my sins on the cross and was raised for my justification. I now receive Him and confess Him as my personal Savior." And, that's it? You just repeat that --kind of like a parrot repeats words it's taught to say --phrase by phrase what another person has told you to say? Well, that's easy enough.

But, as much as I'd like not to be, I'm just a bit skeptical about all that --and other similar answers that we haven't the time to mention here. And, the reason I'm skeptical or unbelieving about it is because I don't read any of that in the Bible. I don't want to sound hypercritical or negative, but I just don't read anywhere in the Bible that an enquiring sinner was ever told to "just accept Jesus into your heart." or to "answer the altar call," or to "repeat the sinner's prayer." And it seems to me, since, as we learned awhile ago, the Bible is the story of the unfolding of God's eternal plan to save man, the

Lord's way for man to be saved certainly would be somewhere in it. Wouldn't you think so? Well, let's look into it and see.

The Old Testament books keep saying a Savior is coming. The first four books of the New Testament tell us the Savior has come. They tell of His miraculous conception and virgin birth, His sinless life, His death on the cross for our sins, His burial in Joseph's tomb and His resurrection. John tells us that the night before His death Jesus prayed the Father, saying, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). Salvation was procured. Now, it became necessary to let all world know about it!

Therefore, after His resurrection, by which He proved Himself to be both Lord and Christ (Rom. 1:4), and just prior to His ascension to the Father's right hand, He said to His chosen apostles, "All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Mark says the same thing; he phrases it a little differently, but he quotes Jesus as saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Luke phrases it still differently. Luke 24:44-51 says, "And he said unto them (the apostles), These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things," He said. "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. (That was the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and bring to their minds all He had taught them, just as He had promised them in John 14:26.) And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:44-51).

Those are the three accounts of what is commonly called "the great commission" of Christ to His apostles. The Old Testament says, "A Savior is coming." The four gospel narratives say, "A Savior has come." And now the good news of salvation must be preached to the whole world, to every nation, and every creature, beginning at Jerusalem! Say! that was a great commission for just eleven men, wasn't it? (One of the twelve, Judas, had betrayed Him and committed suicide and Matthias had not yet been chosen to replace him, so there were only eleven apostles at the time.) In Mark's account of it, he adds, "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."

When, on the authority of our Lord's command, they went forth preaching the good news everywhere, do you suppose they ever were asked the question we are asked today, "How To Be Saved?" What do you suppose they answered? Did they say, "Just receive Jesus into your heart?" Or, "You need to answer the "altar call?" Or did they say, "Repeat after me the sinner's prayer?" Did they? What did those inspired men tell people to do to be saved? I'm getting anxious about this. You see,

we're right down to the nuts and bolts of this matter now. Well, let's hurry along, and see if --and what-- the Scriptures say what they told people about how to be saved.

Well, it was as Mark said, "They went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." And the very first experience they had with this great commission is recorded for us in Acts the second chapter. It was on the first Pentecost Day of the Jews following the crucifixion of Jesus, and many of the people present were among those who just a few short days earlier had cried out concerning Jesus, "Let him be crucified! Let him be crucified!" (Matthew 27:22-23). Peter was the spokesman and he said, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up..." With that beginning he preached to them that they had sinned --they had crucified the Lord of Glory. And verse 37 says, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men an brethren, what shall we do?"

Aha, then they were asked that question, weren't they? There it is, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" What was Peter's answer? Did he say, "Just invite Jesus into your life?" Did he say, "You need to respond to the altar call, and pray and we will all pray for you?" Did he say, "Just repeat after me the sinner's prayer?" No! No! My friend, no he did not! What did he say? Do you suppose his answer would be fitting for our occasion today? Oh, let's hurry and see what he said. It's in verse 38: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]." You see, they were convicted of sin by Peter's sermon, and made to believe that Jesus whom they had crucified was Christ, the Savior, and now what? If they were saved by grace alone, there was nothing to tell them. If they were saved the moment they believed without doing anything else, there was nothing more to tell them. But such was not the case. Peter said (and this time I'll quote the NASV), "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." It doesn't make any difference what translation you use, the answer is the same: Repent and be baptized every one of you for or unto or in order to be saved or that your sins may be forgiven.

Well, our time is up for today. But, what more needs to be said? By the authority of the Holy Spirit, the way to be saved is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and repent and be baptized in His name. Oh, I hope if you haven't you will at once. Let us pray.

When my wife was living she insisted that we keep what little retirement funds we had in an FDIC insured savings account. Despite the fact that it could've been earning twice or even three times - or more somewhere else, she wanted to be absolutely sure of its security and protection. That's what we always did. We both felt confident about that. Something else looked rather tempting at times, but we never went for it.

