

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

A sermon by Bob Burke

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Midnight in the Prison

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.' Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household' (Acts 16:25-31).

Paul and Silas had been imprisoned for no reason other than that they were preaching the Gospel of salvation through Christ alone. They had been "treated shamefully," according to his Thessalonian letter. Cast into prison, their jailers were ordered to "keep them safely." Not only were they thrown into the deepest, darkest part of the dungeon, but the jailer was also ordered to keep "their feet fast in the stocks."

The stocks were solid steel clamps placed around the ankles. Every time you moved you would have that heavy steel band rubbing your skin raw. And yet, in the midst of this pain and humiliation, Paul and Silas had peace in their hearts. At midnight they sang songs of praise and prayed.

Wow.

What a testimony they must have been. The power and grace of Jesus Christ in their lives was irrepressible. Their bodies could be tortured, their beliefs could be mocked, but their confidence in their Savior was not destroyed.

An earthquake shook the prison. The prisoners were unshackled, and the doors were opened. The jailer bolted awake, and when he saw what had happened was ready to commit

suicide. He knew that if the prisoners had escaped he would be held responsible regardless of the reason.

But Paul assured him all were present. The effect was profound. The jailer called for a light and came to Paul and Silas and asked them the most important question he had ever asked in his life: “What must I do to be saved?”

Amazing transformation! The same man who had banished them to the deepest regions of the prison, who had personally clasped the stocks around the ankles, who had beaten them with his own hands, was now asking them the way to salvation!

These men, he realized, were connected to a higher Power, and that he was helpless against that Power. What a turnaround. Before, he had felt he was safe and the prisoners unsafe. Now he recognized that it was Paul and Silas who were safe; he was the lost one. This suggests that the jailer must have had some understanding of the true God.

Let’s consider the question that he came with and the answer that he received.

Questions and Answers

“What must I do to be saved?” That question is every bit as relevant to our world today as it was to that Philippian jailer nearly 2,000 years ago. It is significant to every human being on earth regardless of age, race or social standing. Whether kings, princes, presidents, governors, judges, preachers, farmers, manufacturers, whatever—the answer to that question inevitably finds its way into the mind of every sincere seeker. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are all in need of salvation. And so, this question that the jailer brought up leads to other questions: Saved from what? Saved how?

The answer is, saved from sin. It seems that the jailer must have had some realization of his guilt before God or he wouldn't have come to the apostles quaking with fear. He approaches them, trembling, and asks, "what must I do to be saved?"

We are going to look at one of the words in that question a little more closely, and that is the little word "must."

The word "must" implies two things:

First, it is an open acknowledgement of being lost. That is the first step to salvation. Unless we realize we're lost, we aren't ready for God to save us. Jesus told a story about two men who went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a publican, a tax collector, the lowest of the low in the view of Jewish society. But the Pharisee had no time to acknowledge before God that he was lost; instead, he used his prayer to inform God how good he was. The tax collector, on the other hand, realizing his sinfulness, prayed a very short prayer: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus tells us that that day, it was the tax collector who returned home justified.

Second, in order to be saved we must be willing to comply with heaven's directions. Naaman was a leper. He was also a commander serving the King of Syria; an extremely powerful man. He had heard that there was a prophet in Israel who could help him. And so, he sent his servant to see this man of God. But when he heard from Elisha what he was to do, he didn't want to do it.

Elisha told him to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman didn't think he should have to travel to a foreign country when there were rivers right where he was that he felt were even better. Fortunately for him one of his servants convinced him that he should do what

the prophet said. He was completely cured of his leprosy as a result. If we are too proud to humble ourselves before God, we have removed ourselves from His care and protection. He hasn't deserted us; we have fled from Him. So long as we're not ready to trust God enough to obey Him, we aren't ready for Him to save us.

Salvation is offered freely to those who will accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Paul and Silas answered the jailer's question thus: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." That same answer is still valid for everyone seeking sincerely the Lord today. Faith in Jesus Christ is the gateway to salvation, there is *no* other way that we can be saved. In Acts 4:12, the Bible is plain: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Jesus is the only hope of the world. That was true in the days of Paul and Silas and it is true today. The plan of salvation is so simple, yet we so often make it so difficult. All we need is simple faith in Jesus, and that faith will bring eternal salvation. That is the only way that God can save sinners. We can't save ourselves, and God can't save us while we are in rebellion against His will. That simple faith cannot help but manifest itself in obedience to God's Word.

People who think that they are exhibiting faith in Christ, while they ignore His clearest counsel, are fooling themselves. Christ is the center of our hope and we need to be thankful that we can come to Him and be saved and that we can receive the power of God to become true overcomers.

There are those who say that to teach that obedience is a requirement of salvation is to teach legalism. They are missing one of the most basic understandings of righteousness by faith. God will judge me not by my righteousness, which Isaiah tells us is as filthy rags, but by the

perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. But He cannot do that unless we have surrendered *all* to Him in the first place. Those who claim that that is legalism are preaching only half a gospel. Just as Jesus justifies us, He sanctifies us. They both come from Christ and they are both equally necessary for our salvation.

