

# Saved from sin by Jesus Christ

## The pathway of salvation

- When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, explaining that the child in Mary's womb was conceived of the Holy Spirit, he said to him, 'And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, *for He will save His people from their sins.*' Mat 1:21.
- Jesus did not save us from our sins simply by suffering and dying in our stead. Rather, through His offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary, He pioneered a pathway leading to eternal salvation for those who obey Him. Heb 5:9. On this pathway, we are joined to a process through which we can find deliverance from sin and can become the son of God and son of man whom we were predestined to be.
- With this in view, the apostle Peter opened his first epistle by addressing us as pilgrims who are on a journey from earth to heaven. 1Pe 1:1-2. He explained that we have been born to see our salvation, which is a living hope that is set before us as we journey through life as Christians. 1Pe 1:3-4. Heb 6:18.

## The testing of faith

- Although we rejoice in this hope, we are, at times, grieved in our daily walk because we are beset by various temptations and trials. These trials test our commitment. Through obedience in the midst of these trials, *the genuineness of our faith is demonstrated.* When we are put under pressure and we refuse to draw back in unbelief, or we refuse to deviate to some other belief system, *our faith is purified.* 1Pe 1:6-7.
- In his first epistle, Peter also exhorted us to be sober and vigilant when we are put under this pressure. This pressure comes from the devil, who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Peter explained that the oppressive pressure applied by Satan is a suffering that we all must endure because it belongs to all our brethren in the world. Satan is successfully resisted and overcome as we remain *steadfast in faith*, which is demonstrated through obedience in the midst of pressure and contrary circumstances. 1Pe 5:8-11.
- Peter taught that it is commendable, because of conscience toward God, when we take a stand against sin and endure grief and suffering wrongfully. 2Pe 2:19. However, under pressure some people will deviate from the pathway that Christ has authored for their salvation, and they will be overtaken in a fault. In fact, from time to time, we are all like sheep who have gone astray and must return to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. 1Pe 2:25. The elders, or presbyters, who are among the sheep are to shepherd the flock of God, and to recover those sheep who are overtaken in a fault. 1Pe 5:2-3. Gal 6:1.

## The call to repentance

- The call to repentance is the first word of the gospel, proclaimed by the elders. On Solomon's porch, having illuminated his hearers to their sins, Peter declared, 'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of

refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.' Act 3:19-21. We see that repentance and conversion is essential before a person's sins are blotted out, and it is a condition of obtaining the blessing of eternal life.

- The apostle Paul also emphasised that before we can find forgiveness and be saved from our sins, we must find repentance. 2Co 7:10. Specifically, he wrote, 'For godly sorrow *produces* repentance *leading to* salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.' 2Co 7:10. Significantly, mourning, which Paul described as 'godly sorrow' *precedes* repentance, and repentance *leads to* salvation.
- Godly sorrow is the response that a person makes to the word of God. When a believer is going astray, the word of God comes to them as a command, issued from behind them. Explaining this point, the prophet Isaiah said, 'Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.' Isa 30:21. The word proclaims to them the obedience that Christ has already fulfilled for them when He pioneered the pathway of their salvation.
- The apostle John experienced this ministry of the word. He testified that while he was imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos, he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. He heard, *behind him*, a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last', and, 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.' Rev 1:11.
- It appears that John needed to be reoriented in relation to his work and walk, for he heard the voice of the Lord *behind him*. In response, John turned and was illuminated '*to see the voice*' of Son of Man in the midst of seven lampstands. Rev 1:12. When he saw the Lord, he fell at His feet as dead. Rev 1:17. Having turned to the Lordship of the Spirit, and responded to the word in a manner *worthy* of the call of God, the veil belonging to his present orientation was removed. He was able to see and meet the Lord Jesus Christ, face to face. 2Co 3:16-18.
- The Lord extended His right hand, which contained the seven stars, to John. As He did this, He said to John, '*Do not be afraid*; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. *Write the things* which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.' Rev 1:17-19. Through this initiative from His hand, *in which resided the presbyteries of the seven lampstand churches*, the Son of Man ministered faith to John, enabling him to stand in his name. He then declared to John the works that belongs to his obedience; that is, John was to write the things which he had seen, the things that are, and the things that were to come.
- The word that is ministered to a person who is going astray brings conviction, illuminating them to their sin. It calls them to turn to meet the Lord and to obtain repentance by obeying the word of direction that is being given to them. As we have already considered, this direction is summed up by the command, 'This is the way, walk in it'. Isa 30:21.

## Making confession

- A person begins to mourn as they are enlightened by the word. The darkness of their delusion and self-righteousness is dispelled, illuminating to them the knowledge of their transgression. Their response, as exemplified by King David when Nathan the prophet exposed his adultery and murder, is, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. *For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*' Psa 51:1-3.
- The first statement of a sinner's confession, as they acknowledge their sin and iniquity, is *a statement of their damnation*. In this regard, they are confessing the truth that, on account of their sin, they are not one of the Lord's people. Hos 1:10. To this end, King David's statement concerning his sin, demonstrated the beginning point of true confession. He stated, 'Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight - that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.' Psa 51:4. **With this initial acknowledgement, the** hearer is beginning to demonstrate accountability for their sin.
- It is necessary for a person to identify and confess their sin. However, the identification of one's sin is not, in and of itself, repentance. Viewing one's statement of sin to be repentance, particularly in the first instance, can merely be an action of penance in one's pursuit of absolution for their sin.
- It is most important that presbyters do not get caught in the trap of endorsing the repentance and acceptability of a person on the basis of the sinner's commentary on their condition. This is particularly important where a statement is made to the presbytery without engagement with, or consideration of, those who have been sinned against. Such statements do not demonstrate godly sorrow leading to repentance. Rather, Paul described this response as 'the sorrow of the world' which only produces 'death'. 2Co 7:10.
- **Often the statements of confession, written by a person seeking relief from** condemnation, are a *commentary* on all that they have done. In effect, their detailed self-reflection is an assertion that they see their sin. However, because they say that they see, without acknowledging their blindness on account of their uncleanness, *their sin remains*. As Jesus said to the Pharisees, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, "We see." *Therefore your sin remains.*' Joh 9:41.
- The confession of a person who is sorrowing in a godly manner will continue to progress in detail and in their understanding of the impact of their sin on others. This happens as they receive further illumination in the process of mourning. Highlighting this principle, the prophet Zechariah declared, 'And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his *only son*, and grieve for Him as one grieves for *a firstborn.*' Zec 12:10-11.
- We see, in this statement, a progression from one's acknowledgement of their sin against the Lord, to mourning for their sin against *the little ones* who belong to '*the church of the firstborn*'. Heb 12:23. In this regard, we note that the firstborn is not only Christ, the Person; it also refers to the corporate body of Christ, the church.

## The seven steps of mourning

- A person who has looked on Christ and begun to acknowledge their sin, will mourn with godly sorrow. This is not a pathetic response of condemnation and self-recrimination. Rather, it is a process demonstrating the obedience of faith, which a believer progressively obtains through illumination from the proceeding word.
- Godly sorrow was Christ's intercessory focus in Gethsemane. Christ has already mourned and fulfilled the repentance for each of us. The faith that He gives to us, through the ministry of His word, connects us to this process of mourning, which leads to repentance demonstrated through obedience.
- Describing our participation in this process of mourning, Paul wrote, 'For observe this very thing, that you *sorrowed in a godly manner*. What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.' 2Co 7:11.
- A person demonstrates '*diligence*' through their individual application toward cleansing, restoration, and the recovery of the relationships that have been affected and damaged.
- The term '*clearing of yourselves*' literally means 'apology'. In this regard, the repentant sinner will make apology for the hurt that has been caused by their sin and seek forgiveness from those against whom they have sinned. They will not be justifying themselves or providing a reason for their actions.
- In the first instance, '*indignation*' is the implication of meeting the fiery eyes of Christ. This is a confronting experience, as the prophet Nahum attested, writing, 'Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. Nah 1:6. A person who acknowledges the indignation of the Lord is able to join His indignation. That is, as part of their repentance, they are able to embrace the process necessary for their purification and to stand in obedience and accountability to deal with the cultural matters that require attention within their house.
- A person obtains '*the fear of the Lord*' through the anointing of the Spirit of God in fellowship with the elders. Isa 11:1-2. Jas 5:14. Through the fear of the Lord, a person is delivered from bondage to the fear of death, to join the fellowship of Christ's death. They embrace the implications of their participation in the chastening of the Lord, and obtain wisdom regarding their obedience as a son of God. This is fundamental to the repentance that Christ learned for them.
- '*Vehement desire*' is the evidence of the love of God being poured into the heart of the repentant sinner. Rom 5:5. Describing the love of Yahweh, the Scriptures declare, 'For love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, *a most vehement flame*. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it.' Son 8:6-7. When the love of God is poured into the heart of a hearer, their focus is on their service of others, and on their participation in the fellowship of offering.
- This reveals their renewed '*zeal*' for the house of God and for His people. Psa 69:9. Having been unable to fellowship with an open face in the *agape* meal because of darkness and uncleanness, a zeal for full participation will now become their

motivation. They will speak by testimony and confession, joyfully renouncing the hidden things of shame. 2Co 4:2.

- ‘*Vindication*’, or acquittal, is the final stage in the seven steps of mourning. A person who has been vindicated as been healed of their lameness, caused by their sin and iniquity. Now being regenerated and renewed, they are able to lift up their hands, and strengthen their feeble knees, and make straight paths for their feet. That is, they are restored, completely, to the pathway of salvation that Christ has pioneered for them.

### Teach us to pray

- Calling the elders is not for the sacrament of anointing with physical oil. Jas 5:14. Rather, it is for an adjustment that enables us to discern again our place in the body of Christ and to connect to our works. This anointing enables us to pray our own prayer of faith as the elders also find, with us, the discernment of the Spirit that teaches a person who is sick, how to pray.
- In this fellowship, we are to be anointed with the oil of joy for mourning, and are delivered from the spirit of heaviness as our garments of priesthood are cleansed. This happens as we are restored to the hope of the gospel, with its joy, even though we grieved by its various trials.
- Jesus was anointed for this ministry to us. As He declared, through the prophet Isaiah, saying, ‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.’ Isa 61:1-3. As we receive this ministry from Him, we are able to minister to one another as part of a kingdom of priests.

In Gethsemane we must continue to watch and pray with Christ, lest we fall into the temptation to revert to the actions that come from unbelief - that is, draw back in unbelief. Prevenient grace, accompanying the word of the Lord, gives us the capacity to choose our sonship. We now walk in fellowship with Christ each day, yoked to His obedience that He has fulfilled for us. His yoke, which enables our obedience is easy and light. Mat 11:29-30. We do our works each day through our connection to Christ. This is how repentance works. This message is the gospel that will bring thousands into the kingdom of God.