

2006 SERIES: BELIEVING TO SALVATION

Study 1: 'What Must I Do to Be Saved'

Each year we seek to select a theme for our 11 monthly studies (February to December). This year I felt it would be useful to select a variety of subjects relating to the gospel and pastoral ministry. The first few of these studies were given in the NCTM Summer School 2006, linked with the book, *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith* by William Romaine and also with reference to Walter Marshall's book, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* and associated texts.

The wider thrust will be to discover the plan and goal of history as can be seen from the beginning of history to its climax or completion, i.e. its *telos*. For over 25 years we have been attempting to do this in these classes and as more and more has been revealed along these lines, so more and more has the nature of God been revealed. Because we have come to be converted—i.e. had our sins forgiven through the gospel—so we desire to see others have their sins forgiven through the gospel, and we too have increasingly come to know His gifts of faith, hope and love. In effect the series will be a salvation history, yet a salvation history which at the same time is God's entire intention and action from before time to that which is beyond time. All prophecy is with a view to what is beyond time. So as we read God's word we come under its power. That word of God brings all creation into being and seals what God is about in time for eternity.

The 11th chapter of Hebrews tells us that faith is believing what God tells us and living by trusting Him to the *end* (*telos*: 'the completion'). He has promised that when we come to believe and know God there will be a great increase in love, in faith and in hope. Ultimately it will all happen by grace through faith (Rom. 1:16, 17; 3:19–26; Eph. 2:8–10), and not one human being is exempt from this way of salvation. The word of God comes to us by the three Persons of the Trinity. It is by these three virtues, then, that we grow up into maturity, 'to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13). In Ephesians 1:13–14 this is spoken of, 'In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory'.

Since it is up to us as to the method of study we use throughout the year I suggest we start at the historical point of man crying out in the New Testament for salvation, for in this way the first proclaimers of salvation drew both Jews and Gentiles into the Christian *ecclesia* which thereby had become the new people of God, the true Israel community (cf. Gal. 4:21–31). In regard to us having faith in God through Christ, we have the passage of John 6:25–29 and the demand of verse 29, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent'. See also John 5:24, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, *has* eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but *has passed* from death to life'. Christ's call for all

Israel to repent and believe (Mark 1:14–15) follows that of John the Baptist in Mark 1:4.

‘WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?’

At the point in history when these particular words were cried out was the time the Philippian gaoler called out, addressing Paul and Silas. The full account is written in Acts 16:11–40. Here Paul and Silas, without enquiry by the civil authorities, were beaten with rods because of their preaching the gospel and the exorcism of a girl who had a spirit of divination by which she brought profit to her masters. Enraged by this loss of profit the employers complained to the city authorities who, having beaten the apostles, fastened their feet in the stocks, in prison. At midnight the evangelists were heard singing songs. The prison area was visited by a ‘great earthquake’. The gaoler saw that the prison doors were all opened supernaturally yet the prisoners had not escaped. Paul and Silas had told their fellow prisoners not to escape. The gaoler was sure he would be punished by the authorities but, seeing the astonishing situation, appealed to the apostles, ‘Men, what must I do to be saved?’

Was this a common cry in those days and days before them? It was certainly a strange cry and something important must have been in jeopardy, linked as it must have been with human guilt producing *angst*. Certainly the answer was astonishing. Many people from the beginning of history have cried such cries.

The response of Paul and Silas was, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household’. The gaoler did just this and he was saved and his whole household, ‘and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God, and that all had been saved’. What did all this mean in principle and within the wider scheme of things? The gaoler and his household could scarcely have been Jews because Philippi was primarily a pagan city. When we examine the cry we ask, ‘what were they hoping to be saved from?’ At first sight they seem to want salvation for apparent neglect of gaol duty. Paul makes it certain that whatever punishment the gaoler wishes to escape it can only be through this man Jesus Christ. The belief, the corporate act of baptism and the immense relief tell us that pagans can come to salvation only by faith in Jesus Christ which is equivalent to having faith in the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ. Apart from this event, the only such saving one in history seems to be the salvation of Nineveh which happened when Jonah called that city to repent. Of course Hebrews chapter 11 places the covenant people of God as people of faith and so the saved and saving community of God.