Now I want to be even more sure with my soul. Others may come along with an "altar call" or a "sinner's prayer," or some other scheme, none of which is mentioned in the Bible, but as for me, I want mine to be the Lord's way of salvation, something I can read about in His word. And another thing: when people ask me to tell them how to be saved, I want to be absolutely, unquestionably sure about what I tell them. I will not tell people something I cannot find in the Bible. On judgment day I don't want anyone come running up to me and screaming, you told me wrong about how to be saved! Oh! What a terrible, terrible thing that would be! You may not believe what I've told you today; that's



entirely up to you, but my friend, I am comfortable with telling you what the Bible says, and I pray you will receive it and do it.

We're presented here by your friends in churches of Christ who would love dearly to have you worship with them in a congregation right here in this area. It's likely there's a congregation not too far from your home. If you need our help in locating one or knowing the time of their assemblies, please give us the opportunity to assist you. We're not trying to be amusing or entertaining; we're not striving to please everybody, only the Lord in what we teach and preach. What we learn from the audience rating companies, there's whole big bunch of you out there who are sincerely searching for the Lord's way of salvation, and life. That's why our program continues to grow and grow and grow. It's you.

"MAN AND HIS SALVATION, II"  
II Corinthians 5:14-21

Thank you, my friend, for joining in our Bible study today In Search of the Lord's Way. It's an honor and a pleasure to have you. Your mail and telephone calls are appreciated, too. We're not trying to amuse you with our wit or wisdom or to charm you with our eloquence; we're here to study the word of the Lord --to learn along with you the Lord's way to live, be saved, and be ready for life in the world to come. Some told us we'd never succeed if we weren't entertaining, but we're now in our nineteenth year and going stronger than ever. We've just recently added four broadcast stations in the Philippines. It's all done without hassling you for money in every broadcast, because we're supported by autonomous churches of Christ everywhere. Thank you again for joining us today and for your mail.

All this month we're studying the theme of salvation. We've talked about God and Salvation -- what God has done to make man's salvation possible through Christ, then man's response to that grace. We'll give today's message the title, "Man's Relationship To Christ In Salvation." All of these messages will be made available to you at the end of the month in this very attractive little book titled, "The Lord's Way of Salvation," which will be free to you --at the end of the month. It will be good for your personal study, or to give to an unsaved friend, and I can imagine some churches will want them in bulk to place in their literature racks for the use of the members.

In the passage we just read, the apostle Paul expressed his absolute devotion to Christ, "The love of God constrains (controls and compels) us (from within)," he said, "because, we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." The meaning is clear, if Christ died for all men, then all men were dead --in their trespasses and sins. As we've said before, death is separation. When a person dies (physically) the spirit is separated from the body (Ecc. 12:7). When man sins, he dies spiritually, meaning he is separated from God the Father, who is the source of life. And Christ died that all of us dead in sin, might live or be reconciled to God. Say! that's reason enough to be totally committed to the control of Christ, isn't it? Oh what love! --and grace! In Romans 5 Paul argues that while some people might dare to die for a good person, and some would die for a righteous one, it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. And so, --that love constrains or controls us from within.

Then our text advances to the idea that "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature (some versions have it "a new creation). In Christ we advance from death to a new creation. "Behold all things are become new," meaning there's not only a fresh start but a new lifestyle, too. The person who is saved, has become a Christian and the Christian lifestyle is different. This new way of living is of God, who has reconciled us to Himself in Christ, because God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Not only that, but these reconciled people are given a ministry; it is a ministry of reconciling or leading other people to Christ to be reconciled to God through Him. Then he adds, "We pray you (we beseech you, we implore you) in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God." That earnest plea for others to be reconciled to God says clearly that man is responsive or active in accepting the salvation procured by Christ's death on the cross. There simply is no other way of interpreting that verse. It is to be willfully blind to read it any other way.

What does a person do to be reconciled to God --or saved in Christ Jesus? Well, for a starter, it must be obvious that the unbeliever must believe. You probably remember we studied in the last lesson that in the great commission Jesus said to His apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). Jesus told the Jews of His day, "...if ye believe not that I am he (that

is, the Messiah or the Christ), ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). The case is no different today. That old familiar verse, John 3:16, says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And verse 36 of the same chapter says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son (NASV says, "does not obey the Son) shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." So, the unbeliever must become a believer in Christ as Savior and Lord.

You probably remember, too, that as we studied last week, in Luke's account of the great commission in Luke 24:46-47, Jesus was saying to His apostles, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Then, the believer must repent. Repentance is a change of the mind, or heart, which always and necessarily results in a change of behavior or lifestyle. No, repentance is not something God does for us; it's something we do ourselves. It is a command. The apostle Paul said on Mar's Hill that "God commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30), and commands always require an obedient response.

Jesus preached more about repentance than any other person in the New Testament. In fact, the Scripture says this was the theme of His preaching. After He had been baptized by John in the Jordan River and had been tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He returned to Galilee where He preached in the synagogues of the Jews saying, "Repent (change your minds, change your way of thinking): for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). It would be an interesting study to take a red or blue pencil and mark the passages in your Bible in which you find Jesus speaking about repentance. It is not an option. It is a command, "Repent," He said. And the reason He wanted "repentance and remission of sins" preached in all nations (Luke 24:46), is because, as we just said, He commands everyone to repent (Acts 17:30-31). It is not His will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9). He says, Except you repent (change your minds or hearts) you will perish (Luke 13:3, 5).

Now, the penitent believer will need to confess Jesus Christ openly and publicly. The Lord is not looking for "secret disciples." I heard recently of a lady who said she had become a Christian, but she didn't want her husband to find out about it. My friend, if he isn't able to see the difference, there might be reason for some doubt about the genuineness of it all. I remember baptizing a man several years ago; he's deceased now, who was a farmer. Some weeks after his conversion, he told me that even his dogs knew the day he became a Christian. I think I may have told you about him once before. He said before his conversion, when he went to the barn in early morning, his dogs would come wagging their tails, seeking a kind word and a little loving from him. Instead they got a scolding and were kicked half-way across the yard. But the morning after his baptism, he went out to greet his dogs with kindness and petted them and played with them. He continued that until the day of his death. I think he enjoyed being loving toward his dogs more than the dogs did. The person who genuinely becomes a Christian --a saved person --will have difficulty keeping it a secret.

Another thing: identification with Jesus Christ has been the cause of much persecution through the centuries. The Scripture says that during the time of our Lord's earthly ministry "...among the chief rulers (of the Jews) also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" or ostracized from the community (John 12:42). And in John 9 John tells how Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. Oh! How His critics pounced on that! They tried to get the man's parents to tell them who it was that had done it. But they refused; they simply said, "Go ask him; he's of age; he will speak for himself." But verse 22 says, "These words

spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." It wasn't politically correct to confess Christ even then, but "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

People who openly identify themselves with Jesus today, are often treated in much the same way. A day or two before the Senate impeachment trial began, I was watching a network television news program which reported that the thirteen presenters of the House's case against the President were all male, all white, all from the south and all were Christians. The inference was that there was no way Mr. Clinton could get a fair trial, especially since all those people were Christians. Of course, it would be understood by everyone that Christians are biased and bigoted and prejudiced people, therefore there were no hopes for a fair trial. It was not the politicians saying it, it was the media. This is coming to be more and more the American attitude toward believers in Christ.

One newspaper in Charleston, North Carolina, the Charleston Gazette, carried a front page story on October 7, 1998 written by a minister/lawyer saying that the Church of Christ of which Mr. Kenneth Starr is a member consists of people (and I quote) "whose median education level is definitely below the 12th grade." The article contained other blatantly insulting, untruthful and prejudicial statements against Christian people. People who must resort to glaring and wilful falsehood and fabrication to support their opinions, do not demonstrate superior knowledge or wisdom. My fellow Christians, the Lord's way is to "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

When Jesus sent His twelve apostles out on the limited commission, to the Jews only, He warned them, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved...Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:22, 32-33). Well, conditions haven't changed. I only mentioned two recent examples. But confess Him openly we must if we are going to be His disciples.

Belief in Jesus will give a person a new approach to all of life. Repentance will give him a new start in life. Confession of Jesus Christ before men will give him a new allegiance or devotion in life, but what of his past sins? Has he received forgiveness of his past?

Well, in the commission Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Jesus, who did you say would be saved? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Those are the words of Jesus. Have you, my friend? I pray if you have not, that you will lose no time in doing so. If we may assist you, please give us the blessing of the opportunity. Will you?

