## The Gospel, Salvation & the Sinner (2)

by Harry Osborne

Last week, we noticed that there is a pattern instructing us about the salvation which is revealed within the gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-9). We are instructed to follow that pattern (2 Tim. 1:13; Jn. 12:48-50). But what did Jesus teach us about our responsibility relating to our salvation? That is where we begin this week.

If we want to understand the gospel which Jesus preached, we must start at the beginning. That beginning is not the personal teaching of Christ while on earth, but the preparatory work done by John the Baptist. Mark notes this fact as he begins his gospel account with these words:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mk. 1:1-4).

Thus, the following facts must be understood from the work of John the Baptist:

(1) It was the beginning of the gospel of Christ.

(2) John prepared the way for Jesus through his work and teaching.

(3) The baptism John taught was based upon repentance. In other words, people were baptized as a result of having **first** repented of their sins.

(4) When people responded to John's teaching about repentance, they confessed their sins and were baptized.

(5) The baptism was "for the remission of sins."

(6) The act of baptism took place "**in** the river Jordan" (Mk. 1:5). That place was chosen "because there was much water there" (Jn. 3:23). Thus, the baptism was not sprinkling or pouring, but immersion.

Clearly, part of the message of John the Baptist was that people must repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Lest anyone think this was merely John's idea, Luke 3:2-3 says it was the "word of God" which came unto John. Thus, God commanded the repentance and baptism taught by John in laying the foundation for the gospel of Christ.

During Jesus' ministry, He was asked about the origin of His authority (Matt. 21:23-32). He responded with a question of His own, alluding to the baptism taught by John. He asked, "The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?" (v. 25). Both He and His detractors knew those were the only alternatives. If it was from men, it was vain (Mk. 7:7-9). If it was from heaven, it was from God, thus making it essential.

Their reasoning to arrive at an answer was interesting. "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'" (v. 25). They recognized that they could not say they believed one when they had not obeyed his message. If they really believed John's baptism was from heaven, they would have been baptized!

Jesus confirmed their understanding about the nature of true belief. Matthew 21:32 contrasts the publicans and harlots who had believed John with the officials of Israel who did not believe him. How could it be known that one group believed while the other group did not believe? Simple -- one obeyed and the other did not obey.

Notice the same kind of contrast in Luke 7:29-30. We see that "the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him." If one was not obedient to the teaching coming from God through John regarding baptism, they rejected God's counsel! While some label those teaching the necessity of water baptism as "Pharisees," the truth is that the **Pharisees did not view baptism as essential**. So, when one says baptism is not necessary for remission of sins and salvation, he is in agreement with the Pharisees and their doctrine.

Today, we hear a number of people, including many preachers, saying baptism is not a part of the pattern revealed in the gospel of Christ regarding our salvation. They say one is saved at the point of faith only. How would that have worked in John's time? Jesus said that those who failed to obey did not believe. Might that be the problem with some today who do not obey?

After seeing what John taught about one's responsibility to obey God's teaching to be forgiven of sins, we are caused to wonder if Jesus taught the same thing about our need to obey His teaching to receive the remission of sins.

So, what did Jesus teach in His gospel when He declared the terms upon which we may be forgiven of our sins? Does it state any conditions at all? How can we know the intentions of our Lord regarding this matter? Did He express His will and leave it behind as people today may leave their will behind expressing the conditions for inheriting certain blessings?

The Hebrew writer speaks of Christ's gospel as a "will" or "testament." As in all wills or testaments, the writer notes, "For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives" (Heb. 9:16-17). Thus, Christ's will did not take effect until after He died.

If we want to know the pattern for our salvation today, we do not follow the example of those saved before the death of Jesus. We would not look to Noah and build an ark. We would not look to Abraham and sojourn through Palestine. Nor would we say, "I want to be saved like the thief on the cross." All of those cases were before the death of Christ.

Jesus had a unique opportunity regarding His will. He was able to announce its conditions after He died! This was made possible because of His resurrection. But what did He say about the conditions of His will? The following three passages are parallel announcements of that will which, when taken as a whole, clearly define the conditions for our salvation:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mk. 16:15-16).

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:46-47).

When we gather the sum of the information, what do we find? One must hear the gospel, believe it, repent of his sins, be baptized and continue to do all things commanded by Christ through His apostles. The one who meets those conditions is a disciple of Christ, saved and enjoys the remission of sins. Very simply, those are the conditions and blessings laid down by Christ in His will. None of us has the right to change that will. We cannot take part of it, reject the rest, and still expect the inheritance of salvation.

Was Christ's will taught by His apostles? Did the hearers respond by meeting the conditions given by Christ? We will begin to show next week that the apostles taught Christ's will just as He announced it. Those who were saved responded to the message by obeying it.