For a moment let us examine the event of the salvation of the gaoler and his household. It must have been powerful. We assume that he heard the gospel message. He must have heard the word of forgiveness of sins, and how that had come about by the death of Christ. He must have known that Christ had risen from the dead and that by Christ Paul had exorcised the demon from the girl in the pagan temple. He also appeared to the gaoler who was terrified unto death—that was the great point. The apostolic band had confronted him with God! He believed and it all worked! He knew himself and his household to be saved!

If we examine this important event at Philippi we have to see it as a post Pentecostal happening. The Gentiles had been invited into the Kingdom of God at Caesarea under Peter and the Samaritans under the ministry of Philip. It was clear then that the saving

gospel was for people in the world, i.e. both Jews and Gentiles. Rightly considered this was an amazing happening in history. Indeed it changed all history in a radical way. Why we should say 'radical' we will proceed to explain.

The first intimation of a future salvation of all nations can be found in God's promise in Genesis 12:1–3, 'Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."' No nation needed to be left out where the nations blessed Abraham.

Yet the future blessing was inherent in the making of man in the image of God:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Gen. 1:26–28).

The nations of the world depended and depend on whether they bless or curse Abraham. At the very beginning man was given the mandate as we see it in Genesis 1:26–28. This is a large story because following the sin of Cain and the obedience of Abel, the world (roughly speaking, the nations, divided into those who went the way of human pride, and those who developed as covenant peoples. Great wars ensued between the idolatrous nations, and more strongly against the covenant people of God. Certainly the blessing was seen in Abraham's faithful descendants. Looking back over history we see that blessing firmly established in them. That is why we regard the day of God's blessing as so remarkable. Through Jesus of Nazareth, his incarnation and saving acts, the world was saved. Only through his coming could salvation come to any and to all, otherwise the death which came to all humanity in Eden was the everlasting doom of the whole human race. This is the joy and peace of saving grace. Hence Paul's answer to the Philippian gaoler, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved'. What immense love, peace and joy came to that house through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ! Why believing on him saves people we shall later enquire.

PENTECOST AND THE WORLD CHANGE THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our next step is to examine a context where thousands of Jews questioned Peter on the day of Pentecost. The great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that day brought a dynamic change in the people of God. This was the day on which the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit—'the blessing of Abraham'—came to Israel, 'that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (Gal. 3:14). Jesus' Johannine teaching concerning the Holy Spirit prepared the apostolic band fully for Pentecost. We will see that the final change in the entire world began on that day! The death of Eden was to turn to the life of Pentecost. Jesus had said on one occasion, 'The thief comes only

to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).

As we know, Jesus did not teach much regarding the Holy Spirit until the last night—the night of his betrayal. This may well have been because Jesus wanted to have his teaching concerning the Holy Spirit to be fresh in their minds, especially as being their new Counsellor and Leader–Teacher. In fact the Holy Spirit was to lead the church in a world which would be loved by God but be hated by it as to its created form.

The primary ministry of the Spirit would be: (i) to equip the apostles with teaching and power by bringing back to them the memory of all they had been taught by Jesus (John 14:25–27); and (ii) to lead the church into all the truth (John 15:26) so that they can witness to all truth. John 16:7–11 is a most important passage:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go away, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince [convict, convince, judge] the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Why is this passage so important? Because men fell in the garden of Eden and are spiritually dead, unable to be convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment, they need the Holy Spirit to do what no person can do. It needs all the power of the Holy Spirit to do this. The Holy Spirit alone can give life by virtue of Christ's works of salvation. The whole world has to be changed. Israel, no less than other people, needs the Spirit to effect this change. John the Baptist indicated that Israelites needed to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, 'I baptise you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Matt. 3:11; cf. Acts 1:6–8). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit baptised the 120 believers and in turn they spoke the gospel which caused the crowd to cry out, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'