How the Sanctification Process Works

No unsanctified thing will enter the kingdom. Sanctification is holiness. To be sanctified is to be pronounced holy. No unholy thing will enter heaven, will it? That's not a rhetorical question; I am asking you, will any unholy thing be allowed to enter into heaven? How then can we say that sanctification is not a part of the salvation process? I can't sanctify myself. I am sanctified through the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. I am no more capable of declaring myself holy than I am of declaring myself justified. If Christ isn't the one doing the declaring, it isn't happening.

Ellen White described beautifully how the sanctification process works in us in the book *Steps to Christ*. Notice how clearly she states that it is the Spirit of God who brings about regeneration, and that in this context regeneration is simply another word for sanctification.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or trace all the chain of circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. Christ said to Nicodemus, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.' John 3:8. Like the wind, which is invisible, yet the effects of which are plainly seen and felt, is the Spirit of God in its work upon the human heart. That regenerating power, which no human eye can see, begets a new life in the soul; it creates a new being in the image of God (*Steps to Christ*, p. 57).

What she is talking about here, is sanctification. Quite clearly, it comes from the Spirit of God.

She continues:

While the work of the Spirit is silent and imperceptible, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to the fact. While we cannot do anything to change our hearts or to bring ourselves into harmony with God; while we must not trust at all to ourselves or our good works, our lives will reveal whether the grace of God is dwelling within us. A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are. The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.

When we have accepted the saving power of Jesus Christ in our lives we will demonstrate it by our obedience. That obedience is a result of our implicit trust in Christ. It is not a means of salvation, it is a demonstration of the acceptance of that salvation.

Seven “Musts”

Seven “musts” are laid down in God’s Word. We are saved by faith through Jesus Christ alone, but the Scriptures are very clear that if we really have that faith in Him, then there are “musts” which the Bible outlines as prerequisites to salvation. Let it be stressed that these things don’t save us but they demonstrate that we have truly accepted the salvation He so freely offers us.

We have spoken before about the paradox of Christianity, and that is, that what we do absolutely does not save us but what we don’t do can cause us to be lost. Our faith in Christ is demonstrated by our willingness to submit to His Lordship over our lives. If we aren’t willing to submit our finite will to His Divine will, we haven’t truly accepted His gift of salvation. That cannot be stressed enough. There is a cheap grace gospel that has become quite popular in the

Seventh-day Adventist Church that teaches that salvation comes through justification alone and that sanctification is simply a “fruit.” It is absolutely unbiblical and it is going to cause more people to be lost than perhaps any other teaching in the Christian world.

We wonder why in the minds of many the standards in our church have become seemingly meaningless. Young people deck themselves out in jewelry and tattoos, and we are stunned by the number of professed Seventh-day Adventists who see nothing wrong with having “a glass or two of wine” or going out to restaurants or shopping on God’s holy Sabbath day. The answer to the question of why our standards have gone by the wayside is very simple: If what we do doesn’t matter, then it doesn’t matter what we do.

Did you get that? Let me repeat it: If what we do doesn’t matter, then it doesn’t matter what we do. If how we live our lives has no bearing on our salvation, then it doesn’t matter what I do because I will still be saved. This is the essence of the cheap grace, or as a Pentecostal friend of mine once put it, “greasy grace” (you just “slip” right into heaven), gospel. If the sanctifying power of Christ is unnecessary for my salvation then I don’t really need it. That is why the evangelical “justification only” gospel so popular among some segments of our church today is so dangerous.

It is very easy to string together Scripture texts to support a justification only position but in order to do so you must completely ignore the countless texts that speak of the necessity of being sanctified as well as justified. The Gospel equation isn’t

Justification = Glorification.

It is

Sanctification + Justification = Glorification.

Let's look at the seven "musts" of Scripture:

One: You Must Be Born Again

In John 3:7, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" If the Bible is divinely inspired and if Jesus is the eternal Word, then nothing could be more important than for us to be born again.

The new birth is a transformation of our natures without which we will never enter the kingdom of God. In John 3:6 Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." God's "musts" therefore, are the point of a fork in the road. One way leads to a humbling of self and an acceptance of the will of God leading to everlasting glory. The other road begins in self-will and can only end in despair and eternal death.

All man-made efforts to qualify for the kingdom of God are utterly in vain. It simply cannot be done. We must be born from above. John 1:12, 13 says,

As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Two: You Must Worship in Spirit and Truth

You must worship God in Spirit and in Truth. John 4:24, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." We can worship God and still not be in a saving relationship with Him if we are not worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth. In Mark 7:7, Jesus said, "In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." I can be driving down a road to a desired destination, but if I'm on the wrong road I'll never get there.

Neither will worship get us into the kingdom of heaven unless we allow the Divine Word of God to be the blueprint for that worship.

In John 17:17 when Jesus prayed to the Father on behalf of His disciples He said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” This brings us to the third “must.”

