



During my last two appearances in the pulpit, we've considered both mankind's biggest problem and the only possible solution to that problem. Only Jesus can possibly save us from our sins.

However, knowing the what doesn't tell us the how. I can know that a jack can help me to change a tire, but unless I know how to use the jack to change the tire, that doesn't help me much. Similarly, the knowledge that we can be saved through Jesus doesn't tell us how to lay hold of that salvation.

Sadly, the devil has sown a great deal of confusion on this subject. Some in the world believe things that aren't in the Bible at all, such as that you only have to be a good person. Others take part of what the Bible says about salvation and act like it's all you have to do.

If we want to help people like this, we have to know the whole counsel of God, and we have to declare the whole counsel of God. This evening, then, let's consider the Biblical pattern for salvation.

Assuming that a sinner recognizes his need for salvation, the process of being saved begins with BELIEF. To establish this point, there's no reason to turn anywhere other than John 3:16. We saw last week that Jesus is our Savior, but His salvation is only for those who believe in Him. Only they have the hope of eternal life.

However, many people are mistaken both about the meaning and the significance of belief. Let's start with the former. Lots of people think that faith is nothing more than acknowledging something as true, that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God in the same way that we believe that Paris is the capital of France.

Biblically, that's not accurate. The only time belief is used in this way in Scripture is in James 2, where it's talking about the demons' belief in God. That is not saving faith! Saving faith isn't mere mental assent to the existence of Jesus. It is trust in Him and loyalty to Him. Saving faith is inseparable from action.

This truth is a stumbling block for many. They turn to passages like Ephesians 2 and talk about being saved by faith, not by works. However, that's a misreading of the text. In Ephesians and Romans, when Paul is talking about salvation by works, he's talking about the works of the law of Moses. He's talking about salvation by perfect law-keeping. His point is not that we have to do nothing in order to be saved. It's that we can't earn our salvation.

In addition to belief, the Scriptures emphasize that REPENTANCE is a necessary part of our salvation. As Shawn and I observed during the evangelism class last quarter, repentance is generally one of the main problems that people have with becoming a Christian. Next week, I intend to preach a whole half-hour study sermon on repentance, so you can think of this as a quickie point for people who don't struggle with the truth.

For purposes of this study, though, consider 2 Corinthians 7:10. In this text, Paul distinguishes between two kinds of grief: worldly grief and godly grief. Worldly grief is grief at God's word that does not produce a change of heart. When the rich young ruler went away grievously, that was worldly grief. We see this kind of grief today with people who accept that they're in an unscriptural marriage but never separate.

Godly grief on the other hand, is grief that produces repentance, which is a sincere resolution to stop sinning and live righteously. Repentance itself is entirely mental. The Greek word here literally means "changing your mind".

Thus, somebody who repents of their sins doesn't have to eradicate all those sins before they are baptized. However, genuine repentance is always followed by action. If somebody's life doesn't bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, that's reason enough for us to call their original repentance into question.

CONFESSION is the next thing that we must do to lay hold of God's gift of salvation. Here, let's look at Romans 10:9-10. The first thing that we ought to notice here is that Paul didn't believe that salvation was the result of Just One Thing. He certainly affirms the necessity of faith for salvation, but he also says that you have to offer a confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. A little earlier in Romans, he talks about the

necessity of baptism. Anybody who takes one of those passages out of the context of everything Paul says about salvation is guilty of the worst kind of proof-texting. Rather than focusing on one thing a New-Testament writer says about salvation, we need to focus on everything he says.

Also, let's pay attention to what kind of a confession this is. Often, when we hear the word "confession" our mind turns to a confession of sin. Confessing our sins is certainly a Biblical concept, but when we find people in the New Testament doing that, it's people who already have been saved. That kind of confession is extremely important, but it's not part of the process of salvation.

Instead, the confession that does accompany salvation is what Peter describes as "the good confession". It is a statement claiming Jesus Christ as our Lord, as Jesus Himself confessed His Kingship before Pontius Pilate. There are many different confession formulas in Scripture. The exact wording doesn't matter. However, it is supposed to be a pledge of faith. If we confess Jesus before men, He will confess us before His Father in heaven.

The process of salvation concludes with BAPTISM. As with repentance, this is a subject that can require a half-hour study all its own, at least! I'll be preaching that sermon next week too because sometimes baptism is an issue with people. Sometimes, though, it isn't. I've seen people choose to be baptized after studying only one passage having to do with baptism. If that's the case, Acts 2:37-38 will serve as well as any.

This is another text that contains a subject we've already studied, in this case repentance. Also, it's contextually apparent that Peter's audience in this context already believes. That's why they're asking him what they can do to escape the wrath of God for crucifying Jesus. The only step that's missing is confession, but that shouldn't bother us. When we're telling a story to our friends, we don't cover every detail every time. Instead, we bring out only the details that are significant to the story.

Luke is doing the same thing. He's hitting the high points of what happened, not mechanically going through every little detail of every story of conversion. People who demand that every detail be in every story are expecting something that nobody actually does.

Second, notice that Peter is appealing to these Jews to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. This does not mean that they are being baptized because their sins already have been forgiven. If that's so, why are they crying out "What shall we do?" five seconds earlier?

These are people who know they are not forgiven, and Peter is telling them what they need to do in order to be forgiven. Only through baptism can they, and we, receive forgiveness of sins. If we believe in the Jesus of the gospel, and we want to

be saved according to the terms of the gospel, we must obey the gospel through baptism.

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