



THE SALVATION OF SAUL

(When Are We Saved?)

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The book of Acts is a treasure to Christianity. Within this inspired historical narrative, we find the answer to the most important question we will ever ask: "What must I do to be saved?" This question is answered clearly in this book, and we also read accounts of untold numbers of lost souls being saved by the grace of God. We must notice that every single person who obeyed the gospel in the New Testament record did it in the exact same way. They followed the same pattern step by step to come into contact with the blood of Christ, and we are going to look at one man's conversion story today, a man by the name of Saul, who we know better as the Apostle Paul. As we study today, I want to encourage each one to listen very carefully and consider whether or not you've followed the same pattern as the first century Christians did to be saved. And if you're watching and you know you're lost, please open your mind and consider the words of life.

Acts 9:3-6 "As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia as a Jew and a Roman citizen. He was raised in the city of Jerusalem and received the very best education in the Law at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most highly respected Pharisees and teachers of his time. You might remember Gamaliel as a rare voice of reason when the Apostles were on trial in Acts 5. This is where Paul developed such a strong zeal for the Law of Moses, for his Jewish heritage, and for the traditions of the Jewish people. He loved the temple, and he loved the culture. He was devoted to his convictions, and he made no compromises on what he understood the truth to be. As the Apostles began preaching the gospel, it spread like wildfire

throughout Jerusalem, and Paul was furious. Thousands of his brethren were becoming Christians and leaving the religious system that he loved so deeply. He joined the fight against Christianity, being one of its most ruthless persecutors. Paul himself explained that he persecuted Christians to their death. He bound and delivered both men and women into prisons so they could be punished for their rebellion. When Stephen was stoned to death in Acts 7 for preaching Jesus, Paul consented to his death. Those who stoned him laid their outer garments at Paul's feet as he looked on with joy that one more man, whom he considered to be speaking blasphemies, was silenced. Paul intended to wipe Christianity off the face of the earth. There's nothing that Paul hated more than a Christian. His persecution scattered Christ's followers beyond the city of Jerusalem, so Paul decided to chase them down. He went to the high priest and got permission to go to the synagogues of Damascus and arrest any Christians he could find and bring them back to Jerusalem, to be imprisoned or killed, no doubt. Paul was completely blinded by his zeal. Paul thought he was doing the right thing. He thought he was doing what God wanted him to do, but Paul thought wrong. Paul was the chief of sinners.

As Paul was traveling to Damascus, he had a team of men assisting him, and they were heading for Damascus with blood in their eyes. However, everything came to a screeching halt when a bright light knocked Paul off his feet and blinded him. He heard a voice that changed his life in an instant. "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" Paul said, "Who are you, Lord?" and Jesus said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." A man once blinded by zeal was now blinded by the glory of God. Jesus told him it was hard for him to kick against the goads. He says this to express how much he is hurting himself by resisting the truth of the gospel message that the Apostles are preaching. An ox goad was similar to a cattle prod. Sometimes a cow will get stubborn and refuse to go in a trailer or go through a shoot to be worked, and those cattle just continue to get hit by that cattle prod over and over again. The longer they stand there and disobey, the more pain they bring to themselves. If they would just move after the first hit, they could avoid more discipline. That's what Paul was doing. The more he resisted the truth, the more he hurt himself. In just a few moments, Paul has gone from proud persecutor to being humbled, blinded, and scared to death.

Why is Paul scared? Not because he is blind. Paul is scared because he hears the voice of the resurrected Lord. Jesus is speaking to him, and he knows the horrible things he has done to his followers. There's no doubt that Paul felt completely hopeless when he realized the weight of his sin. All he could muster were a few words to ask Jesus, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" When Paul asked Jesus that question, he wanted to know what he needed to do to make all his wrongs right. He wanted to know how he could be saved from the awful fate he faced because of his tremendous sin. But something interesting happens. Jesus doesn't tell him what to do to be saved. In verse 6, Jesus says:

"Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Paul was a pitiful sight. He rose from the ground blind and was led to the city of Damascus, where he spent three days fasting and praying. The weight of Paul's sin would be difficult to imagine; he probably wondered if it was even possible for him to be saved after doing such evil things in the sight of God. While Paul waited in misery, the Lord spoke to a preacher named Ananias in a vision and told him to go preach to Paul and restore his sight. At first, Ananias was terrified of the idea of being in the same room with Saul of Tarsus. He knew what Paul had the authority to do to him and the brethren, and he didn't want to go. But Jesus told Ananias to:

"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." 17 And Ananias

went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

At this point we must ask: “when was Paul saved?” Was he saved on the road? Was he saved when he prayed? Was he saved when Ananias laid his hands on him? We know Paul wasn’t saved on the road because he asked Jesus “Lord, what do you want me to do?” and the Lord told him to go into the city, and there he would be told what he must do. Paul had to hear the word of God, just as every other person does.

