

Chain Reference: Salvation

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Introduction.

- A. Of all the topics that we might conceivably study with an outsider, probably the one that is nearest and dearest to our hearts is the topic of salvation. All of us who are Christians understand the responsibility we have to teach and to save the lost, and if ever we get someone else to the point of studying with us, it is likely that we're trying to get them to obey the gospel. That makes salvation a good topic for a chain-reference sermon.
- B. Now, of course, even though this is an extremely important topic, it is also a familiar one. There are brethren in this auditorium tonight who have been studying the Scriptures about salvation for 50 years or more, and of all the topics in Scripture, this is the topic where we are likeliest to be able to quote book, chapter, and verse.
- C. Nonetheless, there are a number of reasons why we should study this topic tonight. First of all, not all of us have been Christians for 50 years, and our younger brothers and sisters need Biblical tools to teach the lost too. Second of all, just because we've been studying this subject for a long time doesn't mean that we will be able to repeat verbatim everything we've heard. Some of us just don't have a good memory for Scripture citations, and some of us go blank when we're put on the spot. Sometimes, we need things written down.
- D. Once again, we're going to do this in a chain-reference format. For those of you who have missed the previous explanations, here's the way it's going to work. On a blank page in the back of your Bible, write down the word, "Salvation." Next to "Salvation," write John 3:16, which is going to be our first Scripture this evening. Then, once we turn to John 3:16 and discuss it, write down 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 in the margin next to it, because that will be the second Scripture in the study. If you continue this process of writing the next Scripture down in the margin by the current Scripture, at the end of the sermon this evening, you will have an eight-verse study on salvation for which you need remember nothing but that it starts in the back of your Bible. Folks, this kind of study is what saves souls. Let's go through this chain reference on salvation.

I. The Steps of Salvation.

- A. When salvation is traditionally taught, it includes five steps, but I've never really seen much point in discussing the first step. After all, someone who is sitting down across the kitchen table from us has already heard the word, so teaching on it is unnecessary. We're going to begin this evening, then, by looking at **John 3:16**. As I said just a moment ago, write John 3:16 down in the back of your Bible next to salvation, and then turn to it with me. This is one of the most familiar passages in the entire Bible. In fact, even many non-Christians know it by heart. However, it's still something we need to present because it shows the importance of belief.
- B. Some folks out there are universalists. They believe that the blood of Jesus automatically saves everyone, whether they are Christian, Hindu, or atheist. What Jesus tells us here, though, is that His offer of salvation is universal, but the salvation itself is not. Instead, only those who believe in Him will have everlasting life. Jesus does not require a blind, unreasoning faith from us. Instead, the Bible makes clear that it provides enough evidence that an honest, rational human being will believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
- C. Once we've gotten the concept of belief down, we can turn to our next passage, **2 Corinthians 7:9-10**. Write this one down in the margin next to John 3:16, and then turn with me to the passage so we can read it together. Here, we see the apostle Paul emphasizing the importance of repentance. As this passage makes clear, there are two ways we can consider our sin with sorrow. On the one hand, we can share in the sorrow of the world. This is the sorrow of the gambler who walks out of the casino with empty pockets. He's sorry he lost, but he's already planning to come back tomorrow to see if he has better luck with sin then.
- D. On the other hand, we can have godly sorrow, which is not just sorrow at the ill effects of sin, but sorrow that we chose to do evil and disobey God in the first place. This is the sorrow that produces repentance, which is a change of heart followed by a change in action. When we repent, we resolve not to sin anymore and do our best to follow up. Repentance is necessary for salvation. Jesus doesn't save us from our sins just to write a blank check for further sins, so that Christians can go out, sin all they want, and not pay the penalty. Instead, Jesus died for us because we wanted to be righteous but needed help getting there. Only if we are truly trying to do His will does His grace apply to us. That's why repentance is an essential part of the plan of salvation.
- E. Following repentance, we have confession, which is urged upon us by **Romans 10:9-10**. Write this down next to 2 Corinthians 7:9-10, then turn to it and follow along with me. As Paul tells us here, just as we are supposed to believe in our hearts, we are supposed to make confession with our mouths, both of those things being necessary to our salvation. In our traditions, we typically use Peter's confession from Matthew 16, where he declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That confession will certainly get the job done, but it's not required. In fact, any confession of the Lordship of Jesus in our lives and of our desire to be His disciple will do. Only as we do this, confess Jesus before men, will He confess us before His Father in heaven.

