Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-9-2014



Welcome back to the Mass Notes for 3-9-2014. This week we will examine the creation of man in the Book of Genesis and then the fall of humankind into sin through the temptation of the devil that brought about God's curse upon the earth. Then in the second reading, we will examine God's plan of redemption that He brought about by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Finally, we will study in the Gospel lesson how Jesus successfully resisted the temptation of the devil. Our lesson this week followed a lengthy study last week on the subject of worry. If you haven't read that we suggest you find time to review this from the Mass you attended on Sunday, March 2.

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and covers the sections of creation and the fall of humanity. This text together with the second reading from Romans constitutes the great bookends of human history. On one hand, Genesis records the creation of the universe including the earth, animal kingdom, and humankind. This is closely followed by the ugly record of the day when man sinned against God, which invoked His curse upon the world. On the other hand, the Book of Romans that we will see in the second reading, records in detail God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This is a critically important study this week because we will cover a summary of all of human history, which can be summed up in just four short words: creation, fall, redemption, and glory.

As we move to the first reading let me point out some helpful context since the reading skipped the ending of Chapter 2 in Genesis. The context of the reading from Genesis is that it occurred just after the point at which God created Adam and before He made Eve, the first woman, though she wasn't officially named until Chapter 3 (Genesis 3:20). Chapter 1 recorded the record of the entire

creation, including man. Chapter 2 expands on the creation account by filling in additional details. In the opening of Chapter two God had finished his creation of the universe and had placed Adam on earth in the Garden of Eden with the commandment to cultivate it (Genesis 2:15). He provided clear direction to Adam by saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (2:16b – 17). Subsequently, God formed the entirety of the animal kingdom and appointed Adam with the task of naming every animal and bird (v. 19). The creation story continues:

> *20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:20-25).*

At this point in history man was in the perfect company of God, had the perfect wife named Eve, tilled a perfect garden with unlimited food, and walked around perfectly naked all day. What more could anyone ask for? However, it was just too good to last. Think back to the single commandment that God gave to Adam. He said not to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (v.17). It is easy to look back on Adam and wonder why if he had so much, he had to concentrate upon the one thing that he couldn't have. But, don't we do the very same thing? If we know that the speed limit is 55, why do we feel the need to drive 60 or 70? Just the fact that we have a law almost compels us to break it. Our consideration of whether or not we will break a law is generally tied to the penalty for failing to obey the law. A speed limit law is one thing, but God told Adam that if he broke this one certain law that the penalty would be death (v. 17). Adam had no frame of reference for the devastating effects of death upon his life here on earth.

Now, with this context in mind, let's jump back to verse seven where the first reading begins. As you read, notice the mention of another special tree growing in the Garden.

> *2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch

it, or you will die.'" 4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7)

With the job of creation completed God placed man in the Garden of Eden with trees that were already fully grown (3:6). Adam's wife was then confronted by a talking serpent, which probably wasn't too unusual to her because of her complete lack of history – everything would have been new to her. The first thing the talking serpent told her was to question the word of God. "Indeed, **has** God said?" spoke the serpent to the woman (3:1). The woman restated the warning from God, but added a prohibition about touching the tree, something which wasn't recorded in the warning given to Adam. The text doesn't say whether Adam told his wife not to touch the tree as a protective measure, or whether Eve added to God's prohibition not to eat from the tree. Regardless, had she not touched the tree this whole affair wouldn't have played out the way it did, at least not at this stage of history. [It's almost a foregone conclusion that the Fall was going to happen, it was just a matter of time.]

Next, the serpent tempted the woman a second time by once again casting doubt about the word of God. He said, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 6). There is a nugget of truth in what the serpent said, as is usually the case, since he was a master deceiver and he evidently understood that the woman wouldn't believe an outright lie. What we mean by saying that there was some truth in the statement about not dying is that after both Adam and Eve sinned they did not die physically (3:7), but they certainly did die spiritually. God defines death as separation from Him, which is what happened in their disobedience (Ephesians 4:17-18). God just delayed Adam's physical death for some 930 years. "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Genesis 5:5). We are not told when Eve died. The second element of truth in the serpent's subterfuge was that their eyes *were* opened, as was told clearly in the text (3:7a).

