

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

By Bobby Dockery

Introduction

We live in an age that is troubled by a number of perplexing and sobering questions. Many of the questions that concern us are Economic: Does the world face economic collapse...? Should I change jobs...? Some questions are political: Can there be lasting peace in the Middle East...? Does the future hold war or peace...? Our most immediate problems are often personal: Is this the person I should marry...? What career should I pursue...? Can we afford a larger house...? Am I doing what is best for my children...? Life is literally filled with question marks!!!

There is a question far greater in importance than any of these other questions that we might ask...In comparison with this question, all others become trivial and unimportant...It is a question which has the gravest possible consequences, both in this world and in the world to come.

1) We first encounter this question in the New Testament as John the Baptist was preaching in *Luke 3.10*. When John warned the people of the coming wrath of God and exposed their hypocrisy and sin, the cry went up: "What should we do then?" This is a question that will assume overwhelming importance as the Gospel story continues to unfold!

2) The ministry of John gave way to the work and personal ministry of Jesus. *Luke 18.18* tells of an occasion when Jesus was eagerly approached by a certain ruler with the urgent question: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

3) We turn to *Acts 2*. It is the birthday of the Church. The Apostle Peter has just completed a stirring sermon - the first Gospel Sermon ever preached. In his sermon, Peter demonstrated the guilt of his audience in rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. *Acts 2.37* notes: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

4) We come next to *Acts chapter 9*. Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus to search out and seize Christians for persecution, is struck down by a brilliant light and is confronted by Jesus the Christ. In fear and trembling, he manages to ask: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (*Acts 9.6*).

5) Finally, we come to *Acts 16*. Paul and Silas have been imprisoned in Philippi for preaching the Gospel. During the night, an earthquake opens the prison doors. The jailer, fearing the worst, prepares to take his own life but is prevented by the Apostle Paul. At this point the jailer inquires: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (*Acts 16.30*).

This is the greatest question ever asked! It was asked by a variety of people in a number of different situations. But one thing which they all had in common was the intense desire to make their lives acceptable to God! We can consider no greater question today than the question: "What must I do to be saved?"

The Question Considered

The significance of this question can be gauged by looking at the individual words which are used in asking it.

1) What... Salvation begins with a question mark. Man is not saved by doing "what comes naturally," or "following his own inclinations." Man by himself does not have the answer. "I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps (*Jeremiah 10.23*).

2) Must... It is not a question of "What might I... or what could I...What maybe, might, possibly be an answer...?" It is a matter of necessity. That which is to be done is mandatory; definitely required.

3) I... This is a personal question. It applies to each of us individually. It is not a question about somebody else but about me!

4) Do...The world has a misconception at this point. Religion is not primarily something which is "gotten," "felt," "received," or "realized." It is something done! *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6.46) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who **does** the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7.21) "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"(James 2.29) Action is necessary!*

5) To Be Saved..."Saved" is a word which we associate with some of the most crucial situations in life. For example, a person is lost overboard from a ship and frantic efforts are made to launch a life-boat so that person can be saved! Someone is critically injured in a car wreck and is rushed to the hospital emergency room where the doctor is asked: "Can you save him?" Or imagine that three small children are trapped in an upper story of a burning apartment house. A fireman risks his own life to attempt a daring rescue so that they can be saved! Saving souls is more crucial than any of these situations! The soul is eternal. *(Matthew 16.26) It is a fearful thing to be eternally lost. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."(Matthew 10.28)*

Three things make this the greatest question ever asked: (1) The value of the soul; (2) The fearfulness of being lost; (3) The length of eternity! No other question can possibly have such serious or long-reaching implications! All must come to grips with this great question!

The Question Answered

The modern religious world gives all sorts of different answers to the question, "What Must I Do To Be Saved...?" Many people are bewildered by the variety of conflicting answers which are heard. Which is right...? How can I know which road leads to salvation? God has given us a Book which has the answer! It is within the pages of God's Word that we are told what we **must** do! If we will take our Bibles and study them carefully, we will note that it is the New Testament Book of Acts which tells about the beginning of Christ's Church. This same book gives us eight separate detailed accounts of what men and women in the First Century were told to do in order to be saved! If we can see what they did and do the same things ourselves, we can be sure we have the right answer to life's most crucial question.

It is of the utmost importance that we examine these examples of conversion carefully and follow their pattern exactly.

1) Pentecost (Acts 2.14-42) We have already noted that this was the day upon which the Church began. Peter preached a powerful sermon which emphasized that Jesus was the Christ and that his listeners had been guilty of an enormous crime in rejecting Him. In response to their anguished question: *"What shall we do,"* Peter replied: *"Repent and be baptized..." (Acts 2.38).* The record goes on to note: *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about 3000 souls." (Acts 2.41)* Note what happened: Christ was preached and people believed what they heard. By word of mouth, they indicated as much and were commanded to repent of their sins and be baptized. This they gladly did!

2) The Samaritans (Acts 8.5-13) Philip the Evangelist went down to Samaria and *"preached Christ." (Acts 8.5) "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said(Acts 8.6) "When they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized,..." (Acts 8.12)* Note the summary: Christ was preached; people believed; they changed the direction of their lives; and they were baptized!