Romans 10:14 “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

Jesus sent Paul to Damascus to wait for the preacher to tell him what he must do. Paul already believes in Jesus, but according to Jesus, he isn’t saved yet, because the preacher has to tell him what he must do to be saved. The most common doctrine of salvation today is the “faith only” doctrine. It teaches that all one must do to be saved is believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. There’s no question that we must believe in Jesus to be saved, but what we read here shows that belief is not enough. His sin is still separating him from God. Jesus told Ananias that he would find Saul of Tarsus in the house praying. I’ve also heard it widely preached that if a person wants to be saved, they have to say a prayer asking for forgiveness and inviting Jesus into their heart. Interestingly, we do not find anyone in the bible praying a sinner’s prayer to be saved, nor do we find a command to pray for salvation. You might say “wait a minute! What about Romans 10:13? That’s the command for a sinner to pray for salvation. It says:

Romans 10:13 “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Okay, let’s look at Paul’s situation. Was he saved when he prayed? There’s no doubt that Paul was praying for forgiveness for the terrible things he had done. There’s no doubt in my mind that Paul was asking God to save him from the eternal flame that awaited him. But did that prayer save him? Remember, he asked Jesus what to do to be saved. Jesus didn’t tell him to pray; he told him to go into the city, and a preacher would tell him what to do. What did Ananias tell him? Did he tell him to pray the sinner’s prayer? No. Ananias told him to arise and be baptized. What then does it mean to “call upon the name of the Lord?” We learn from Paul’s retelling of his conversion in Acts 22 that when Ananias entered the house, he said to Paul:

Acts 22:16 “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

How do we call on the name of the Lord? Paul tells us here we do so through baptism. It’s not talking about a prayer! It’s talking about obeying the gospel. I’ll ask another question. Can we be saved without our sins being washed away? We often sing the song “What can wash away my sins, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” That’s true! But when does that happen? It’s not a question of how we are saved; it’s not a question of how our sins are washed away. Everyone agrees that the blood of Jesus is what washes our sins away. It’s a question of when. When does that happen? At belief? At repentance? When we pray a prayer that the bible does not mention? When we confess Jesus? NO! Ananias told Paul that his sins were washed away through baptism. That’s the moment Paul contacted the blood. That’s the moment that Paul was saved.

Romans 6:1-11 says, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Apostle Paul teaches us in this passage of scripture that we reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in baptism. What’s the significance of that? It goes on to say that we are “united” with Christ in baptism. Can we be saved without being united with Christ? It also says that we die to sin through baptism. Can we be saved before we have died to sin? We can only be made alive in Christ by dying to sin. That occurs at baptism. In Acts 2, a group of Jews asked Peter the same question that Paul asked Jesus “What shall we do?” Peter told them in verse 38:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

That word “remission” means “forgiveness.” Can we be saved without our sins being forgiven? Of course not. That’s what salvation is! When are sins forgiven? When we are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Many preach today that baptism is an outward showing of an inward faith. Many preach that baptism is not essential for your salvation, but the bible says baptism is for forgiveness of sins. That doctrine and what the bible teaches about baptism are contradictory. What shall we trust? The doctrines of men or the doctrine of Christ. We better choose to follow the doctrine of Christ. Why? Because in judgment, our lives are going to be measured against what is written in this book. Some doctrine that a man teaches apart from the scripture cannot save. Jesus will not use that in Judgement. The word of God is the standard. It is the only source of truth, and the answer to the question of life “Lord what do you want me to do?”

You might be thinking “what about the thief on the cross?” He wasn’t baptized, but Jesus told him he would be with Him in paradise. What you’re teaching would make Jesus a liar, wouldn’t it? I believe the thief on the cross was saved. Jesus told him he was, and he didn’t have to be baptized to be saved. But does that unique experience demonstrate to us how we are to be saved? Let me ask you a question to get to the bottom of this: What must a person believe about Jesus to be saved?

Romans 10:9-10 “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

I don’t know of anyone who would disagree with that. We must believe in the death, burial, and resurrection to be saved. Did the thief believe that? The thief couldn’t believe that. The thief died before Jesus resurrected from the grave. I’m not saying the thief wasn’t saved, but the thief wasn’t subject to

the New Covenant, as we are. And Jesus had power to forgive sins while he was on earth according to Matthew 9:6. And what did Jesus tell His disciples to preach about the New Covenant?

Matthew 28:18-20 “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*” Amen.

So, what’s the answer to the question “when are we saved?” We, like Paul, are saved when we obey the gospel according to the New Testament pattern. I heard a preacher say one time, “if we do what they did, we’ll get what they got.” If the pattern saved Paul, it’ll save us! And when we deviate from that pattern, we are treading in deadly waters. We MUST be baptized immediately, by the authority of Jesus Christ, in the name of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit, for the forgiveness of our sins. Please examine your heart today and reflect on your own salvation experience. If it doesn’t match the New Testament pattern, why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

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