The sin that Eve committed was great, but she at least had the excuse that she was deceived by the serpent. Adam however, could not plead that the devil made him do it. No, the text said, "she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (v. 6e). Adam sinned without having the excuse that he was deceived, he sinned with his eyes wide open, and willfully disobeyed God's law regarding not eating from the tree. God held Adam responsible for his sin and the subsequent curse that He poured out onto His perfect creation, something that must have grieved our Lord to no end. Adam was created first, and was appointed as the leader for stewardship of God's creation, including the woman. Eve was created as the helper (2:18). If we look forward in Chapter 3 we will see that God questioned Adam first about what happened in the Garden. "Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9). In the New Testament God verified that He held Adam responsible for the sin, even though Eve sinned first. We will read about this when we study the

second reading from Romans Chapter 5.

The other special tree in the garden was the "tree of life" (v. 9b). It's important to note that although Adam did eat from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" he didn't eat from the tree of life. Had he done so he would have remained in his fallen state in the cursed creation forever. God said later in Chapter 3, "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (3:22). Instead, what happened was that Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and as a result, his eyes *were* opened (v.7), just as the devil had said they would be (v.4), such that he knew both good and evil. He knew about goodness before he sinned, and after his sin he found out about evil.

The fall of humanity that we read about in the first reading had a gigantic impact upon the world, both on the creation itself, humankind and also the animal world. Just ask anyone that has raised a two year old. Although I haven't had that privilege I do have a story about how the fall has affected even the animal kingdom. My family used to have a golden retriever named Rusty. I remember our beloved dog very well as both of us used to like to go running together. Whenever I went jogging around the country roads in the neighborhood, Rusty used to like to come along with me. He used to run in front of me and then would frequently cross into the woods to follow whatever animal scent he could find there. Rusty just loved running around the woods in the neighborhood. I remember that when Rusty was young he would follow me outside thinking that I was going to take him running. Rusty would then take off down the road and I would call him back. There was an awkward moment when I would call to him while he decided whether or not he was going to obey. He turned his body away from me but looked back towards me while he made up his mind. Frequently he would think it about it for maybe a half a minute while I continued calling, then he would take off running away from me down the road. What a little stinker. He knew that he was being bad but he ran away anyway. This sin wasn't something that we taught him, it was instinctive. The corrupted state of this world frustrates all of us in every layer of life.

The fall of humanity resulted in God's pronouncement of a curse upon His creation. This curse affected men's relationship with women (Genesis 3:15), men and women's relationship with their work (Genesis 3:19), and the ground itself (Genesis 3:17-18). God predicted the ultimate physical death for Adam. "By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

We need to let the depth of the bad news provide a backdrop to the message of hope delivered in the second reading. God sent the Second Adam to redeem mankind from their sin, which is a gift freely given to those who believe God has provided His righteousness through faith. This reading is from Saint's Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context of the reading is that Paul had just explained the crucial concept of justification by faith. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The word "therefore" is present to provide a linkage to what Paul discussed in the previous chapter. Here Paul explained how father Abraham's faith was the reason that he was found righteous before the Lord, not his good works. Paul said,

"For what does the Scripture say? ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3, the capital letters in this NASB version indicates a quotation from the Old Testament). Abraham's good works were laudable, but they didn't merit his salvation from the curse of Adam's sin. Paul said, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (4:2).

As you read the second reading from Romans 5 you will recognize the story we read about in the Garden of Eden.

> *12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12-19)*

Paul said a mouthful in this text, enough that entire books could be written on just one of these verses alone. Here are some of the key points that arise from the reading.

- Salvation, meaning forgiveness of the penalty of sin, is provided as a free gift (v. 15) only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- God held Adam ("one man"), not Eve, accountable for the Fall of Mankind (v.12). All people from Adam onwards are sinners (v.14), except for Jesus (v.18).
- Though everyone even before the Jewish Law was a sinner, those before the Law couldn't be held accountable for the Law which hadn't yet been given (v.13). Nevertheless, humans are accountable to God for the laws that are written on their heart. Paul said, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Romans 2:14-15).
- The sinful state of Adam was imparted to all of humankind from that moment forward. "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (v.19a).
- Death didn't exist before the Fall and came into the world only after sin (v.12b). This negates

the possibility of theistic evolution to explain God's creative process as any form of evolution requires a cycle of death.

- Jesus' sacrificial death resulted in the imputed righteousness of believers, the "gift of righteousness" (v.16, 18).

