

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

By Arch Chater

The man said, "What must I do to be saved?" Friends there is a book that convinces of sin and reveals the way of salvation and I trust you have that book with you this morning.

No doubt we are all familiar with the story recorded in Acts chapter 16 and the experience of the jailer who stood guard over the prisoners in the jail at Philippi. Paul and Silas were numbered among the prisoners. Following their singing that night, possibly prayer psalms, a great earthquake developed and the prison foundation and walls were shaken and the doors of the jail burst open and the prisoners' bonds were released, Acts 16:22-33. Let us open our Bibles and read of these events.

The fear, the terror, experienced by the jailer following the rapid succession of these unusual events drove him to attempt suicide. But for the intervention of Paul, this would have occurred. The jailer's dilemma, compounded by his fear that the prisoners would escape and he be held responsible, demanded an immediate assurance of present safety and security. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit there was awakened in this man a strong desire for ultimate salvation. Addressing Paul and Silas, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:30. A prompt answer was given by Paul and Silas, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31.

We can ask ourselves the question, Did this "belief" encouraged and sought by Paul and Silas from the jailer, did it equate entirely and completely with their understanding of all that was necessary for salvation? Did that word "believe" and the following actions of believing, have embodied within it a much deeper meaning, a deeper implication, a greater commitment, than the dictionary definition of "believe" as we understand it, more than just knowing something to be true. Yes it did! Yes it does! Did Paul and Silas at that precise moment have time to explain? No they didn't! Could "belief" in all its simplicity be enough for this man's salvation if he were to live on, or for that matter the salvation of any man or woman? No, it didn't! No it doesn't! "For faith without works is dead" (James 2:17) there being no evidence of the faith. This was a time of extreme pressure for the jailer when there was no time for Paul and Silas to give a profound theological discussion on what it meant, the depth of those words, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be save." The time, the circumstances then did not permit it, therefore succinct direction for salvation was necessary and brief and to the point and this was given. This man under the influence of the Holy Spirit felt his spiritual need, and the Lord knew his heart and Paul and Silas were compelled at this time to give such a brief direction for this man's salvation.

Sadly today Friends, too often we hear the cry, "Only believe!" "Only believe!" Satan believes and trembles and there is no salvation for him, nor any of his followers (James 2:13). The injunction of Jesus Christ given in Matthew 11:29 "to take my yoke upon you and learn of me For my yoke is easy and my burden is light," submitting to the discipline and training of Jesus' way of life is considered by many today as unnecessary for their salvation. "Only believe" is the catch cry. Didn't Jesus say, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me?" (Matt 16:24).

Does not Paul in his counsel to the Ephesian Church (Ephesians 2:8-10) say that “we are His workmanship, the workmanship of God (Spiritually recreated) through Jesus Christ unto all good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Do you think this would have been the experience of the jailer? One would think it was. He responded to the Holy Spirit. He listened to Paul and Silas as the expounded the truths of salvation and the need of a personal belief in the redeeming life and work of Jesus. Did the jailer have a change of heart? It appears that he did, evidenced by his concern as he washed the wounds of Paul and Silas, caused by their floggings. He showed sympathy and did what he could to ease their pain.

Friends, each one of us needs a faith that habitually brings forth good works, motivated by love for our Saviour for the truth, and for our fellow man (James 2:18). It is true that we must believe in Jesus Christ. He is the only hope of our salvation, but it is also true that we must work out our own salvation daily, in faith, with fear and trembling (2 Corinthians 7:15).

Friends these words “with fear and trembling” may cause some confusion, as to the meaning but it means having an attitude of self-distrust – a fear and a trembling of trusting to self. Paul was ever aware of the fearful possibility of being cast out of God’s presence, unless he curbed his sinful and fleshy propensities, and exercised rigid discipline toward his sinful nature, when he said of himself, “But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway: (1 Corinthians 9:27). That evil that warred against his spiritual aspirations must die and so also must it be the case with each one of us – it must die. This can only be achieved by surrendering the will completely to Jesus Christ and the acceptance of His Holy spirit, Jesus living out the life within, and this is the lesson for each one of us, for all who would hope to qualify for acceptance as citizens of heaven.

Paul never relinquished in his fight to overcome. He said of himself, “I die daily.” (1 Corinthians 3: 14). He died daily to self, to self trust and toward the end of his life he could say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the Righteous Judge shall give me at that day and not to me only, but to all them that love His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). The hope of eternal life, friends, what a prospect! What a goal! What a prize! Can we afford to do less than Paul?

Has any not found at times the old unregenerate nature strongly striving for recognition and supremacy, in spite of the fact of good intentions to serve Jesus Christ? Paul did! And we can take courage from Paul’s experiences and we dare not do less than he, to die daily to self and have one’s life and will in the hands of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Friends we need to hold fast the profession of our faith. Come what may, without wavering, for eternal salvation is conditional on remaining steadfast until the very end (Hebrews 4:14). Paul in writing to Timothy (1 Timothy 4: 1) had much to say about steadfastness when he said: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.” Friends, their steadfastness was gone and they had abandoned the faith. And when did Paul say some will depart from the faith? In latter times, those times are now, they are upon us! And how will some depart from the faith?

By falling away from the truth, by accepting false doctrine, by forsaking the right way, by compromising the truth and the commandments of God! Sadly, this condition abounds – apostasy.

