

LESSON 18

GREAT BIBLE THEMES

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

In our lessons so far we have noticed the unfolding of God's plans for all who would receive the blessings he had planned for the redeemed people of the earth. In this study we have not devoted any special lesson to God's plan of salvation although this plan has been seen in many of our studies. We have noticed the faith producing material in the four gospels which were written that we might believe on Jesus as the divine Son of God. We noticed his great commission in which the apostles were charged with the responsibility of teaching all nations. They had the assurance that those who believed in Jesus and were baptized would be saved. We devoted several lessons to the second chapter of Acts in which we have the record of Peter's sermon and its effect upon the multitude. On this occasion Peter, speaking as the Holy Spirit directed, told the believing people who inquired what they should do, to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. From the great commission and from this account we see that people who hear the gospel, who believe it, who repent of their sins and are baptized in the name of Jesus the Christ, stand pure and justified before the Creator of us all.

For today we want to make a further study of the plan we have just set forth, by looking to other examples of conversion recorded in the book of Acts. We want to approach this study with one main question in mind. Here is our question: . . .

1. We have noticed that Christ taught that we should hear his message, believe in him as the Savior, repent of our sins and be buried with him in baptism. Are these conditions of salvation to be understood as applying to the extremely wicked only? Are there exceptions to them?
2. Suppose a man is already religious and a believer in God, is that sufficient?
3. If Jesus should appear personally to an individual, would he still be expected to be baptized in order to meet the approval of God?
4. Suppose a man is praying. Would he also be expected to repent and be baptized?

LET US LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR OUR ANSWERS.

For the answers to the series of questions listed above we want to turn to the book of Acts which records many cases of conversion. Before we do this, however, we should recall that in the early days of the church, special gifts of the Holy Spirit were bestowed upon the members of the church. There were also a number of miraculous events which served to convince the unbelievers that the message of the early preachers was really God's message. These special manifestations of God's power will appear in our lesson today.

Let us suppose, as we look for the answers to our questions, that an individual is religious. Suppose further that he is so sincere about his belief in the only living God that he is willing to sacrifice a good deal of time and suffer inconvenience in order to worship as the Lord has taught that he should. Would this high type

religious worshipper of God be subject to the conditions of salvation we have noticed?

We have the record of just such an individual recorded in **Acts 8:26-40**, **And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went**

down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea. (AKJV).

In this account we have the story of the preacher whose name was _____ (verse 26). "And he arose and went; and, behold a man of _____, . . . who . . . had come to _____."

_____." (verse 27). This man lived more than one thousand miles from Jerusalem, but he made that long journey to worship God. It might be thought by some that such an individual would surely stand justified in God's sight, but let us read further. He was reading a prophecy of Christ from Isaiah

(Isaiah 53:7, He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (AKJV)), which pictured Christ being led as a sheep to the slaughter. He was anxious to know what this meant. (verses 35-36)

"Then Phillip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and _____.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, _____; what _____?"

_____?" (verses 38-39) "And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went _____

_____, both Phillip, and the _____, and he _____ him. . . . the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his _____."

Would it seem that God was interested in people, even the very

religious worshippers under the old law, hearing about Jesus, believing in him as the Savior, and obeying his teaching by being baptized?

In the early days of the church a young man by the name of Saul took the lead in persecuting all Christians. The extent of his fury against them is given in Acts 9:1-2. "And Saul, yet

_____ against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priests and desired letters to Damascus to the synagogues that if he found any of the way (Christians), _____, he might bring them _____.

_____." But this man was chosen by God to be a very special messenger to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Notice further the account of what happened as he journeyed. He came near Damascus; and suddenly there shined about him a

_____ ; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, _____, _____? And he said, _____?

And the Lord said, _____

_____ : It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he _____ and _____ said, Lord,

_____? And the

Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be _____."

Notice that Christ personally appeared to Saul, but shall we take this to mean that he was saved? We are living today in an age when we do not expect these unusual miraculous events to occur, but suppose someone today should report that he had seen Jesus, and he talked personally with him. Would we be justified in saying that such an individual is saved immediately by the grace of God without obedience? Look back to the verses above. In spite of the fact that Christ has appeared to him, that Saul believed in Christ, and that he fell down trembling before him when he asked what the Lord would have him do, he was told that he should go unto the city and that there it would be told thee " _____."

Notice too, he did not say what it would be nice or best to do, but he used the stronger term when he said what thou must do. We want to look for the one in Damascus who told him what he should do.