These foundational insights give us a sense of hope in our day to day lives, if we have turned to Jesus as our righteousness. We no longer have to pay the penalty for our own sins, but we are declared righteous by God if we will live under His provision of grace. The idea of grace is unmerited favor, which means we have been given a gift. A gift that has been given, needs to be received if it is to be useful to the recipient. Have you opened the gift of God's grace in your life by trusting in Jesus Christ as your only source of salvation?

The Gospel lesson from today is from Matthew Chapter 4. As we read in the first reading, Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil and succumbed to his temptation that resulted in the Fall of Humanity. In the Gospel reading we will see how Jesus was also tempted by the devil and how he persisted in his obedience to God the Father. As you read pay special attention to how Jesus dealt with the temptation of the devil, and how this contrasted with how Eve interacted with him.

> *1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matthew 4:1-11)*

We saw that Jesus dealt with the devil's temptation by quoting from the word of God. Notice in the NASB version how easily it is to spot the quotations from the Old Testament since they are shown in all capital letters. Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus resisted while quoting from the word of His Father.

The temptation for Jesus was to get His rightful place of rulership without having to go through the cross. In some ways, all of our temptations have this sense of shortcutting the process in order to attain the glory without the upfront cost. What the devil doesn't tell people is the price tag, which will be paid in full by the person who purchases his shortcut. Jesus saw through his scheme and was

not pushed around by the devil's slick talk or even deceived by the twisting of Scripture. By standing in the midst of temptation, Jesus becomes our strong advocate in our own times of temptation. Hebrews 2:18 says, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." He wants us to call on Him and to ask Him for help. Let's take Him at His word.

How should we go about resisting temptation? Saint Paul provided us with some guidance, and along with what we learned from the readings it should be obvious that we too need to rely upon the word of God to deliver us from temptation. Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). In times of temptation, instead of looking for a loophole, look for the way of escape!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

This week had a lot of powerful concepts for us to consider in our daily lives. Here are some questions to prompt further reflection:

1. Compare the two temptation accounts again and list the ways that Jesus dealt differently than Adam and Eve. What do you learn from His example?

2. The bookends of history are encompassed in this week's reading, starting with the bad news (sin's price tag is death) and moving to the good news (Jesus' payment for our sin). If you were to analyze where you are at today in your relationship with God, where would you place yourself on the continuum of living in your sin verses living in God's grace?

||Living in my sin ——————————————————————||————————————————————Living in God's grace||

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030914.cfm

First Reading GN 2:7-9; 3:1-7 (Plus verses added for Context)

Genesis 2:7-9 NAS95 7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden,

and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:10-25 NAS95 10 Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. 15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. 16 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Genesis 3:1-7 NAS95 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

Second Reading ROM 5:12-19

Romans 5:12-19 NAS95 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

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Gospel Reading MT 4:1-11

Matthew 4:1-11 NAS95 1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil *took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and *said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain and *showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus *said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil *left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Welcome back to the Study Note for the Sunday Mass. This week we will again return to Isaiah and see in the Gospel lesson how the prophecy was fulfilled through Jesus. As in Isaiah's day, we too are living in a land of deep spiritual darkness, one in which we need both spiritual and physical healing through our Savior Jesus. After Jesus' First Advent, Scripture says that the best is yet to come when He returns to set up His Kingdom rule on earth. During this time there will no longer be any darkness because the Lord our God will be our Light (Revelation 22:5). As the believers during Isaiah's time celebrated because of his prophetic message of hope, we too can celebrate because of his prophecy of the coming Light through the return of the Lord Jesus. As we see evil men grow worse and worse (2 Timothy 3:13), similar to what was happening in Isaiah's time, we can look forward to the coming King who will reverse the curse placed upon the world through the sin of Adam (Genesis 3:17).

This week we are going to begin with the second reading and then cover the first reading and Gospel lesson last since the content on those two are closely related. The first reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Last week we looked at the introduction to this Letter that Paul wrote to the crossroads city, a place entrenched in immorality and worship of a plurality of gods. To review, Paul's overall purposes of the Letter were to deal with some divisions in the church, address some serious moral issues, defend his apostolic authority, and to specifically answer several questions from a letter they sent to him (1 Corinthians 7:1).

As you read, what is one word that best summarizes Paul's concern for the Corinthians in this section?

