

## ***What Does the Bible Say About Being Saved?***

By Mark Roberts

It is difficult to imagine a more important question than the one that forms the title of this article. While concerns in this life dominate most people's attention we ought to be more concerned about the life to come. Are we saved? How do we know we are saved? What does the Bible say one does to be saved? This article will attempt to answer these crucial questions.

Perhaps no place in scripture can answer these questions quite like Acts 2:38. Acts 2 is an ideal place to study salvation for several reasons. To begin with, it is the first place that God's complete plan of salvation is announced. Second, it contains the preaching of an inspired apostle, Peter, who spoke exactly what the Holy Spirit told him to say. Third, and most important to our study, Acts 2 begins with unsaved people and ends with saved people. What happens to them in this chapter that moves them from a state of being lost to a state of being saved is of primary importance.

Space does not allow a full analysis of Peter's sermon, but we need to note the key components in this very first gospel sermon. After the Apostles were anointed with the Holy Spirit they began to speak in foreign languages and tongues of flame like fire sat on them (2:1-12). All of this, coupled with the sound of a mighty windstorm, caused many people to come see what was happening. Peter seized the opportunity and began to proclaim the gospel. Repeatedly drawing on Old Testament prophecies to prove his points, Peter taught the people that the rejected Jesus was the Messiah and Savior of the world. In verse 36 he forcefully closes his sermon by stating, "Therefore

let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." What a bombshell! The Messiah the Jews had been anxiously awaiting for centuries had come, Peter said, and instead of being received with joy was viciously murdered! Peter's sermon convicted the audience of the crime of murdering the Son of God. Has there ever been people any more lost than those on that day? Their pitiful cry in verse 37 ("Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?") brings us to the verse we wish to study. What the Bible says about salvation can well be answered by considering what Peter said next.

Peter's reply was simple: "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" (Acts 2:38). Allow me to make several observations from this significant passage.

First, do you see that Peter told the people to do something? The idea that man does nothing to receive salvation is wholly defeated right here. Such teaching has been done out of wrong concept of works and a failure to understand God's grace. Certainly all are saved by grace, and nothing can be done to earn that favor (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is impossible to work one's way into heaven, to do special deeds that catch God's eye and cause Him to bless one with salvation, or to do anything in any way that merits or deserves the priceless free gift of salvation. However, eliminating works that earn grace does not eliminate every kind of human activity. God has been showering His grace upon people for centuries, but this has never meant that people were not

required to obey Him and do as He instructs. Genesis 6:8 tells us that Noah "found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Hebrews 11:7 furthers our understanding of Noah's salvation when it says "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household. . . ." Notice that Noah was saved by grace and by faith, but neither of those eliminated his need to "prepare an ark." In other words, Noah's salvation came about as his faith led him to obey God.

Isn't this exactly what Peter is telling the people in Acts 2? That they have faith is evident (more about this in a moment). Peter's command "to repent and be baptized" did not nullify grace, nor exterminate their salvation by faith. He simply urged, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that these people take the action steps necessary to demonstrate their obedient hearts. James brings these thoughts together perfectly when he writes, "But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works . . . You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." (James 2:18, 24). Peter told the people in Acts 2 they needed to do something to be justified (saved). Those actions did not earn salvation, but were clearly necessary if they wanted to accept the gracious gift of salvation.

Second, do you see that not everyone will be saved? The universalist says that everyone will be saved, despite their life, faith, or deeds. How can this be in light of Acts 2:38? Peter did not say, "Do nothing because God is going to save you all." Further, we might note that Peter did not say "Do nothing because God has predestined

some of you to be saved and has predestined the rest to be lost and nothing you can do can change that." This isn't the teaching of Peter by any stretch of the text. 2

Thessalonians 1:8 makes it clear that Jesus will take vengeance "on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." How can anyone doubt the necessity of obedience, or that obedience can and does affect one's eternal destiny?

Third, do you see that Peter did not say "You will be saved by faith only?" Peter did not tell the crowd "Ask Jesus into your heart," or "Pray this little prayer to be saved." So many today offer a plan of salvation that is incomplete and insufficient. They tell people to believe in Christ, but they do not tell people what Peter told them: repent and be baptized. That the people of Acts 2 had faith is certain because the scriptures say the message "pricked their heart." They would not have asked Peter what to do if they did not believe the message. They had the essential quality of faith that every person wanting to be saved must have (John 8:24). But nowhere in scripture do we read that faith alone can save. Indeed, the passage in James says exactly the opposite: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." (James 2:24). This is the only place in scripture where the phrase "faith only" occurs and it is preceded by the word "not!" Peter did not teach faith only — why should we teach or believe it today?

Let's turn our attention to what Peter did tell these people to do. What does it mean to "repent?" Repent is a word that means to change, to turn one's life around. Repentance is essential salvation. Jesus says, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). One who repents has a marked change in

his or her life, a quality called "fruits of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). It is inconceivable that one could be a sinner, separated from God, ask to be saved from those sins and then gladly continue in them! Those who come to God decide to leave behind sin, and that is repentance. It is the reversal of life, from sin and darkness toward righteousness and light. This doesn't mean that a Christian is perfect, but it does mean that a Christian is trying to do God's will and live righteously.

The second command Peter gave was to "be baptized." What does this mean? The term in the original Greek just means to immerse or plunge under water. Peter is clear that baptism is not an outward symbol that we have already been saved. Instead baptism is the point of salvation because it is here that one's sins are forgiven. Isn't that what Peter said? "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. . . ." Remission of sins is another term for forgiveness. We could well translate Acts 2:38 "be baptized for the forgiveness of sins." Another passage in Acts makes this connection even stronger. When Saul of Tarsus was praying and fasting, after seeing the vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was told "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). Read those verses again carefully and see if you can answer the following question: What does baptism do (what is its purpose)? If you answered to "forgive sin" or "wash away sin" you are absolutely correct, because this is what the word of God says. Please realize as well that baptism is important because it is in baptism that one is placed into the Body of Christ. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

(Galatians 3:27). Occasionally I meet someone teaching that one can be saved without being baptized. All I do is ask if they believe they can be saved outside Christ? No one has ever said "yes," yet many resist the Bible's plain teaching that baptism puts one into Christ. For these reasons we can say that baptism is the culmination of the human activity needed to please God, demonstrate humble obedience and accept the free gift of salvation. Again, none of these things earn salvation any more than unwrapping a birthday gift earns the present. God is the hero here, not humans with their religious works. But we must do as God says, and there can be no question what God, through His inspired apostle, directed people to do to be saved.

Peter's instructions were clear, simple and direct. What did the people in the crowd do when Peter told them these things? If we read further in Acts 2 we do not read that someone challenged God's plan of salvation with their own, or that some quibbled that baptism was a "work" and so would nullify grace, or that anyone said "baptism seems silly." What we do read is that three thousand were baptized that day and that the Lord added those saved people to His church (verses 41, 47). That is what those people did when an inspired man answered their question, "What shall we do to be saved?" In short, unsaved people heard Peter's sermon, did what Peter told them to do, and were saved that very day. Surely we can do the very same with the very same result. May God bless us to have the courage to do so.