

What Must I do to be Saved? – Acts 16:25-31

Last Wednesday, I was reminded how busy Brother Fulton is right now. He just got back from 11 days in Kentucky which included preaching in several churches and being in a missions conference. Yesterday he and Rachel hosted a House-warming party which we forced on them, and then last night they drove three and half hours down to TriCities where he is preaching this morning. Tuesday he leaves for the Conference in Oklahoma, for which he has had only had a few days to prepare several messages. With that in mind, last Thursday, I texted him, telling him that if preaching tonight was too much, I would be happy to withdraw my offer, and I'd take both services. He replied, telling me he'd love to preach, giving me the title *"What men must do to be saved."*

Did you read the title to my message when you picked up the bulletin this morning? Did you pay attention to the scripture which we read a few minutes ago? The Philippian jailor asked Paul, *"What must I do to be saved?"* Immediately after that exchange of texts, Austin and I got on the phone and began comparing notes. I cannot remember from where it came, but the idea for my message has been sitting on my desk for several weeks. I believe it came up in the course of my reading, but I may be mistaken; that's not a part of my notes. Thursday before our texting, I began working on this message. But after hearing what Austin planned to preach, I told him I'd find something else. Then it occurred to us both that God had given each of us this theme and our messages. I'm sure there will be similarities between what I have to say and what Bro. Austin says this evening, but they will not be the same message. This sort of thing often happens in Bible conferences where two or three men will preach similar messages, and the Lord blesses them all, but, admittedly, this is a bit unusual in a local church.

The chief jailor at Philippi was shaken out of his sleep by a God-created earthquake. Of course, he knew why Paul and Silas had been arrested earlier that day. And I have no doubt that while they were being mistreated and locked into their cells and stocks, that the missionaries spoke to the man about Christ. Then, easing their pain, since they couldn't sleep anyway, Paul and Silas continued to talk of Christ, to pray and to sing some of the newly-written Christian hymns. When the jailor felt and heard the walls of his prison crumbling, he became terrified. Fearing that his charges had probably escaped, and knowing that he would be held responsible, because his superiors would have to blame somebody, the man propped his razor-sharp sword between two pieces of rubble and was ready to fall on it. All of a sudden, out of the darkness, he heard, *"Do thyself no harm; for we are all here."* Have you ever wondered how Paul even knew what the man was doing? Could he see him?

That jailor then brought the Lord's missionaries out of the rubble and asked his famous question. He wasn't asking for their advice on how to escape from the problems with his bosses. He wasn't worried about more of the prison walls falling and killing him. He wasn't asking for marriage counseling, or ways to get out of debt. His question was *"What must I do to be saved from the judgment about which you men have been talking."* He knew the earthquake was not natural – it was sent by God, and he assumed it was Paul's God. If the prisoners were all there, as Paul said, then there was even more evidence of Christ's sovereignty. *"What must I do to be saved from the judgment of this God?"* And Paul answered, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."*

My theme, and probably the theme of the day, is that most Christians would not give that jailor the same answer. Today, after asking, *"What must I do to be saved?"* a man might hear, *"Ask Jesus to come into your heart,"* or *"All you need to do is accept Christ."* Many Christians are intellectually lazy, and rather than having to explain what God says, they summarize. Everyone today seems to have been trained to simplify as many things as we can – including the gospel. We have Keurig coffee machines and micro-wave ovens to make our lives easy. We use abrvns – LOL. And we even use cliches to share the gospel. Some modern answers contain truth, but like the Keurig, their brew is often either too strong or too weak. At the same time, some answers are so blatantly wrong, I'm afraid I'll lose your attention before I get to my primary points.

The answer to "What must I do to be saved?" has nothing to do with baptism or church membership.

Sadly, these are the replies which Catholicism and Protestantism generally give to the question. There are evangelical Protestants who might speak about faith in Christ from time to time, but it is easy to prove from their doctrinal statements that most "Christian" denominations teach that church membership and the ordinances wash away sins and convey saving grace. The Lord's church may be the messenger, carrying the correct answer, but no one has ever been delivered from his sins by joining any church or by participating in any of their rites and ceremonies. I will admit that a few scriptures might be twisted into teaching that baptism washes away sins, but those are gross misinterpretations.

