

The Teachings of Jesus

How to Be Saved

Lesson #5 for August 2, 2014

Scriptures: Luke 5:27-32; 13:1-5; 14:25-27; Matthew 22:2-14; Zechariah 3:1-5; John 8:30-31.

1. This lesson starts with a very auspicious title! From the teachings of Jesus primarily, can we learn the steps necessary for salvation? When speaking to Nicodemus, one of the spiritual leaders of the Israelites, Jesus referred back to an experience the Israelites had near the end of their wanderings through the wilderness. After nearly 40 years of having all their needs met miraculously by God, they were still complaining about the food and the water! So, God decided to take away some of the protections and blessings He had provided and see how they would respond. He stopped protecting them from the deadly snakes that inhabited that area. (Deuteronomy 8:15) When many of them started to die from snake bites, Moses was instructed to produce a bronze snake and place it on a cross. Why did God ask him to do that? A bronze snake cannot do anything. How was that different from an idol? Some of the Israelites doubted the snake's ability to have any effect on their disease; so, they did not look at the snake, and they died. Those who went and looked in faith were healed. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets* 430.)
2. If we take a look with our mind's eye at our wonderful Savior's dying on the cross and understand what was happening there, could it give us eternal life? Would that be magic?
3. Read Psalms 14:3; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:10,23; 1 John 1:9-10. It should be painfully obvious that throughout Scripture we are told that we are all sinners; and thus, without a miraculous change, we are doomed to die. Satan hopes to so blind us spiritually that we cannot or even will not look to the cross. (John 9:40-41) Jesus responded by saying: "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people to repent, but outcasts." (Luke 5:31-32, *GNB*) The Pharisees were willfully blind because they believed that they were righteous and did not need any help. The tax collectors and sinners who went to Matthew's feast recognized their need and were helped.
4. How many Christians today really recognize their spiritual need? Do we just give lip service to the idea that we are sinners? Jesus had a hard time teaching even His disciples that the Pharisees' behavior could not earn eternal life for them. What about us?
5. For hundreds of years, the Christian church has taught the idea that in the judgment God will balance our good deeds against our bad deeds; and if the good deeds outweigh the bad deeds, we can be saved. Jesus categorically rejected that idea. We cannot earn salvation. He told us that only the Holy Spirit working in our minds and transforming us from unrepentant sinners into followers of Jesus—repentant disciples—can possibly bring eternal life. (John 16:7-11)
6. Unfortunately, in Revelation John described that the final church in history—the Laodicean church of our day—while thinking it is rich and well-off and has everything it needs, is actually "poor, naked, and blind." (Revelation 3:16-18) Could that really be true about us?
7. Only the Holy Spirit can produce a change in us that will bring salvation. Fortunately, God is a perfect Physician. The Holy Spirit has never lost a case of a person who honestly and sincerely asks for help. The lost will be lost because they do not think they need any help.
8. But, recognizing our need is not the only thing necessary. Biblical repentance includes three things: 1) We must first recognize our own sinfulness; then, 2) We must recognize the damaging effects of sin and be truly sorry for the sin itself and not just sorry about the results of the sin; and 3) We must really desire to stop sinning. One of the saddest stories in Scripture is the story of Judas who had every imaginable privilege and opportunity. Even after spending years with Jesus, he thought he knew what was good for himself and for Jesus better than God did. (Matthew 27:3-4) Later, he was sorry for the results but not sorry for his sin.
9. John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples all started their messages to the crowds with an appeal to repent. (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 3:19) What does it mean to repent? To repent is to change direction. If we refuse to give up our sins, the inevitable result will be death.

“Sin pays its wage—death.” (Romans 6:23; Luke 13:1-5) But, a clear understanding of God’s plan for our lives and a recognition of His goodness leads to repentance. (Romans 2:4)

We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 189.1. [Bold type is supplied.]

10. When sinners begin to recognize their true condition and turn around and ask for divine help for salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to their aid because Jesus says: “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” (Mark 9:23, *NKJV*).
11. Read Romans 14:23. That verse teaches us that it is a faith-relationship with God that brings us closer and closer to Him; sin takes us further and further away from Him. If we think something is wrong and we do it anyway, it damages us. Thus, it would be correct to say that sin and faith are opposites. Luke 8:12 tells us that the Devil understands this clearly and will do anything possible to prevent us from recognizing this truth. So, what is a faith relationship with God?

Faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it without reservation for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. That is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, God’s friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, “Why?”—Spoken many times by A. Graham Maxwell.

People who ask questions are seeking to understand.

12. Paul told the Philippian jailer that faith, in fact, is the only requirement for salvation. (See Acts 16:31.) Faith is a very personal relationship with Jesus which grows through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing until we come to understand Him and love Him. (John 6:69; 1:12; 17:3)
13. So, how does that actually work out in human experience? Having faith in Jesus means that when we are tempted: 1) We stop and think about what Jesus taught; (What if Eve had said, “Let me ask God first”?); and then, 2) We believe that what He said is really for our best good; and then, 3) We choose to do His will instead of our own. That is not easy for sinful, selfish human beings. But, we can do it. And God promises eternal life to those who do it. (John 6:40)
14. It is only the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that allows us to see what is wrong with sin and what is right with salvation/righteousness and how that relates to God’s judgment. (John 16:8) After wooing us from our sinful state, He awakens in us knowledge of our real spiritual status and then convicts us of sin. This may be one of the few times when guilt is a good thing—assuming it leads us to make changes.
15. Let us be very clear: Without repentance and turning from our sins, there is only death in our future. If we refuse to repent and give up our old sinful ways, redemption is impossible.
16. After spending a full year in Galilee healing, teaching, and preaching, Jesus culminated His activities there by feeding the 5000—and that was just counting the men! But, when they came seeking Him the next morning for more of His special food, He disappointed them by saying: “For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life. And I will raise them to life on the last day.” (John 6:40, *GNB*)
17. On another occasion, a sinful woman, Mary Magdalene, poured an expensive bottle of perfume on Jesus and kissed His feet, wiping them with her hair. Jesus said to her, “Your sins are