Paul has more to say on the matter of accepting truth and holding it fast, when he said, “All that receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved will be left to accept strong delusion that they should believe a lie” (2 Thessalonians 2: 9-11). Any and all who refuse to choose and cherish and love the truth, are susceptible to being influenced by all that is deceitful and the workings of Satan, to the extent of believing the ultimate and crowning deception when Satan impersonates Jesus Christ. Deceived into believing the worst lie of all. Friends we need to cast out and firmly secure our anchors in the rock that is Jesus Christ. We need to raise the standard in our lives. We need to hold fast to all that is good, living a life in all good conscience toward God.

Friends, the question the jailer raised to Paul and Silas, “what must I do to be saved” was answered in truth. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” That is the core to our salvation but surrounding the core, Jesus Christ, is the evidence and substance that needs to be seen, the evidence in the life of the believer, a life displaying love, obedience to God’s commandments, gratitude, and the hope of eternal life. A life displaying the fact of one’s belief, or it otherwise denies it. Days are close ahead Friends, when one’s faith will be truly tested, when persecution will be felt by all who keep all the commandments of God, when the test will come to each one individually and days are here now, when false doctrine and the compromising of God’s commandments is rampant. “Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7: 14). Let us heed all the counsel that answers the question posed by the jailer “what must I do to be saved.” Hold fast that we will be found walking in the narrow path, denying self, shedding the sinful pleasures of this world, for none can walk this path carrying worldly burdens.

Hold fast your profession (Hebrews 4:14) Hold fast your belief in all that God has revealed about the only means of salvation, an unyielding faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, for it is through His boundless mercy alone, than any can expect salvation.

Hold fast your confidence (Hebrews 3:16) Rejoice in the hope firm unto the end. The belief and assurance of your present acceptance with God. Hold fast the conviction of the certainty of the things you have learned to believe concerning Jesus Christ.

Hold fast that which is good and abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Prove all things, hold fast that which is good and true in spite of temptations to release your hold.

And like Job who said of himself, “My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go,” speaking of his conscience (Job 27:6) may we likewise be of the same mind having a clear conscience, void of any offence toward God. And Job could say this in spite of all that happened to him through all his pain, his suffering and losses.

Friends may this also be our choice, our way, our determination, that in the power and strength of Jesus Christ, we will hold fast, clinging to our Saviour and His words of encouragement, taken from Revelation 2: 25 and 3:11 “Hold fast till I come,” “Hold fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown.”

Believe



The Hebrew language developed in a nomadic agricultural culture. Because of this much of the language is centred around this lifestyle. The more we understand their way of life and culture, the more we can understand their language. This benefits us, as Bible students, because we can better understand the author's message if we better understand his language.

In our culture, concepts, words and ideas are taught by using other concepts, words and ideas. Often this is a very difficult task to accomplish. Since the Hebrew language is a task-oriented language, teaching these concepts, words and ideas are much easier.

The subject we are going to cover is a prime example. If you wanted to teach your children what it means to believe, how would you do it? If you think about it, it is very difficult thing to do.

The Nomads

In Genesis 4:20 we read about the first Nomad Jabal, a descendent of Adam through Cain.

"And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle."

We know that Jabal and his descendents were nomads from the simple fact they lived in tents and raised livestock. A tent (ohel in Hebrew) is a portable shelter for the purpose of moving from one grazing place to another. The Hebrew word used in the above for cattle is "miqneh" which actually means any livestock property. This could be cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, etc. When the livestock consumed the edible vegetation in one area, the herder would then pack up his tent and his belongings and move on to better grazing land.

Probably the most famous nomad is Abraham. He travelled a great deal through the land of the Near East living in tents and raising livestock.

The Tent

The tent is a very important part of the nomads life. By looking at the many words derived from this shelter we have tangible, hands on tools with which to teach our children the basic concepts in the Bible. In this study we will be looking at a tent stake. For those who have camped before, you are probably familiar with these stakes. What is the most important factor when placing your tent stakes? The ground. If you drive in soft ground, the tension on the rope will pull the stake right out. You need very firm ground to hold the in. The ideal ground would require a hammer to beat the stake in. In ground like this the stake will remain secure in its position even in a strong wind. Let us now look at a passage of Scripture that uses this "concept".

Isaiah 22:23 "I will drive him like a peg into a firm place, he will be a seat of honour for the house of his father."

Here we have the stake (peg) being driven into a "firm" place. The Hebrew word translated as "firm" here is the verb "aman" which literally means "to be firm or sure". When setting up our tent, we desire to find a spot where the ground will be firm.

Believe

This verb "aman" is used 110 times in the Old Testament. Let us now look at another passage using this same verb and see what it says.

Genesis 15:6 "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness"

The word "believed" is the very same Hebrew verb "aman". The picture we have from this is that Abram was firm in his devotion to G-d. Just as a stake planted in firm ground supports the tent even in a storm, Abram will support God even in the storms of life. The question we now ask is, how did Abram remain firm? The verse just before states;

Genesis 15:5,6 '[God] took [Abram] outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.'

We usually read this to mean that Abram believed God's promise in verse 5. The problem with this is that the Hebrew verb "aman" means more than just knowing something to be true. Why did God give this promise to Abram?

Genesis 26:4,5 "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws (Torah in Hebrew)".

God made this promise to Abram because he was firm in his obedience to God. The Hebrew in Genesis 15:6 does not say Abram believed God, it says he was firm in God. From Genesis 26:5 we see that he was firm in his obedience to God and his Torah.