> *10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)*

What word came to your mind which best summarized Paul's concern? For me it was "disunity." Paul was calling the local church in Corinth to unite for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel. Look at verses 17 and 18, just past where the reading stopped. Here we see an insight into why unity was important in the church. Paul said, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel,

not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 17-18). In other words, Jesus sent him to preach the good news so that the minds of the unbelievers would be transformed such that they recognized the power of God. Later in First Corinthians Paul said, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, **so that they may be saved**" (1 Corinthians 10:32-33, emphasis added).

Second, Paul was warning the local church in Corinth *not to unite* along the lines of a "cult of personality" (as has happened in so many churches since then). Paul provided specific examples of how this disunity was happening in the church through the practice of baptism of family members in the house churches of the region. Someone may have said something like, "I am more spiritual than you because **I** was baptized by Paul but you were only baptized by Apollos."

Paul stood in good company with those that called the local church to unity. Jesus said in His prayer about the church, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me **through their word**; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21). Jesus prayed on behalf of His disciples who had believed by firsthand knowledge *and* for those who believed through the *testimony* of His disciples (v.20b, "through their word").Unity is important in the church because it's through this unified message that God's power is revealed. All of the believers after the era of the disciples have come to faith in Jesus through the testimony of "**the word"** and "**their word**." "The word" is the testimony of the disciples through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit written into what we call the New Testament Bible. "Their word" is both the testimony of the disciples *and* the testimony of all believers. Jesus' purpose in this message was a calling for the church of God be unified in their proclamation of the Gospel so that the entire world may believe (John 17:21f).

As we leave the second reading, we will move to the Old Testament reading and the Gospel message. The first reading is from Isaiah, the prophet whom we have studied extensively over the past several months. The context of this section of Isaiah was just after his warning to the Northern Kingdoms that they would be overtaken by Assyria. This was a time of gloom and anguish for the Nation of Israel. He wrote the prophecy and delivered it to Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah so that there would be two witnesses as required by the Law such that when the event was fulfilled his authority as God's spokesman would be confirmed (Isaiah 8:2).

Let's read the Scripture, and as you do it will become apparent who the Galilean is about whom Isaiah is speaking.

> *1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They*

> *will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. (Isaiah 9:1-4 – Verse markings differ in this NASB version.)*

Clearly, Isaiah spoke about Jesus of Galilee (Mark 1:9). He said that people "will see a great light" (v.2b) in the future sense, yet he saw through a telescopic lens of prophecy through which he recorded near term and distant events together. In this case, he saw both the First and the Second Advent of Jesus together as the accomplishment of God's deliverance from their oppressor. Those that are in a state of spiritual darkness will rejoice when their oppressors have been broken (v.4). The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were distant areas just to the west of the Jordan in Galilee that were easily subject to invasion from the foreign enemies. It was in this area that the Lord Jesus called His first disciples, as we will see next in the Gospel message. The Battle of Midian referred to Gideon's victorious battle with his small army of just 300 men waged against the Midianites in Judges 7:22-21:25. It's also important to note that the prophecy of the multiplication of the Nation of Israel (Genesis 22:17) will be fulfilled in the yet future (v.3a).

In the Gospel message Jesus began assembling his first disciples after John the Baptist had been arrested. You will see how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy from the Old Testament reading.

> *12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES– 16 THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:12-23)*

In this message, Saint Matthew confirmed that Jesus did in fact fulfill Isaiah's prophecy and quoted it directly as proof. Since the Law required two witness (Deuteronomy 19:15, Isaiah 8:2), God satisfied this requirement through the testimony of both the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Father at Jesus Baptism (Matthew 3:16-17). Jesus took up where John the Baptist left off, saying the same thing as John, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17).

Then he settled in the same region that Isaiah prophesied would see a great light (v.16). Here Jesus called four men into discipleship and ministry: Simon Peter, Andrew, and finally James and John, called the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). As He began his ministry he went about teaching, proclaiming the Good News, and healing (v.23). How wonderful would it be to have Jesus with us in his human presence so that we could avail ourselves of His powerful ministry? The truth of the New Covenant is that He does live with us each day through the Holy Spirit – teaching us, proclaiming the Good News, and healing us of our destructive ways. May we learn to listen and receive the ministry of Jesus in our daily lives.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading from 1 Corinthians we mentioned the "transformation of the mind" for the purpose of spreading the Gospel message to the world through the power of God. Read the following verses and then answer the question below.

> *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2).*

> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)*

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)*

What are the prerequisites for someone to have his or her mind be transformed in order to be able to recognize the power of God? How does this come about?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/012614.cfm

First Reading IS 8:23-9:3 (verse markings different in the NASB Version)

1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. (Isaiah 9:1-4 NAS95)

Second Reading 1 COR 1:10-13, 17

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 NAS95 10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17 NAS95)

Gospel Reading MT 4:12-23

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES– 16 "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He *said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:12-23 NAS95)

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

A Quick Look at Justification



A Quick Look at Justification

By Jim Hill

The subject of **justification** was one of the things that the former Catholic priest Martin Luther protested against the Roman Catholic Church when he nailed his thesis to the door of the Cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany. Link: http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html Hence the name for the church that was formed out of this movement, the Reformation, the Protestant church. The entire unity of believers I will call the Christian church, whether they are Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or Anabaptist. There are both believers and unbelievers in all of the churches, and only God knows a person's heart. We cannot be their judge, God has this supreme role. Unfortunately, the official doctrine of many of these churches disagree with what is taught in the Bible.

First, realize that within the various churches there are a wide variety of personal viewpoints. For example, some Roman Catholics have chosen to use birth control, in violation of church teachings. Also, there is variation in beliefs in the Protestant church, and also the Christian church as a whole. The concept of the Rapture for example, and infant baptism for another. Also, we see the Orthodox Church appointing an openly gay bishop for example, and while many disagree with that, others

among the majority of leaders agree. The bottom line is that as Christians, there needs to be agreement upon the fundamentals of the faith. Any difference upon these key points is a different Gospel, which as Christians we are called to condemn.

This brings us to the next point, authority. Who has final authority in leadership of the universe of Christian believers? Is it the church, the church fathers, the church teachings, or is it indeed the Lord God? If you agree that God is the authority, has He vested this authority in an elite group of church leaders? What does God's Word say about this, the Bible? The Bible says that the Christian Church, which is the unity of all of us that believe in Jesus for salvation, is a "priesthood of believers." These believers can come from within any Christian denomination, or possibly even none of them. In 1Peter 2:9 Peter says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." In Revelation 1:6 John says, "and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Later in Revelation John said:

> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10)

What sacrifices do these priests offer? Romans 12:1-2 says:

> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Also, 1 Peter 2:5 says, "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

So, all believers are Priests and offer spiritual sacrifices. What about the altar? What does the Bible say about offering physical sacrifices on a modern church altar? Hebrews 7:27 says, "who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."

Once for all, and Jesus said "It is finished" as he died on the cross. A warning is in order here, which is that **anyone forsaking Jesus as their Savior no longer has a sacrifice for sin** (Hebrews Chapter 10 v 26). This is what is taught in the Bible and the Christian Church as a whole. What about the office of High Priest, who fulfills that role now that there is no longer any sacrifice for sin, which was the main purpose of this role of the Jewish High Priest? Hebrews 4:14-15 says:

> Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the

> Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

We can show other verses that will tell you that Jesus is our High Priest, and we as believers are priests with our chief purpose to set about fulfilling the **Great Commission** explained in Matthew Chapter 28 v 16-20:

> ***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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

Now we can come back to the topic of **justification**. The word in the theological construct means in layman's terms, "how you are made right with God." In Romans 3:23 we know that it says "for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God." All, means everyone, except Jesus of course who is the God of the universe, the creator of it all, our Savior. Another way to look at **justification** is how we can be made right with God, "just as if I'd never sinned." Say that quickly, "just as if I'd never sinner." Justified.

How can we be justified with God? How can our sins be blotted out, forever, and we be made right with God? The Bible teaches, and the Christian church believes, that "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." John 3:16 Matthew 18:3 says, "unless you are converted, and become as a little child, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

John 3:3 says "you must be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Romans 10:13 says that "anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Now, briefly, let me move to Luther's primary protests. Over the years the Roman Catholic Church adopted a different theology of **justification,** one not taught in the Bible. The theology that developed through church tradition and councils is as follows: (1) Grace comes through receiving of the sacraments, and (2) the sacraments, along with good works are meritorious towards Salvation. The sacraments themselves, and good works, along with Jesus death and resurrection, and dying without any un-confessed mortal sins, results in justification. As Christians, we would call the process of purification occurring after trusting in Jesus, sanctification. The Bible is clear that justification does not come from the works of men. You may ask, what is grace? Grace is "unmerited favor from God." Unmerited means undeserved. The Christian church teaches, as is Biblical, that we are justified by grace, through faith, alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 says this clearly:

> For it is by grace that you are saved, through faith, and that not of works, it is the Gift of God, lest any many should boast.