As we read further we find that Saul was led into the city and that for _____ days he was blind and neither ate nor drank. The record further states that he was a praying man. Surely such a penitent praying believer in Christ would be justified in God's sight if there are any exceptions to God's plan as set forth in the beginning of this lesson. We have not, however, found out what he was to be told that he must do. Years later Saul, who was later called Paul, was telling of his conversion to Christ. He told how a man by the name of Ananias came to him when he was blind and praying in Damascus. Among other things Ananias told Paul what he should do. Acts 22:16, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and _____,
 _____,
 _____,
 _____."

Does this verse definitely state that in Saul's baptism his sins were to be forgiven or washed away? Does this imply that although he was a believer in Christ and a penitent praying man to whom Christ had personally appeared, that his sins were not forgiven before his baptism? And that in this act of obedience they were washed away? Does this then help us to answer the question as to why people are not justified in the sight of God before they are baptized?

We have another very interesting case of conversion recorded in the tenth and eleventh chapters of Acts. At times people may think of their salvation in terms of their own morality. Possibly in every age people have thought that the good moral man, the good neighbor who was interested in the general welfare of his community, would thereby be numbered with the redeemed people of the earth. Are they correct in this? Let us look to these chapters for our answer.

In the beginning of chapter ten we are introduced to a man by the name of Cornelius. Notice the description given of him in verse two. "A _____, and one that _____ with _____, which gave _____, and _____ always." Surely such a description would be a compliment to a devout Christian today. But does the fact that he was a devout man who feared God, and one who gave much alms to the people and a man of prayer mean that he was thereby a saved man? Notice further (verse 4) that as he was praying he saw in a vision an angel of God who said to him, "Thy _____ and thine _____ are _____."

May we ask again, does the fact that an angel had appeared to this very high type man to tell him that God had heard his prayers mean that he was justified before God?

As we read on we find that Cornelius was told to send to Joppa to get Peter. Why? Notice Acts 11:14, "Who shall tell these _____, whereby thou and all thy house _____." Does this definitely state that Cornelius needed to hear the message of Peter in order to know what he should do to be saved?

When Peter arrived at the home of Cornelius he found a very interested group of people whom Cornelius had invited to come hear Peter's message. Peter spoke to them of Jesus. Acts 10:44, "While Peter yet spake these words, the _____ _____ _____ _____ _____." See also verse 46, "For they heard them _____, and _____." Does the fact that they received the Holy Spirit in this manner and were able to speak in other languages mean that they were thereby numbered among the redeemed? Notice what Peter told them to do? (Verse 48) "And he _____ to _____ in the _____."

Let us reflect upon the conclusions we have reached in this lesson. God is the author of the physical laws that govern the universe as well as the spiritual laws that govern our spiritual welfare. Do we expect to find exceptions to the laws of nature? Suppose we should start out to find the exception to the laws of gravity. Would we expect to find some objects subject to this law

and others not. If God has given us a plan of salvation, should we then expect to find exceptions?

All this refers to what was prophesied by Moses when he spoke of a prophet who would be raised up to speak God's word. Notice again Deuteronomy 18:19, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not _____
_____ which _____
_____ in my name, I will _____
_____."

TEST

1. Saul, who later became the apostle Paul: (a) had been a believer in Christ all his life, (b) defended the Christians with an army, (c) persecuted the disciples of Jesus, (d) paid no attention to the Christians. _____
2. Saul's sins were forgiven when: (a) the light shone on him, (b) he heard the voice of the Lord, (c) he began to pray, (d) he, because of a believing and penitent heart, was baptized. _____
3. (a) Jesus, (b) Annias, (c) the apostles, (d) an angel: told Saul what he must do to have his sins washed away. _____
4. The eunuch from Ethiopia had journeyed to Jerusalem: (a) on his vacation, (b) to worship God, (c) to pay his taxes, (d) on business for Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. _____
5. The eunuch: (a) was baptized by a little water, (b) went near to the water to be baptized, (c) went down into the water with the preacher to be baptized, (d) was not baptized. _____
6. Preachers should preach Jesus and not preach about baptism, for baptism is not part of preaching Jesus. (True or False) _____
7. Cornelius, a Gentile, was saved: (a) because he was taught by the words of Peter, (b) during his praying, (c) by the

direct operation of the Holy Spirit, (d) because he was a good moral man. _____

8. Baptism was never commanded anyone. (True or False)

9. Read Acts 9. Saul began to preach Christ the Son of God (before, after) he was baptized. _____
10. Even though Saul was told to arise and be baptized that his sins might be washed away, and the Ethiopian eunuch showed his faith in Jesus by being baptized in water, and Cornelius was commanded to be baptized by Peter, we do not have to be baptized that our sins might be washed away; for we are saved the moment we believe. (True or False) _____

Score: 10 points for each correct answer _____

Answers to questions in Lesson 17:

1. (b)
2. (a)
3. (d)
4. (dwells)
5. (d)
6. (true)
7. (c)
8. (b)
9. (true)
10. (a)