The apostle Paul's letter to the Romans is the greatest dissertation in existence on the marvelous grace of God. What a great and good God is He. Despite our sins, He loves us and wants us all to be saved. In the fifth chapter, verse 12, he says we are all dead in sin because we have all sinned. Beginning with the next verse he sets forth the argument that in spite of the magnitude and the multitude of our sins, God's grace reaches us unto salvation. In verses 20 and 21 he says, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

In chapter 6:14-18 he writes, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to

whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? Romans 6:17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

Please notice that they had obeyed a form of that doctrine that was delivered them, being then made free from sin. What was the doctrine that was delivered them? It was the gospel (the good news story of the death, burial and resurrection) of Christ. That's the gospel story (I Cor. 15:1-3). They obeyed a form of that doctrine at which time they were made free from sin. What was that form of the doctrine. It was mentioned in the same chapter (verses 3 and 4) which say, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." They could believe that doctrine, but they could not obey it. However, they could obey a form of it, and that is done in baptism; baptized into Christ's death; buried with him (baptism is a burial --immersion), and raised with Him in His resurrection. You see baptism is more than a mere church ritual; it is more than mere church tradition. It is living the experience of the cross, the tomb, and the resurrection with Jesus as we begin a new life with Him. You cannot circumvent or by-pass the cross of Jesus in becoming a Christian. We all need to repent and be baptized in His name for the forgiveness of sins as in Acts 2:38.

"SALVATION IN THE NAME OF CHRIST"

Luke 15:11-24

Jesus is recognized by believer and unbeliever alike as the Master Teacher. One reason is His masterful use of parables. Of all the parables He told, probably the one I read awhile ago, what we call "The Story of the Prodigal Son," is the most loved one. It's been said, one reason is that so many of us can see ourselves in it. That may very well be it.

Because Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience, He was talking about a Jewish family living under Moses' law. There were two sons; the younger of which, with a haughty, ungrateful, unloving and rebellious spirit, demanded his rights to the family inheritance. He had his rights and he wanted what was his. He was going to leave home to be free of family traditions and restraints, and to do his own thing. The loving old father gave it to him, and the young man went to live in riot and wantonness. Such a life always brings a person to poverty, and this young man found himself in destitute circumstances. Jobs were almost non-existent, so of all things, he was forced by hunger and want to go to work for a gentile to feed his hogs. In those days Jews had no dealing with gentiles or hogs. He was so hungry he would have even eaten the hog feed, and none of his worldly friends showed enough compassion even to give him a scrap of food. Jesus said "he came to himself." NASV has it that "he came to his senses," and resolved to go back home. He would not be proud and selfish this time. Humbled by the disgrace and indignities of his experiences, he began the long, difficult journey home. He wouldn't ask to be restored to the status of a son; it would be enough to be received just as a hired hand.

His father saw him coming at a distance. Jesus said it was, "while he was a great way off." He had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. He clothed him with the best robe in the house. He put sandals on his feet and the ring of sonship on his finger. He told the servants to kill the fatted calf so they could celebrate because, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Home again! All is forgiven! Sonship is restored! All is well.

I said Jesus was talking about a rebellious Jewish lad, but really He was talking about all of us. Our heavenly Father blesses and blesses and blesses us. But then, very arrogantly we think we know a better way of life than the Lord's way. His way is too restrictive --too many "thou shalt nots" for us. We're living in the 1990s, you know. Those old traditions and values we were taught from the Bible are no longer the "in thing you know." So we take His bountiful blessings and walk away from God. We go into a life of disobedience and sin and shame. There are lots of things we don't know about that kind of lifestyle when we make that choice. For example, we don't know that evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim. 3:13). We are unaware that we are getting worse and worse, until one day we find ourselves living in the filth of the moral and spiritual hog-pen, with eyes full of adultery, fornication of every conceivable kind, drugs, dishonesty, lying, deceit, and every form of disgraceful behavior --morally --spiritually bankrupt, actually. Then some of us come to ourselves or come to our senses and abandon that ungodly lifestyle and come home. That's Jesus story of the prodigal son. But, He is talking about repentance, too. In the verses immediately preceding that parable, He has told of the lost sheep that was found and the joy of it, and He says, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Then He told of the lady who lost a coin and the joy of finding it. And He said, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." That's what He's talking about as it applies to us. He's talking about our repentance;

our reconciliation with the Father; our forgiveness; our salvation. That's the message. Can you see yourself in it? At what point in the story do you see yourself? In the rebellious state or the returning state? I hope it's the latter. Our Heavenly Father is ready to receive us home and rejoice, when we are ready to come home. But, we left and we must come back. How to do it. That's what this entire series has been about.