Was the thief on the cross baptized? And yet Christ told him that he'd soon be with Him in Paradise. Baptism had

nothing to do with that man's acceptance with God, and neither did your baptism. After Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well, were any of the people in Samaria baptized, or did they immediately organize a church in which to become members? In none of John's writings is baptism mentioned in any way – in his gospel or any of his three epistles. While praising the saints in Thessalonica for their faith, and patience and hope in Christ, nowhere in **1 or 2 Thessalonians** does Paul praise those saints for consenting to be baptized. And to the Corinthians he says that he was pleased not to have baptized but a few. Paul never commands Timothy or Titus to baptize or to highlight baptism in their gospel message. Baptism, communion and church membership have nothing to do with salvation from sin. If these are things you are trusting to take you to Heaven, the only way you'll see that place is from the back window of God's prison bus as it takes you to Hell.

Similar incorrect answers might include – *“Become a disciple of Christ”* or *“Become a Christian.”* While the word *“disciple”* is common in the Bible, the idea of the *“Christian”* is rare. That word was first used as a derogatory – as a term of shame. Only once do we read *“become a Christian,”* and it came the lips of a confused unbeliever. *“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”* But Paul wasn't trying to persuade him to become a Christian; he was presenting the gospel. There is an important difference.

If someone emphasizes the word “DO” in “what must I DO to be saved?” the listener needs to be careful. Because it can leave the impression that by performing certain duties forgiveness from God can be earned. For example, some religionists tell their hearers that by forgiving others they earn forgiveness from God. Again, there are a handful of scriptures which are horribly twisted to teach such things, but that idea is contrary to a mountain of other scriptures. If I forgive someone for an offense he has committed against me, it is one sinner forgiving another. He and I are equals; I deserve his forgiveness as much as he deserves mine. But God and I are **not** equals. I am a sinner while He is infinitely holy; I am night and He is day. He is life while I am dead. A miracle is required for God to forgive me – that miracle took place at Calvary with the death of Christ. It doesn't come through **MY mortification** or my **humiliation** in the eyes of anyone else. My forgiveness of another person has no direct relationship to God's forgiveness of me.

There is nothing we can perform in order to be saved, because we are born spiritually dead – inert, lifeless. Part of the meaning of *“saved”* takes us to our need of eternal life. And just as there is nothing a rock can do to become alive, there is nothing a dead person can do to live. So learning to be generous cannot save us; becoming hospitable cannot bestow eternal life. Raising money for hurricane victims does not make a person a Christian. Nor does giving blankets to the homeless, or coats for kids, or collecting sunglasses for poor Africans.

“What must I do to be saved?” Listen to Paul's answer to the man's question – He said, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”* There was no mention of physical action; no special sacrifice required; no contribution; no labor. It was simply – *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

I hope that no one here has a problem understanding that **doing things** cannot change a sinner into a saint. Such ideas are foreign to the Word of God. There isn't even a hint of truth in these ideas. And becoming a *“disciple of Christ”* falls into this category.

There are other commonly expressed answers which sometimes contain some truth. *“What must I do to be saved?”* the man asked. Today we might hear a similar question.

But many times the answer will be – “Accept Jesus Christ” or “Accept Jesus as your Saviour.”

There is no doubt that the Son of God came into this world to become the Saviour of sinners. At the time of Christ's birth angels announced, *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”* Peter told the leaders of Israel, You men took Jesus of Nazareth, giving Him to the Romans for crucifixion, but *“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”* A Christian is someone who is *“looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

Jesus Christ is without doubt the Saviour. And it is true that in order for a sinner to be saved, he must acknowledge that **Jesus IS that Saviour**. In fact, as it is commonly stated, the sinner must accept Jesus Christ as his **own personal** Saviour.

But a problem with that statement arises with the word *“accept.”* For some people the word means *“acknowledge”* – will you *“admit”* that Jesus is the Saviour? But that can be as deadly as **James 2:19** – *“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”* I am sure that even Satan acknowledges that Christ came into this world to be the Saviour, but that doesn't mean Satan is saved. Someone might even acknowledge that

Jesus came to be a Saviour **to him**, but that may be nothing more than an intellectual admission – something like the result of a mathematical equation.

A far more common understanding of *“Accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour,”* would be *“receive”* Him. *“What must I do to be saved?”* – *“Receive the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Please understand that I am not making a blanket condemnation of this phrase. I’m just suggesting that we be careful in using it. Is *“Accept Jesus as your Saviour,”* the same thing as *“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”*? It could be; it ought to be. But as we use that phrase does our friend understand it that way?