Peter's response to this desperate cry was, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). We note: (i) that out of the Jewish multitude some 3,000 were 'cut to the heart'; (ii) they cried out; (iii) 'they received his word'; (iv) they 'were baptized'; and (vi) 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'. This response was in contrast to their previous rejection of Jesus of Nazareth being 'both Lord and Christ'. How come then that change was so radical? Many of them had assented to the death of Jesus. Now they were turning from Judaism to faith in Jesus Christ. We gather that they were 'cut to the heart'. What caused such a cry from this multitude? The answer is that they knew they were wrong as a nation in rejecting John the Baptist. What caused such a radical change in heart? It was the work of the Holy Spirit: for nothing else could accomplish the transformation of so many people in so short a time. Jesus raised from the grave brought a continuing harvest of faith in Christ and the rapid growth in the new community. Writing this account one feels one's inability to awaken the world to the importance of the event. The sin of Eden brought the death of mankind: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit brought terror such as was known to the errant Judaists on the one hand and the sinners of the Gentiles on the other. To both groups it brought forgiveness and life. We must not think a sprinkling of life and light

came to the world, but an enormous change began at Pentecost and so much so that there would issue a multitude out of every nation and tribe and people and tongue. Jesus once said, 'I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth' (Matt. 8:11–12). By Christ the kingdom had been won and as John the seer later recorded in Revelation 21:22–27:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

In that day of the new birth of the entire creation (*palingenesia*), when he is seated 'on his glorious throne', those who have faithfully followed him 'will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life' (Matt. 19:27–30).

We have lifted the veil enough to see the hope sufficiently to know 'the inheritance of the saints in light' so that we 'may abound in hope'. Later, Paul would attribute abounding in hope to the power of the Holy Spirit as one of the prodigious powers of Pentecost (cf. Rom. 15:13, 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope'). In making this point we highlight all powers of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' promise of Acts 1:8, 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth'. How deep a work, we repeat, of the Spirit that the dynamic operation of world change and humanity change should begin at Pentecost and proceed to the glorious *telos* or completion of God's glorious plan. This is of the essence of faith, hope and love. One might call it 'the Second Operation' or even 'the Second Beginning' or 'the New World'. Ephesians 1:3–22 spells out this *intention* or *telos* of God for His creation. It, along with the remainder of the Letter, needs to be studied closely. At the same time Romans 1:17 – 3:20 needs to be studied so that the rebellion, fall and death of humanity may be understood, especially man's becoming homicidal—see Romans 1:28–32, including his drive to destroy God and all human relationships. The key to his sinful state will be a drive to kill: his drive for his new state will be a drive for life. The Holy Spirit in the New Testament is always the Spirit of love (Rom. 5:5); the Spirit of fellowship (Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 13:14); of love, joy and peace (Gal. 5:22–25); and of unity (Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:1–5). See the powerful description of the state of the *ecclesia* in Acts 2:43–47, and 4:32–35.

Above all the description of the Holy Spirit, most used of all is that he is 'the Spirit of life', referring both to original creation, sustaining creation, and the renewal of things which have 'devived' (cf. *Dry Bones Dancing!* by Geoffrey Bingham, NCPI, Blackwood, 1983, pp. 1–4). In opposing God man dies from the beginning. He walks in darkness and death when he does not walk in life. The apostle John emphasises this strongly in the New Testament, just as the Old Testament writer of Genesis discourses on the subject of creation. Nothing will show this more than the passages such as Genesis and Isaiah that link generation with life and light. Job and Psalms and other prophets carry on this teaching. So much so, that we come to see the unity of the

initial creation and the light, power and love of the consequent creation are of one piece. The doctrine of *perichoresis* which is at the heart of all Christian doctrine enlightens us in the teaching of the utter union of the Three Persons which comes as the ultimate inter-relatedness of God and man, and so of man and man and then of all creation, we being participators of the divine nature, whilst never becoming God in essence. Man is one with God by grace, always needing salvation. That is why Pentecost must be first the place of salvation as it is simultaneously the birthplace of the community of love, God's *ecclesia*, the home of transformation, the tabernacle of redemption and then of God and man in perichoretic unity, the state of total reconciliation.

From a somewhat different angle it means that whilst God and man and all things are utterly one, yet this is not after a prescribed order of behaviour. It is how things really are existentially and why we need the special wisdom of God to understand them. This is indeed the eternal plan of God come to fulfilment.

Pentecost: 'Brethren, What Shall We Do?'

The happening on the Day of Pentecost was that 120 believers were gathered together in a certain place when the Holy Spirit came as Acts 2:1–4 describes the event:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Peter identified the happening with the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32, which needs to be studied in detail. No doubt it is to be identified also with prophecies of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, especially when we note the relationship of the coming of the Spirit and the coming of the Kingdom.¹ Certainly the event is attended by happenings which seem to be supernatural signs, wonders and fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Given the teaching of John the Baptist and Jesus, the future of the people of God and the nations of the world—including the triumph of the Kingdom of God—nothing will happen apart from the event which we now call 'Pentecost'. What Peter taught is the key to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So powerful was it in its content and the dynamic of its truth that the impact began the new era—the era of the Spirit. The people who heard the message became aware that they had rejected the teaching of John and Jesus, and in so doing were on the edge of apostasy.

Horrified, i.e. 'cut to the heart', they cried out to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' (AV). Let us not hurry over these words. How often are human beings cut to the heart? Certain speakers may have the gift of rhetoric and of histrionics and deeply affect listeners, but this is not the case here. These listeners are shocked beyond measure: being God's people they have murdered their Messiah! The Holy Spirit's ministry of conviction (John 16:7–11) has bitten deeply. They have rejected the plan of God and yet are not aware of their dastardly deed. At a later date the writer of the Book of Hebrews warns the church that it is in similar danger to the people of God who had rejected the word of God in the wilderness:

¹ See *The Day of the Spirit* by Geoffrey Bingham (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985) and its subsection 'The Era of the Spirit' (pp. 41–92).

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,
'Today, when you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.
Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, "They always go astray in their hearts;
they have not known my ways."
As I swore in my wrath,
"They shall never enter my rest."'

Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, while it is said,

'Today, when you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'

Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And with whom was he provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief (Heb. 3:7-19).

Here at Pentecost the Holy Spirit has met Israel with an even deeper confrontation, hence the shock, the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and the response of 3,000. Jesus had told his disciples before his ascension that when the Spirit would come upon them then they would receive power. So Israel would be saved and the ministry proceed to Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and all other nations of earth. This indeed was what happened and is happening. Other parts of the New Testament and Old Testament tell us that Satan and his kingdom of darkness will be destroyed:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 'For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one (1 Cor. 15:20-28).

In a day when preaching takes the 'softly softly' approach, and God is said by many proclaimers to have no wrath, and when persuasion, rather than confrontation, is the manner of proclamation, few people cry out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' No fear of the Lord brings no repentance, no confession or conviction of sin. Likewise, no gratitude of love, no relief, no freedom. Where there is understanding, there is conscious gratitude and openness to the cleansing, liberating and guilt-removing power of the Cross as also the life-giving power of the Resurrection. Those who have existed in spiritual death have now come into spiritual, everlasting life.

'Believing unto salvation' has become a radical and transforming crisis, process and *telos* of the human race, and is not completed in a moment of time. That it is these three things teaches us that God's plan deals radically with man and creation via the work of Christ. So we speak of creation, decreation and recreation, or of creation

(giving of life), loss of life (death), and the giving of new life (recreation). We have to realise that God's plan was to so take man through these processes that he would arrive at His—God's—fulfilment and be completely in the image of God. To have full salvation is to be taken through the processes which bring each person through the saving grace of God to believe and so know God until he/she is justified, sanctified, and perfected, transformed into the full likeness of God. The new age will be one which is called the City of God, the Bride, the People of God. The promises of God constitute eternal hope.

Realising that history is to produce a peerless Community of Love in which all are in the image of His Son, that all things will be heavenly and truly spiritual, we now know that salvation is a powerful and high venture, including as it does the fulfilment of justice, the destruction of all evil, the abolishing of death and the establishment of the eternal Kingdom of God. It will be correct to talk of 'a new heaven and a new earth'. To cover the whole subject is/will be, a large order.

CONCLUSION TO STUDY ONE OF 'BELIEVING UNTO SALVATION'

We may have begun this study thinking it would be simple to cover and understand. This could never be the case. We will never understand the matter of the wonderful state of the initial creation because we are all in a state of spiritual death. So we will never understand anything until we are brought to life. To bring us to life calls for an amazing work of the Three Persons of the Triune Godhead. We must be taught what it is by the reading of the word of God. So many facets are there to this teaching, and these call for spiritual wisdom and not mere intellectual ability. They also call for personal humility and acceptance of what is heard in the heart.

We are encouraged to hear, to knock, to seek and to find. In this spirit of the mind we will discover that we will be taught and understand. Comprehension will bring belief in God and believing will bring us to the fullness of salvation.