Three: You Must Obey Him

We must do all that the Lord says. Numbers 23:26, “...All that the Lord speaks, that I must do.”

Balaam spoke from experience when he uttered these words to Balak. He had learned the hard way that you can't circumvent God's “musts.” Balak saw the strength of the God of Israel and recognized that he lay right in His path. He felt that the only way to stop the Hebrew juggernaut was to have a true prophet curse the Hebrews. Unfortunately for him, when his chosen instrument spoke, words of blessing came out of his mouth rather than words of cursing. Hence Balaam's words.

We are very often tempted, because of our human weakness, to bypass certain duties God has laid out before us. We hope that He won't notice. Often the temptation is to bypass biblical obligations that aren't popular or that are difficult, or that require a special effort on our part. But we need to make up our minds that God's “musts” simply cannot be bypassed without taking the risk of being eternally lost. There will always be people who want to substitute their own traditions or religious inventions for the Word of God, but they will eventually learn that there can be no substitute for truth.

Why is the gift of salvation within our grasp? Because Jesus didn't try to circumvent the “musts” that God had outlined for Him. He asked if the Father might take the cup from Him but

He went willingly to the cross rather than try and bypass the “musts” crucial to the plan of salvation. If Jesus had chosen to go the way His human nature was prompting Him to go, we wouldn’t be here in this sanctuary today talking about how we are saved. There would be no salvation.

If Jesus was willing to obey the way of the cross that He knew He must tread, should any less be expected of those (us) who placed Him on that cross?

Four: You Must Believe That He Is

Hebrews 11:6 insists, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

We need to believe that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8); we need to believe that, “He is faithful” (1 Thessalonians 5:24); that “He is able to save to the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25); that “He is true” (2 Corinthians 1:18); and that “with Him there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). When we come to God in prayer seeking to worship Him, we “must” believe that God is always ready to hear our prayers and to answer them when they are in harmony with His holy will.

Five: You Must Decrease

In John 3:30, John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

In the same way, the influence of Jesus in our lives must increase and our sinful selves must decrease. John states a law of the Spirit which is one of God’s “musts” in the realm of the Spirit. We are, at best, only reflectors of the glory that comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is Christ Who is to be seen, heard and felt by mortal men and women, not us.

Our Savior said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32). As we near the Sun of Righteousness we will be enveloped by His glory and we will forget ourselves completely. “Not I, but Christ, be seen, be heard, exalted.” “He must increase, but I must decrease.” That is the law of the Christian faith, and if we have a relationship with Him like John did that will be our desire as well.

Six: You Must Enter the Kingdom through Much Tribulation

Consider Acts 14:21, 22:

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’

Our world is increasingly hostile to God and to His Word and there can’t be any truce between Christ and the world as long as the world continues to set itself against the will of God. As we approach the end, persecution will increase. Revelation 12:12 says, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

First Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” The closer we come to the end, the more Satan will increase his pressure against God’s true followers and we must expect tribulation. The way of the cross is not a red carpet; it’s a pavement of jagged stones.

Seven: You Must Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

This is the seventh “must” that we can’t bypass. Notice that God’s seven “musts” join themselves to one another. We must be born again; we must worship God in Spirit and in truth; we must believe that He is; we must decrease; we must do all that our Lord asks us to do; we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God; and we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Each is a biblical necessity that cannot be bypassed.

The good news about this last “must” is that if we have been faithful in the first six we can rejoice when we come before the judgment seat of Christ. If we have trusted in God to do the things that He reveals to us, the judgment will be the most blessed day of our lives. It will be the day when we are given the crown of life and pronounced holy in His sight. It is the day that we will begin our adventure in His eternal kingdom.

Conclusion

If we are in Christ, if we trust Him enough that we believe that He asks us to do nothing that isn’t for our good, if we submit our mortal will to His Divine will, we will receive the greatest gift that could possibly be made available to mortal men and women; the gift of eternal life.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ (1 Corinthians 15:53-55).

We will have passed from death to life, from mortality to immortality, from a world of pain and suffering and death, to God's earth made new. There, we will hear

a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away' (Revelation 21:3, 4).

That is God's plan for us if we will trust Him enough to do His will. He is our Creator and our Sustainer and He knows what is best for us. God will never, ever, ask us to do anything that isn't what is best for us and we need to respond to His love in a way that lays aside our human opinions, our human stubbornness, and our human arrogance, and place our faith completely in our precious Savior.

That is the decision each and every one of us here today should make. Then we will experience the joy of victory that can come through no other source than our glorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Biographical Note: Pastor Bob Burke serves in the Alberta Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He obtained the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religious Studies in 2003, and is working on the Masters in Pastoral Ministry through the Andrews University InMinistry Program. Presently, he serves as pastor of Camrose, Ryley, and Sedgewick churches. Visiting members and interested persons is a favorite part of Bob and wife Ruth's ministry call. They are also passionate about reaching out to the youth and helping them to make their own relationship with Jesus Christ a personal and empowering one. The Burkes live on an acreage near Heisler, Alberta with their two horses, donkey, cat and degu.