In **Colossians 2:6** Paul said, *“AS ye have therefore RECEIVED Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”* Notice, he was not presenting a gospel witness to some lost people; this was not the **Book of Romans**. He was speaking to Christians, people who understood that they were obligated to walk as people whose Lord and Saviour was Jesus Christ. **John 1:12** also uses the word *“receive”* when it says, *“But as many as received him (Christ Jesus) to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”* Again, this is not in the context of a gospel presentation, but a declaration of fact. And it goes on, *“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that BELIEVE on his name.”* If we use this terminology – *“Accept Jesus as your Saviour,”* we can’t stop there. We must teach the person that it is by faith that Christ is received as Saviour.

And here is the point – if we have to define the unbiblical term *“accept Christ”* then why not throw it away and stick with its Biblical equivalent *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”*? Christ never told people to *“accept”* Him as their Saviour, so why do we? The Lord Jesus did refer to *“receiving”* Him, but it is arguable that it was in an evangelistic context. *“Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me”* – **Mark 9:37**. *“I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive”* – **John 5:43**.

A similar neo-evangelical answer to the jailor’s question is *“take Jesus as your Saviour.”*

I like this answer even less than the previous one, but perhaps you’ll think I’m just being petty. To me the word *“take”* is even farther from faith than *“accept.”* It makes even stronger the idea that this sinner **must DO something** to contribute to his salvation. Man in his sinful pride, really wants to participate in his deliverance from sin. Even though we might not want to admit it, sinners want to be able to say, *“I made the right choice,”* or *“I took the right steps.”* *“I went into the bakery with my three brothers, and we were all looking at the goodies in the display case. George took the glazed donut; Sam chose the bearclaw; Fred selected a jam bar, but I took the eclair. I made the best choice.”* *“And similarly back in 2004 I took Jesus as my Saviour.”*

It is far more Biblically accurate to say that *“Christ took me”* than to say *“I took Christ.”* We were as sheep in the jaws of the lion or wolf and Christ snatched us from death. We didn’t pry open the lion’s mouth so that we could run to the Saviour. We were as dry grass about to be consumed by a wildfire, but the Saviour delivered us, dousing the flames. We were lepers condemned to eternal separation from God and godly society, but the divine physician, not only cured us, but invited us into His holy temple. We were sinners under the curse of the law, but Christ the Saviour, wrapped His perfect righteousness around us and delivered us from eternal judgment. *“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged”* – **Isaiah 51:1**.

Along the same line some modern evangelists might answer the question *“What must I do to be saved,”* with the words *“Identify with Jesus.”* *“Identify with Jesus?”* *“Identify with Jesus?”* What is that? Even though a clever Bible student might make some sense out of it, once again, it robs the Lord of the glory of His salvation. The Old Testament scholar can argue that when the priest or perhaps the common Israelite put his hands on the head of the animal about to be sacrificed, he **identified** with the sacrifice. Through the symbolical act, he acknowledged the sacrifice to be representative.

As I say, there is some logic, even some Bible, behind most of these terms and cliches. In this case, Paul tells us that in the transaction which purchased our salvation **Christ transferred** or *“imputed”* His righteousness to the sinner, and our sin was *“imputed”* to Christ the sacrifice. Christ identified with the sinner whom He saved, and that sinner was identified with the Saviour. **Romans 4:3** – *“For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed*

are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” The thing to notice here is that technically it was not the sinner who identified with Christ. It was God who took care of all the imputation and identification. **James** says the same sort of thing – *“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God”* – **James 2:23**.

The most obnoxious & unbiblical answer to the question has to be: “Ask Jesus to come into your heart.” I suppose it’s possible to get from *“Ask Jesus into your heart”* to *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,”* but the road between the two is dangerous, filled with ruts, switch backs, washboards and falling rock. Nowhere in the Bible do we read such words. Even **Romans 10:13**, which says, *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,”* says nothing about *“asking Jesus into the heart.”* Even **Romans 10** goes on to speak of faith – *“How then shall then call on him in whom they have not believed?”* And I believe that the reference to *“the name of the Lord”* demands a **recognition** of the **Saviour’s high** and **holy nature**. I believe it demands **humility and repentance**. *“Ask Jesus into your heart”* is a foreign to the Bible as *“baptism washes away your sins.”*

What does Paul say is the answer to the jailor’s question?

He says, *“BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”* From that statement it is an easy step to an explanation of faith and trust. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to trust Him for that necessary salvation. The jailor was already at his wit’s end – he was despairing of life – he had given up everything. *“What must I do to be saved?”* **DO nothing** at all, just put your trust in Jesus Christ the Lord. Empty yourself of all your righteousness, all your good deeds, all your religion, all that you consider helpful in salvation. Lean entirely on the Lord Jesus and what He did on the cross.

If, in your struggle for peace and forgiveness, you have come to the end of yourself, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”*