

12. Salvation in the 21st Century as Taught by Christ and the Apostles

In the world of the 21st century, folks take many different views of salvation. Some believe that all humankind will be saved, thinking that a loving God could not condemn people to eternal punishment. Others think that as long as a person's conscience is clear, that God will save that person. Still others think that to go to the church of one's choice, is to have salvation. Yet, Christ and the apostles taught salvation, which only goes to the faithful and obedient followers. He taught in Matt 7:21-23:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Not every religious person, not every worshipper, and not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven.

In Matt 15:7-9, the Lord extended this excluded group to include false worshippers:

"7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:
8 'These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
9 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.'"

The question of this study becomes, "If salvation does not go to everyone, to whom does it go?"

Salvation Goes to Those Who Are Born Again

Sectarians and denominationalists might easily agree that salvation goes to those who are born again. Even politicians courting the religious vote are quick to say, "I am a born again Christian." Do they mean the same thing as the Lord and the apostles meant. The Lord and the apostles conditioned the new birth on being born again. Jesus and Nicodemus had this discussion in John 3:3-8:

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

The language of the Lord is not obscure: no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again, and you must be born again.

The new birth is not some super awareness or emotional experience. Paul told us exactly how the new birth occurs in Rom 6:3-7:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

In his death, Jesus poured out his blood for many unto the remission of sins, according to Mt.26:28. He shed his blood at his death in John 19: 34. Paul taught that this new creation [the one born again] is in Christ in 2 Cor 5:17-18:

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” The saved are born again, and the new creation so made is in Christ.

Salvation Comes to Those Who Are in Christ

We have learned that the new creation, those born again, are in Christ. Therefore, salvation goes to those in Christ. Peter states this principle, of salvation in Christ, directly in Acts 4:12: “12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Those in Christ find salvation, and salvation comes to them in the same way that the new birth came to them. They are baptized into him according to Paul in Gal 3:26-28:

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In none other than Christ is salvation, and we are baptized into him.

Salvation Is the Spiritual State of Those Who Are in the Church

On the day of Pentecost, after the death of Christ, Peter and the other apostles, preached baptism for the remission of sins. The previously cited scriptures show that this same baptism results in the new creation—the recipients are born again and that those baptized are also baptized into Christ. Acts 2:38 reads, “38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The passage goes on to say in verse 41 that those who accepted the word and were baptized were added to their number: “41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” Those baptized formed the church. The Lord did this, adding to their number as stated in verse 47: “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” The King James Version translates this passage, “The Lord added to the church.” Still many 21st century folks would argue that people are saved outside the church; Paul also emphatically teaches that the saved are in the church. In Eph 5:23-28, Paul taught:

Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Christ is the savior of the church, having made the church holy and clean by the washing with water through the word. Just as one is born again of water and the spirit (John 3), the church, the body of those baptized (Acts 2) receives its cleansing and salvation by baptism. Paul made this matter the more certain in 1 Cor 12:13 by clearly stating, “13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

Conclusion

Universal salvation is not a part of Bible teaching. Neither is the salvation of the good moral person a part of that teaching. Neither is the salvation of religious people following teaching other than that 1st century teaching of Christ and the apostles. The saved are those born again, in Christ, and in the church as a result of their believing and obeying Christ's teaching in baptism, where they are raised to walk in newness of life. Salvation is the subject of the coming of Christ to the earth and his dieing for the sins of all. Salvation of humankind is the subject of the praise and the glory to God. John records in Rev 12:10

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation
and the power and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.

For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
Has been hurled down.”

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Matt 7:21-23: Who will enter into the kingdom of heaven? To whom will the Lord say: “I never knew you?”
2. Matt 15:7: Why did the Lord call these people hypocrites? What was their worship? What was their teaching?
3. John 3:3-8: How can one be born again when he is old? Of what are those who are born again born?
4. Rom 6:3-7: Those baptized into Christ were also baptized into what? In what are they raised to live? What happens to the old self? What happened to the body of sin? From what are we freed?
5. Mt.26:28: For what did Jesus pour out his blood?
6. John 19: 34: When and where did Jesus pour out his blood?
7. 1 Cor 5:17-18: What is one who is in Christ?
8. Acts 4:12: Where is salvation found? In what name must we be saved?
9. Gal 3:26-28: How are we clothed with Christ?
10. Acts 2:38: For what are people to repent and be baptized? What will they receive?
11. Acts 2:41: What happen to those who accepted Peter's message? Who and how many were added to their number?
12. Acts2:47: Who were those added to their number?
13. Eph 5:23-27: Of what is Christ the Savior? How did he cleanse the church?
14. 1 Cor 12:13: Into what are we baptized?
15. Rev 12:10: What four things are now come? Who has been hurled down?