This is what was taught by Jesus and the Apostles in the Bible. The Catholic Church now officially teaches that the sacraments (works of men) are meritorious towards salvation. But, like I said before, there are many different ***personal*** views within the Catholic Church. The view that a person

holds will determine whether they enter Heaven Justified, or made right, before the Lord, or they hear the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew Chapter 7 "away from me, I never knew you." Strong words? Yes, but we have a very loving God who wishes that all come to faith in Him and none to perish in the judgment of eternal Hell.

So, what were our marching orders when Jesus left? The Great Commission, which commands us to make disciples of the Christian Church, teaching, and baptizing. Those three things. Our goal is not to specifically make members of a particular denomination or church, but to the universal Christian church, priesthood of Jesus Christ our Lord. We are to make disciples of Jesus, teach others what He taught us to, and Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This needs to be the goal of our lives. As Christians, every morning that we wake up we need top ask ourselveshow we are doing on the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Our answer will determine the extent of our eternal blessings in Heaven.

I hope that this clarifies some of the misunderstandings that you may have. For some reason many people are afraid to discuss these very important matters. I have that this is especially true among my Roman Catholic friends and family. The life we spend here on earth is miniscule compared to what we will spend in eternity. We must know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

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The Inside Story



Originally by J. Vernon McGee (http://www.ttb.org)

Would you really like to know how to get to heaven?

A few years ago railroads and airlines printed what were called "time tables." They all laid claim to the better route to your destination. They went so far as to print their line in big boxcar type, while their competitor's line was put in the smallest type.

The different denominations and churches all have their peculiar route to heaven. The various sects and isms claim to have a monopoly on the only way to a blessed eternity. Which way shall we go? Certainly all of us want to go to heaven. Most assuredly we want to take the proper route. Which is it?

Instead of listening to this babel of voices all about us, why not listen to God? Here is what He says in the Bible. This is the inside story on God's way to heaven. It is the gospel according to the Author.

God tells the truth about mankind:

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10)

"For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and does not sin." (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

"…For there is no man that sins not.…" (1 Kings 8:46)

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

God says that He must punish sin:

"Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sins, it shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4)

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

God tells the inside story about His remedy for sin:

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

"God commends [demonstrates] His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed." (l Peter 2:24)

"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5)

"For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

God wants to save you and will save you if you will follow His instructions:

"He who believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he who believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)

"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your household." (Acts 16:31)

"To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:43)

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name." (John 20:30, 31)

God definitely declares that there is only one way to be saved:

"Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by Me." (John 14:6)

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

"Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25, 26)

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (l Timothy 2:5)

Christ extends to you a personal invitation:

"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and he that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37)

Now it is up to you. You have the inside story. What are you going to do about it?

More About Salvation: The Four Spiritual Laws:

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The-Inside-Story.pdfDownload

Introductory Bible Study



Introductory Bible Study

In referring to angels, the Bible has this verse in it: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14) Please consider the following thought material:

(1) Can you ever remember a time when you had something which you could describe as an angelic intervention?

(2) What is salvation? Do we all inherit salvation by default or do only good people inherit it?

(3) Upon what standard should we judge ourselves good, and bad?
Let's say that we decided that our standard would be the Golden Rule, which is to do unto others as you would have done unto yourself. Then, on this basis, how are each of us doing according to this self-imposed standard? Be honest. For myself, I fall far short upon the basis of the Golden Rule.

I have spent a fair amount of time looking at other religions including Mormonism, Jehovah Witness, and Islam. This is in comparison to Christianity, which I hesitate to call a religion but will do so for the sake of argument. All of the former religions have doctrines that state something like "don't question our infallible authority". The word Islam means submit. Christianity teaches something quite different, that you should test everything. The Bible says in the New Testament: "Test all things; hold fast what is good." (I Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 21)

The Story of Job

Job, pronounced 'Jobe', is one of the oldest books in the Bible. It was written around 1,500 BC and dealt with events which happened around 2000 BC. Job was one of the books found in the caves around Qumran beginning in 1947. These Dead Sea Scrolls as the came to be called were exact manuscript copies of the Jewish Bibles in existence around 200BC. In fact, fragments or complete copies of all of the books of the Old Testament were found there except for one, which was the book of Esther. These finds confirm the unchanged nature of the modern Bible, which has only minor differences primarily in the spelling of names. Job was an old dude that made some pretty amazing statements. You see he was very prosperous and living high on the hog, but according to God, was also a righteous and good man. Job recognized that he was a sinner though, as all of us are. The New Testament reveals a similar view of mankind: "…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Job made an interesting statement in chapter 19, verses 25- 27:

> For I know that my Redeemer lives,
> And He shall stand at last on the earth;
> And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
> That in my flesh I shall see God,
> Whom I shall see for myself,
> And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
> How my heart yearns within me!

Remember that this was written around 2000 years before Christ, most likely during the patriarchal period, well before the Prophets of the Bible. Copies of the book of Job were found among the Dead

Sea Scrolls dating to at least 200 BC. Job said that his "skin is destroyed," but somehow he will stand in his flesh and see God. How could this be? Let's continue with our Bible study, and learning, but testing and questioning everything, remembering what we read in First Thessalonians. 5:21. Yes, Job was looking for a Redeemer way back in 2000BC. The theme of a coming Redeemer was woven throughout the Old Testament Bible. The Bible says that Job was a righteous man: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil." (Job 1:1) Why did Job even need a redeemer, if he was a righteous man? Let's jump to the New Testament, to the book of Romans again, chapter 6 verse 23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This passage says that our wages, or payment, for sin is our death. Sounds like a bad deal to me! Remember what we said in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Yes, Job was a sinner, and died as one, although he enjoyed a long life.

The Bible records that mankind fell into a sinful state immediately after they were created. The story is recorded in the first book of Moses, called Genesis, in Chapter 3. It was after man turned against God that the concept of a sacrifice for sin arose. You see, God immediately killed an animal to provide clothing for our lovely couple Adam and Eve! "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." (Genesis 3:21) The poor little animal did not sin, but our poor little sheep or whatever suffered the ultimate price for what our human beings did against God! Let's look at it another way. We talked about the Golden Rule as a standard of judging ourselves. And if we were honest, we would admit that we fall short on that general scale. What standard would God use for judging us? Since God is perfect, would He use His own perfect standard? On that basis, who is righteous? Where would Job fall on this scale? Would he indeed fall far short of the perfect standard? Where would we fall on the basis of this perfect scale of judgment? I know that I would fall **far short**.

Prophesy Concerning the Coming Redeemer

Back to the theme of the coming Redeemer that Job was looking for way back in 2000 BC.

Most school kids know the name of the city that Jesus was born in — Bethlehem. You may be surprised to find out that some 700 years before Christ (BC) there was a prediction made by a prophet named Micah. This has also been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls which date back to around 200BC. Here is the verse from Micah 5:2:

> But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
> Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
> Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
> The One to be Ruler in Israel,
> Whose goings forth are from of old,
> From everlasting.

Ephrathah is the region in which Jesus' birthplace of Bethlehem was found. You may be surprised to find out that at the time of Jesus, there were two cities called Bethlehem. This prophesy identified the exact village where He was actually born. It also identified that the Ruler would come from an eternal identity and would be everlasting. Only God could have fulfilled this role of eternal Ruler.

There are hundreds of other prophesies in the Jewish Old Testament Bible which not only predict how and when Jesus would come, but also predict how he would die. Isaiah 53 records this about the coming Messiah Jesus:

> Surely He has borne our griefs
> And carried our sorrows;
> Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
> Smitten by God, and afflicted.
> But He was wounded for our transgressions,
> He was bruised for our iniquities;
> The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
> And by His stripes we are healed.
> All we like sheep have gone astray;
> We have turned, every one, to his own way;
> And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Sidetrack: Why You Can Believe the Bible

During my research to prove the existence of God, I discovered that there were at least four types of evidence for proof of truth in the Bible. Here is what I found:

(1) Prophesy evidence, like we just looked at.

(2) Historical evidence, what history writers have said about Jesus and events in the Bible from primarily non-Christian authors such as Josephus.

(3) Manuscript evidence, which means looking at the number of copies of the Bible and the lack of variation between the copies. We find that there are many thousands of copies of the Bible with almost no difference between them. This is one of the best documented facts of history.

(4) Statistical evidence, in which the science of probability and statistics is applied to the Bible. For an excellent analysis of this, I suggest the book A Skeptics Search for God by Ralph Muncaster.