forgiven.” (Luke 7:48, *GNB*) And then He went on to say: “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:50, *GNB*)

18. But, does faith save us? No! It is Jesus who saves us. *Faith* is just a description of our relationship with Him which brings about that salvation.
19. Jesus healed a number of people with the words: “Your faith has made you well.” (Matthew 9:22; Mark 10:52; Luke 17:19, *NKJV*). We need to recognize two important things: 1) The word for *healing* in these verses also means to be *saved*. In other words, Jesus was saying, “Your faith has saved you.” But, 2) It is not our action of faith that accomplishes things; instead, it is God’s response to our faith. God is the One who does it.
20. It is important to notice that point because when we pray at the bedside of a seriously ill or even dying patient and that person does not suddenly become well, we must not conclude it is because of our lack of faith. We must always be humble enough to pray, asking for God’s will to be done. God may see things quite differently from what we do at the moment.
21. Read Matthew 5:20. Don’t you think the Jewish people in Jesus’s day were shocked when He said: “I tell you, then, that you will be able to enter the Kingdom of heaven only if you are more faithful than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees in doing what God requires”? (*GNB*) But, just like the Pharisees in Jesus’s day if we do “good works” to be seen of men, it will not produce the kind of change in us that is required for salvation.
22. In the plan of salvation, our ultimate goal should be to do what is right because it is right—not just because it is pleasing to God. In heaven, everyone will do what is right because it is right.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God. *Christ’s Object Lessons* 97.3-98.0 (1900).

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—*MS 20*, 1897 (*MR # 970*); *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 par. 11 - section in [. . .] omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120.4; *12MR* 236.1.

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us. *Desire of Ages* 668.3.

23. Jesus gave us an interesting parable in Matthew 22:2-14. When the people whom the king had invited to his feast refused to come, he sent his servants into the highways and byways to compel people to come. He provided for them wedding garments appropriate for the occasion. But, when he came to visit his guests, he discovered there was a man who did not have on the proper wedding garment. And what did he do? The man was thrown out. And what did that wedding garment represent? (See Isaiah 61:10; Zechariah 3:1-5.)

What is the robe that Christ offers? This robe “**is the righteousness of Christ,**
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His own unblemished character, that through faith is imparted to all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.”. . .

By His [Jesus’s] perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God’s commandments. **When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness.** Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah. (*Christ’s Object Lessons* 310-311.4.) [Content in brackets and bold type are supplied.]

24. Whatever “good” or “righteousness” that we can produce is nothing more than filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6)
25. The Holy Spirit gives us this gift—the righteousness of Christ—as daily we are being changed as we practice giving Him access to our minds and our thoughts. We are not asked to make the changes ourselves because we cannot. We give the Holy Spirit access to our thoughts, and moment by moment He guides and directs our ways if we allow Him to do so.
26. However, that calls for crucifixion on the part of our sinful selves. (Matthew 4:20-22; Mark 10:28; Luke 5:28; John 8:30-31; Luke 14:25-27) That is not easy for us. Please note that the phrase to *hate* in biblical language means *to love less*. Compare Matthew 10:37.
27. Has being a Christian cost you anything?

We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 26.
28. In every step of the process of transformation from being a selfish sinner to being a disciple of Christ, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are active. They help us to recognize our need, to recognize where our help comes from, and to actually make the changes necessary. See *Steps to Christ* pp. 26-27.
29. Some people are naturally self-deprecating. They have feelings of doubt, guilt, and worthlessness. Other people are just the opposite. They tend to think that they are the best people around. How does Christianity address the needs of these two groups?
30. Is it important to recognize why Jesus died? Did Jesus die to pay for our sins? Or, did His death teach us the consequences of sin? The righteousness which the Holy Spirit can bring to us may be free, but it is not cheap. Heaven risked everything to make it available to us. Are we willing to give up anything for Jesus? What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Him? In your own life, can you recognize the various steps that are being discussed in this lesson? Having claimed salvation and yet recognizing your own failures as Paul did in Romans 7, can you still rejoice?
31. How can we reach out to others who are total nonbelievers and convince them that carrying a cross is the right thing to do?
32. Why do you think Jesus used the example of a marriage festival to describe salvation? It is a little hard to see how carrying a cross has something to do with a marriage festival! But, the imagery of marriage is important to our understanding of Christianity. You cannot be partly married or half-married; you are either married or not married. What does that tell us about salvation? And where does the church of Laodicea generally fit on the spectrum?
33. The disciples of Jesus abandoned everything and followed Him. And in the end, they did it gladly. Most of them ended up martyrs. Are we prepared to follow Jesus in that same way?

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