3) The Ethiopian Treasurer (Acts 8.26-40) While on his way back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem, this devout government official was met by Philip, who *"told him the good news about Jesus." (Acts 8.35)* As a result of this preaching, the Ethiopian desired to become a Christian and verses 36-39 describe what was done. This conversion story follows the pattern of the previous two: Christ was preached; the Ethiopian believed; he confessed his faith; change of will or repentance took place; and he was baptized!

4) Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9.1-18; 22.3-16; 26.12-18) This was one of the most dramatic conversions ever recorded. It was so significant that parts of it are described three different times in the Book of Acts. Saul of Tarsus, a brilliant Jewish scholar and avowed enemy of Christianity was headed for Damascus to persecute God's people there. But on the road he had a meeting with Jesus which left him blind and which convinced him that Jesus was, in truth, the Son of God. After three days of fasting and prayer in Damascus, Saul was visited by Ananias, a preacher sent to instruct him in what he needed to do to be saved. The preacher's instructions are found at *Acts 22.16*, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." *Acts 9.18* specifically tells us that Saul complied with this command. Again, we have the same pattern: faith followed by sincere repentance; the making known of faith; and baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

5) Cornelius (Acts 10.1-48) Cornelius was a Roman soldier who earnestly desired salvation. By the providence of God, Peter, a preacher, was sent to him. Peter's sermon centered on the life and work of Jesus the Christ and concluded with the words: "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (*Acts 10.43*) After a Divine demonstration of the fact that Gentiles were suitable candidates for salvation, Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." (*Acts 10.48*) Here again we find Christ being preached, people believing the message, their implied repentance, and their being baptized in order to be saved.

6) Lydia (Acts 16.13-15) Lydia was a business woman converted by Paul in Philippi during the Second Missionary Journey. He found her, in the company of a group of women, at a place of prayer by a riverside. We are told that Paul preached, (*Acts 16.13-14*), and as a result Lydia was baptized (*Acts 16.15*). Not specifically mentioned in this brief account (but implied) is her faith following the message, and her determination to change the direction of her life. This was indicated by the fact of her baptism.

7) The Keeper of the Roman Prison in Philippi (Acts 16.23-33) Paul and Silas were imprisoned because of an act of kindness bestowed upon a demon-possessed slave girl. When an earthquake opened the prison doors at midnight, the Roman official charged with the keeping of the prison assumed that the prisoners had escaped and he prepared to take his own life. But Paul quickly called out to assure him that everyone was still there. Bringing them out of the inner prison, the guard asked them: "Sirs what must I do to be saved?" (*Acts 16.30*) "Believe," Paul commanded, and then, so that he could believe: "They spake the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house" (*Acts 16.32*) And the same hour of the night he "he and all his household was baptized." (*Acts 16.33*) Again the pattern is the same: Paul preached Christ; people heard and believed, were willing to commit their lives unto the Lord and were baptized.

8) The Corinthians (Acts 18.1-8) In the course of the Second Missionary Journey, Paul came to the Greek city of Corinth. In this distinctly pagan setting, he found a small colony of Jews who had a synagogue. "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (*Acts 18.4*). Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized" (*Acts 18.8*) Once more Paul preached Christ, those who heard believed, turned away from the world, and were baptized into Christ.

The Answer Considered

A careful analysis of the eight cases of conversion reveals a definite pattern. Though the eight cases we have considered cover many different types of people in radically different situations in life, the procedure for becoming a Christian is always the same. In every case, there was first the preaching of the Gospel message. (*1 Corinthians 1.21*) In every instance, faith was required. (*Mark 16.16*) After the person involved had believed in Christ, it was necessary that he turn from the world and its evil toward Christ and His righteousness in the act of repentance. (*Acts 17.30*) In some way it was necessary for faith to make itself known. (*Romans 10.9-10*) Finally, came the culminating act of baptism which resulted in the forgiveness of sin and entrance into Christ. (*Romans 6.3-4*)

A lost person must hear something and do something as a result of what he has heard. Some object that this makes salvation a matter of works and not grace. But this is far from the case. What we do does not earn salvation; it merely puts us in a position where we can receive it! The Bible speaks of even faith as a work. (*John 6.28-29*) Surely, no one would argue that salvation is possible without it! The point: We are not saved by deeds or works; but salvation is impossible without them!

A case in point: The case of Israel at the Red Sea illustrates that God has always required people to *DO* something to become the recipients of grace. *"Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord,"* they were told. (Exodus 14.13) But they had to walk through! Their own actions were required to lay hold of God's grace!

Conclusion

In our day many people talk about the many roads to heaven, or the many ways of being saved. It is significant that the Bible describes only one! Every New Testament example of becoming a Christian follows the same pattern; the names and places differ but the procedure is the same! It is deeply significant that salvation begins and ends in Christ. (Hebrews 5.8-9) It was Christ Himself who said; *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14.6)* It was also Christ who said: *Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6.46)*

Published by Gospel Tracts International™
Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA