

2.11.24

There Is Only One Plan Of Salvation.

John 3:5 is Acts 2:38 is the one and only plan of salvation for the Church age.

JV Maurer Sr

How are we saved in the Christian era?

What is the much-needed plan of salvation? Men seeking righteousness with God would come to ask this question. The book of Acts records people who did. How do we know the answer? We look to Jesus, its author.

Jesus acting with great economy of time

Revealing the plan of salvation for the Christian era began early in the ministry of Jesus on a starlit night in Jerusalem. He was speaking with a ruler of the Jews named, Nicodemus. The man had expressed faith in Christ, so the Lord proceeded to build on his faith. He gave Nicodemus a peak at the Christian plan of salvation. It came in the form of John 3:5.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

You probably immediately noticed a certain force about it. It's as invariable and absolute a statement as you will ever hear. Jesus double-amenated it prior to saying it, adding an extra layer of firmness. You are wise to understand it because it can save you. You are actually bound by it. You will not be saved any other way.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This word of Jesus will stand forever. No one coming after Christ will alter or diminish it in any way— no Apostle, angel, or man, regardless of his name. No amount of education can remove it. It is settled in heaven and will not erode with time. Its strict luster will never be tarnished. After twenty stormy centuries of Christianity, no one has done anything to obliterate this truth. It's as true today as ever.

Concurrently narrow and yet sufficiently wide

John 3:5 is strongly inclusive and exclusive at the same time, as absolutes always are. It bars entry into the Kingdom of God except by one sole means, a new birth of water and Spirit. But that singular means, though highly exclusive, admits all who obediently come through its narrow door. That strategic design satisfied God's infinite wisdom perfectly.

The way is narrow but not too narrow to exclude anyone, sufficiently wide but not borderless. No serious seeker of salvation, within the parameters of the Church dispensation, would find it inaccessible at any time. All who enter by its tenets would be rewarded unimaginably in the Kingdom of God with new life; all who quibble about the way provided, left to find their own way out of a doomed state. Every careless person, failing to understand its simple elements with certainty, jeopardizes his very soul.

Truer words have never been spoken.

Of course, John 3:5 is one hundred percent true. Everything Jesus ever said is. Additionally, we all prove its veracity one way or another. Those who believe and obey it will prove it positively. Those who try to be saved another way will prove it negatively. In the end, souls that are saved and those that are not will all eventually show the dazzling truthfulness and unmitigated narrowness of this word that fell from the lips of the Savior and Judge of all mankind. Those that entered the Kingdom by it will praise God for making His mercy and grace so available. Those who do not will be a testament to the fact that there truly was no other way. And, over the course of Christianity, every kind of way had been imagined.

Jesus was the consummate communicator.

Jesus' Word is remarkably and, of course, purposefully, captivating. It almost forces itself upon one's attention. Once you hear it, you never forget it. Its paradoxical nature is enigmatic and startling at the same time, gripping the hearer. How could someone possibly be born again? It strikes every person hearing it for the first time with perplexity, as it struck Nicodemus when it was first spoken by the God-man. It baits a person to know its resolution.

No less remarkable is the fitting nature of the words, *born again*. No pun intended, but they are pregnant with meaning. They imply a new birth which imparts eternal life rather than the short span we gained at natural birth. — Eternal, this time, because it is untainted with sin. It suggests a new kind of life in the midst of a world otherwise dominated by death, the scourge of the race created in the image of God. Hence, this new birth is the solution to the human dilemma! — An escape from sin and death! — And an eternal fitness to live with God! It is a wonder of wonders.

What Jesus said was profoundly theological, too, especially to one learned in the Word, as Nicodemus was. It had been excavated by Christ from Old Testament prophecy and polished to brilliance. It was too overwhelming, though, for Nicodemus to suddenly grasp such a cogent and powerful bit of theology formed by the very mind of God. Its brightness was blinding, numbing, dumbfounding. It

was like looking into the noonday sun from the perspective of midnight. Its radiance could not be understood or appreciated. Probably no one would have reacted any better than Nicodemus. The world since has had two thousand years to process the shining nugget but, even after so long a time, learned people say equally dumb things as Nicodemus.

Its sheer potency

John 3:5 is ineffaceable. It's harder than diamonds. It's stronger than steel. It's indestructible. Its substance is the breath of God. It's sharper than a two-edged sword. Two millennia later, it is still profitable for instruction and doctrine. It still saves and remains the world's sole means for entering the Kingdom of God.

Enter the Kingdom of God

Notice this grand theme— entering the Kingdom of God. Prior to this, the Bible focused on the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, which comprised all of God's people. But Jesus introduced the Kingdom of God/heaven and calls us to it. It is identifiable with the Church age. It began on the Day of Pentecost and will continue until the Rapture. Entering that realm will result in our going to heaven at His return, the physical Kingdom, where Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. Never has there been a clearer or more desirable hope for the human race. And, its scale is infinite. While we can't fully appreciate infinity, we understand enough to realize nothing could be greater. It should only require the smallest amount of wisdom to be sufficiently moved to seize the eternal prize before us and to take the greatest care that we are truly in the Kingdom. Heaven is an area of interest where fear of missing out should reach its zenith. Only a small or ill-affected mind could not be aroused by its powerful lure.

The necessary means to enter: water and Spirit

Water and Spirit— they carry their own intrigue. Upon hearing or reading, your interest meter instantly moves far right. The elements draw you in by their mystique. The seeming blend of the natural and spiritual suggest something essential and effective, but not too difficult. —Water, simply because of its commonness, availability, and abundance. It also has a strong association with cleansing. —Spirit, because that's what God is and everyone knows He's generous and there's a lot of it. And it's associated with producing life.

The combination seems to have a built-in driver to make you immediately curious as to its meaning and, at the same time, imparts a desire to fulfill it. Maybe that's largely because it's from Jesus, fresh into His ministry— a ministry that will be all about forgiving sins and filling people with the Holy Ghost, a full two thousand years worth.

Even if you don't know what water and Spirit mean when first hearing about them, it only requires a little understanding of how language works to realize that water and Spirit are the elements necessary to enter the Kingdom of God. In other words, water and Spirit are the plan of salvation.

The *cannot enter* aspect

Jesus, before Nicodemus' eyes, breathed Scripture into existence and, in doing so, did not mince words. He said that, unless a person follows this certain prescribed way, involving water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom realm. If language means anything, Jesus just said *there is only one plan of salvation*. Drawing from His wisdom in another place, we may conclude it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than to change that theological fact. Because it's the Word of God, it's more stable than the universe itself.

The negative way of stating the plan of salvation ("Except a man be born of water and Spirit, *he cannot enter...*") presents it much more forcefully than the positive ("A man can enter the Kingdom of God by water and Spirit."). It actually serves to emphasize the fact of there being a singular, one-for-all-persons plan of salvation.

You would expect that simplicity would receive a warm welcome by all. But, for whatever reason, mankind resents this hard and fast theological fact and desperately tries to deny it, even though each person is an equal beneficiary of its grace, eliminating the need for a second means of salvation. There may be no other aspect of doctrine that modern Christianity hates more than the fact of there being a single plan of salvation for the entire human race. I would ask, "What could be more fair?" Of course, the reason people don't want to believe there is only one way is because they don't want to relinquish theirs and they're plenty willing to allow others to hold to their own if they may do the same. The result: "Let's deny that there can only be one way to be saved. Let's make the person who holds that view look vain, narrow, and silly."

Sadly, crossing the teaching of Jesus doesn't change that truth.

Looking in the rear view mirror of time

I remember in the 60's and 70's when the fact of there being just one plan of salvation was accepted. Most denominations held on to the belief that their view of salvation was the only view. They held that conviction because they understood that the Bible teaches there is only one way to be saved. They insisted theirs was the only way, then, because to do otherwise was to deny a prominent teaching of Scripture. Since then, men have become less confrontational, but more accommodating of false doctrine. I don't think there is an argument about which is worse.

Over time, Jesus elaborated on the elements of water and Spirit.

Regarding the Spirit, Jesus made reference to it constantly. See John 4,7,14,16,20. He not only taught that it would be available to all men but that it was to be received by all. In fact, John the Baptist first referred to the One he would herald into the world as being the Spirit-baptizer (Matthew 3:11), indicating that anyone who would believe in Christ was to be a recipient of His Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter explained to the puzzled onlookers that what had produced the phenomenon of speaking in tongues was Christ pouring out His Spirit (Acts 2:33). Paul later described the New Testament as being the dispensation of the Spirit (2Corinthians 3:8), so universal is the promise to receive it. He also concluded that, if any person didn't have it, he did not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). Needless to say, receiving the Spirit is a major component of Christian salvation.

Jesus' reference to being born of the water was probably recognized by the Apostles, either when it was spoken or shortly thereafter, as referring to water baptism. Since John the Baptist, baptism was the revolutionary new way of receiving remission of sins. It had prevailed as a practice even under the ministry of Jesus (John 3:22-24). The specific formula to be used in the Christian era was not revealed until the post-resurrection visits of Christ in His Great Commission.

Jesus' earthly ministry was largely preparation for the Church age, for which He would ultimately give His sinless blood. That was the purpose for calling His twelve Apostles. They were trained and taught in order to carry the Good News into the Christian era. By the time His teaching of them was through, the Apostles had perfect understanding of the Christian tenets of faith. They knew what the elements of water and Spirit entailed. Upon receiving the last segment of the Great Commission on the day of Christ's ascension, they went from the Mount of Olives to an upper room in Jerusalem to await the momentous Day of Pentecost. The finale of the Great Commission congealed into repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost (Luke 24:45-49).

Peter would reveal the plan of salvation to the world (Matthew 16:19).

Jesus made Peter to be the spokesman of the plan of salvation on the Day of Pentecost. It is recorded in Matthew 16:15-19.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

When the curious spectators on the Day of Pentecost inquired about the poured-out Spirit, Peter took his cue to preach to them about the crucified Christ. When they were gripped with conviction, they asked what to do. At that point, Peter revealed to them the plan of salvation: **Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost** (Acts 2:38).

The authority Jesus gave Peter to bind and loose is evidenced in the next verse. He stated that the plan of salvation he had just revealed is for the entire Church age: **For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call** (Acts 2:39).

Three thousand souls were saved that day. As the Gospel went into the world, all New Testament ministers preached the same salvation message— no exceptions.

Acts 2:38 is the fulfillment of John 3:5. It is the new birth experience of water and Spirit. It reveals the all-important elements of water and Spirit to be water baptism in Jesus' name for the remission of sins and the infilling of the Holy Ghost. And, as one would expect, it was declared to be for everyone.

The only logical conclusion is that there is only one plan of salvation. In fact, there couldn't possibly be another because this one is perfect.

Peter reflecting

In his first epistle, Peter acknowledged that the people to whom he was writing had received the born again experience (1Peter 1:22-25). He summarized it as resulting from their obedience to receiving the incorruptible Word of God.

22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

That word was first introduced by Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, and confirmed by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, later by others (Hebrews 2:3). And, as the Word of God, it will endure forever. The implication is that the plan of salvation can never change. As Jesus emphasized to Nicodemus, **All persons must be born again** (paraphrase of John 3:3,7).

Conclusion

For the entirety of the Christian era, there has been and will be but one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). Time, geography, and persons cannot change the Gospel. The same plan of salvation is sufficient to save every soul who surrenders to Christ. To know of Acts 2:38 is to be not far from the Kingdom of God. To obey it is to enter.