Well, we learn from the prodigal son that we don't haughtily and proudly lay down our own terms or conditions on which we will return. We don't say, "Father, I'll come back home if you'll let me just repeat the sinner's prayer or respond to the altar call, but I won't repent and be baptized as you've said in Acts 2:38. No, we don't devise our own way of salvation. The prodigal Jesus talked about didn't say, "Now Dad, I'll come back, but you have to understand, there are some things, I won't do." Quite to the contrary, in the very humblest way he said, "I am no longer worthy to be called a son, just make me (or let me be) as one of your hired hands."

We could have called any number of thousands of people who have become Christians to come here today and relate their conversion experiences. All of them would have been interesting and thrilling, some of them more than others perhaps, and we would have rejoiced with them. But, I've chosen, instead to relate some of those recorded in the New Testament, so we can learn from them what it's all about.

The Scripture says that Jesus commanded the apostles to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned...And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Acts 2:15, 16, 20).

The book of Acts is the inspired account of their going forth and preaching every where. The second chapter tells of their beginning on the day of Pentecost. Peter preached to the people, many of whom were in the crowd who cried out to old Pilate about Jesus, "Let Him be crucified! Let Him be crucified!" And Peter told them that with wicked hands they had crucified and slain the Lord of Glory, whom God has raised up. Oh! they were cut to the heart and cried out, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost...And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Well, they kept preaching and the Lord kept working with them and verse forty-seven says that the Lord continued to add to the church (the saved) daily others that were being saved.

They kept on preaching Christ and Acts 4:1-4 tells us that despite imprisonment and persecution many who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. And Acts 5:14 says that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Verse 42 says, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." So that "the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (6:7). The seventh chapter is Stephen's powerful sermon, which he never got to finish because when the people heard about their having crucified Christ, "they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth" and stoned him to death."

The stoning of Stephen was led by a devout Jew named Saul who was of the city of Tarsus, of whom it is said in the eighth chapter that "he made havoc of the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the

apostles...Therefore they that were scattered abroad when every where preaching the word...Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ to them...And when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. And there was a deceiver of the people who had deceived the Samaritan for a long time who also heard the gospel and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Philip and told him to go down south to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. He did, and he came upon an Ethiopian, who was what we could call "Secretary of the Treasury" in Egyptian government. He had been all the way up to Jerusalem to worship according to the way of the Jews. He was riding along in his chariot reading his Bible --He was actually reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah when Philip found him. Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" "How can I," he asked, "unless some one should guide me." So Philip began at the same Scripture and preached Christ to him. And as they rode along they came upon some water and the nobleman asked him, "What hinders me to be baptized?" Peter said, "If you believe, you may." "Oh," he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." They stopped the chariot, and Philip and the nobleman both went down into the water, both of them, the Scripture says, and the man was baptized. The end of the story is that "He went on his way rejoicing."

The ninth chapter opens with the story of the conversion of that man Saul who was persecuting the church. He was enroute to Damascus, Syria to do just that when a great light shined upon him and a voice said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me." Saul was astounded and said, "Who are you?" It was Jesus and He identified Himself. Saul immediately, cried out, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" Jesus told him to go on into the city and it would be told him what to do. After three days, which Saul spent in prayer a disciple of the Lord came to him and told him to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 9, 22, 26). He was baptized immediately and promptly began preaching Jesus whom he had been persecuting. That's a great story and deserves more time than we can give it today. We'll take one entire program for it someday.

The tenth chapter tells of the conversion of the first Gentile to Christ. His name was Cornelius. He was a devout man; he and all his family feared God and were generous to the poor. Peter was the preacher and he commanded Cornelius to be baptized in water in the name of the Lord.

Well, that fellow Saul became the apostle Paul, the great preacher, evangelist, apostle to the Gentiles. It was on one of his great missionary journeys (Acts 16) that in the city of Philippi he came upon a woman by the name of Lydia who was worshiping with some other Jewish women by the riverside. He preached to them, and the Scripture says, Lydia attended to the things that were spoken by Paul and she was baptized. The sixteenth chapter also tells us of a Jailor in that same city to whom Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord, who believed and was baptized along with all his family after a midnight earthquake had shaken his prison. And what rejoicing there was on that occasion. On that same missionary journey Paul preached in Corinth and many of the Corinthians, hearing believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

And so the story goes --one after another of these prodigals, hearing, believed and were baptized --then rejoiced in salvation. How about you, my friend? Will you be the next prodigal to come home? I hope so. Let us pray.

I don't know how closely you followed me, but if you studied with me seriously, surely you noticed that in coming to God through Christ, in every instance in which the details are given, every one of these people believed and were baptized, for the remission or forgiveness of their sins (Acts



2:38) or to wash away sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). And in every case, just as it was in Jesus story, there was rejoicing.