- F. As probably most of you were expecting, we're next going to turn our attention to the subject of baptism, the final step of God's plan of salvation. We see it described in **Acts 2:38**. Hopefully, you know the drill by now. Write Acts 2:38 down in the margin next to Romans 10:9-10, then turn to the Scripture with me. Here, Peter's audience of Jews on the day of Pentecost has asked how they can atone for participating in the murder of Jesus, and this is Peter's reply. The text really could not be clearer. Peter tells these Jews that they need to repent and be baptized to receive the forgiveness of their sins. The opposite implication is obvious. If either they do not repent or they are not baptized, they will not receive forgiveness. Baptism is essential.

II. A Defense of Baptism.

- A. As most of us know, though, what seems so straightforward and simple in the pages of Scripture is anything but in the world around us. If we can even think of a way to mess up the subject of baptism, there's probably someone in the U.S. today who is practicing baptism that wrong way. There are those who teach that baptism of the Holy Spirit is what saves. There are those who argue that infants should be baptized. There are even those who argue that baptism is not essential to salvation at all. Let's look at what the Bible says to all these.
- B. Let's begin by looking at **Ephesians 4:5**. As always, write Ephesians 4:5 down next to Acts 2:38, then turn to the Scripture with me. In just two words, this verse tells us something critical about baptism, that at the time Paul is writing, there is only one baptism. All baptisms have to be essentially the same and follow the same Scriptural pattern to be the saving baptism of which the Bible speaks. This has some important implications. It means that every positive description of baptism in the Bible excludes all the other possibilities. If baptism could be carried out in more than one way and be soul-saving, there would be more than one baptism. There is one right way to be baptized, and every other way is wrong. It's up to us to learn what the right way is.
- C. We see some important clues about baptism in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in **Acts 8:36-38**. That means that y'all need to write Acts 8:36-38 down next to Ephesians 4:5, and then turn there. This passage is important because it shows that saving baptism is an immersion in water. First of all, the eunuch doesn't cry out, "Give me the Holy Spirit so that I can be baptized!" Instead, he sees water and recognizes that as the essential element of baptism. In teaching him about Jesus, Philip has taught him that water is necessary for his salvation. Any other so-called baptism is not the one baptism of Ephesians 4.
- D. We see the second important point in the description of the actual baptism of the eunuch. As the text says, Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and then came up out of the water. He was immersed for the forgiveness of his sins. This is certainly not the most convenient thing for Philip and the eunuch to do. After all, the eunuch was traveling through the desert. He certainly had water with him. If sprinkling was enough, Philip could have just flicked some water on him and neither one of them would have had to leave the chariot. If pouring was enough, Philip could have just dumped a waterskin on him, once again, without even leaving the chariot. The fact that they got out of the chariot, walked down to the muddy water hole, and went down into the water shows that both Philip and the eunuch knew that full immersion was necessary. Just as it was true for them, it's true for us. We can't be sprinkled or poured. We must be immersed for forgiveness of sins.
- E. We see another extremely significant passage in **Mark 16:16**. Be sure to jot Mark 16:16 down in your Bibles next to Acts 8:36-38 before turning there with me to read it. This is a passage that emphasizes the importance of belief combined with baptism. If we just knew the Bible and nothing else, this would seem like a strange thing to emphasize, but in the religious world of today, we have to mention it. Many of the denominations around us practice infant baptism. In other words, almost as soon as the baby is home from the hospital, they put the poor thing through a sprinkling ritual that they say makes that baby part of God's family. Folks, that can't be. You can sprinkle a baby, you can pour water on a baby, you can even dunk a baby, but you can't truly baptize a baby. As this text makes clear, whoever is baptized must believe first, and a baby can't believe. For that matter, a baby can't repent of its sins, because it doesn't have any sins, and a baby can't confess Christ because it can't even talk yet. God doesn't require any of us to do something that we are incapable of doing, so that teaches us that babies aren't among those who need to be saved.
- F. After this, our last passage of the evening is **1 Peter 3:21**. Write this one down next to Mark 16:16, then turn to it with me so we can read it together. The point of this passage is quite simple: baptism saves. Once we have followed all the other steps of God's plan, this is the point at which we are finally, truly, and forever cleansed of our sins. It doesn't do this simply because we've taken a bath that washes off the filth of the flesh. Instead, baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience. It's asking Jesus to use the authority that He has to wash our sins away. Once we do this in full assurance of faith, we are as sinless as Jesus Himself.
- G. As clear as this is, it's something that many in the denominational world reject. They agree that belief is important, that repentance is important, that confession is important, but they get right up to baptism and they stop. They say that you should be baptized, but that it doesn't save you. Folks, I don't see how you can honestly read 1 Peter 3:21 and come to that conclusion. We've already established what baptism is. This passage establishes what baptism does, and anyone who is honest and believes the Bible will admit this if presented with this passage. It's just simply not possible to say it any more clearly. Baptism saves.

Conclusion. If you want to be saved from your sins, follow God's plan of salvation tonight.