(5) Evidence of changed lives, in which people have left lives of drug addiction, alcoholism, pornography addictions, and a variety of other ills.

Back to the Study!

Most of us would not doubt that Abraham Lincoln lived, in the same way we trust that Jesus also lived from a historical perspective. From the same historical perspective you will notice that many folks visit the grave of Abraham Lincoln, but there is no grave for Jesus Christ because Jesus is alive in Heaven. Even with all of the false prophets on the TV screen these days, none are talking about visiting a grave containing the body of Jesus. During the time that I attended a Roman Catholic Church, I viewed the TV preachers like Ken Copeland as somehow representing the entire non-Catholic Christian church. I found out later that these folks were, in my opinion, false prophets — liars, which the Christian church abhors. Their ministries, which seem to be chiefly designed to take away people's money, do so at the additional expense of their follower's eternal souls!

Previously, we saw the beginnings of the practice of sacrifice of an innocent for our sin. This practice was a hallmark of the Old Testament Bible. We also read about what the New Testament book of Romans said about sin – that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and that the power of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 3:23 and 6:23) According to God, the gift of eternal life is something that cannot be earned, but it must be received. Unless you receive it, it's not your gift. Think of your family Christmas tree where a small gift somehow got lost behind the tree and was not located until after the New Year. Even though it was purchased for you, it was not YOUR gift until you found it and opened it. This is a crude analogy to the way that Salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus bought your redemption, but you have to trust and believe in the gift — it will not be forced upon you.

The Old Testament records the following in regards to our inherent nature to sin. The book of Ecclesiastes was another one of the books found in the Dead Sea Scrolls dating to 200BC. This passage reads much like the New Testament statement we read in Romans. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says: "For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin." We see continuity on the theme of our imperfect human, sinful nature. In the following section on Exodus, we will find the description of the law provided by God to Moses. The law convicts us of our sin.

The New Testament book of Galatians in chapter 3 verse 19 says: "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator." The purpose of the law was to show us that we are sinners. In our conscience, inherently, we know what is sinful and what is not. We know that murdering a person is wrong. We know that stealing is wrong. The Old Testament law simply codified this. The law made a firm standard for what was wrong, and showed us how when we sin we can be forgiven, because all of us are of a sinful nature. The beginning of the law was really when God condemned Cain for killing his brother Abel in which the specific act of murder was condemned. But the formal law came about through what we know as the Ten Commandments. These were delivered by God to Moses who is the person that delivered

the Hebrew people from their slavery in Egypt. This is the history revealed in the book of Exodus.

The Exodus

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we find the order from God to Moses for the Hebrew people to flee from their slavery in Egypt. This was during the time of the Pharaohs, mummies, and Pyramids. Moses predecessor Joseph was highly favored among the Pharaohs. Once Joseph died, the Egyptians turned against the Jews and made them their slaves. The commandment to kill an innocent lamb and spread the blood on the door posts was made by God with the promise that all of the first born children would be spared throughout the land in any home in which this was done. The Jews followed this commandment and were saved through faith in the promise by God, and all of the first born of the Egyptians died that evening. Here is the story In Exodus Chapter 12:

> Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb.Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire–its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You

shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. (Exodus 12:1-17)

Through faith in the sacrifice of an innocent lamb, the death of the first born of all the Jews was prevented. This was also commanded to be done in future generations in remembrance – known to Jews as the **Passover** feast. This is what the Jews celebrate to this very day — Passover. Of course the Egyptians did not follow this commandment from God, and as a result they lost all of their firstborn children (and animals). This led to Egypt allowing the Jews to flee. Almost immediately though, the Egyptians had second thoughts and pursued the Jews into the Red Sea where the Lord parted the waters for safe passage. Once the Egyptians were part way across the sea, God caused confusion among the pursuing soldiers and disabled their chariots. When all of the Jews were safely on the other side, the sea was closed again and death came swiftly to the pursuing army.

We talked about the Golden Rule, which is a common standard for judging ourselves. What standard do you think that God would judge us by? Does it seem sensible that he would use His own standard? If so, and God is perfect, then where would we fall upon His scale. The Bible says about Heaven in Revelation 21:27: "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causesan abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

On that basis, who would be good enough to enter Heaven when they die? Even if we had one single sin, even if it was a sin revealed only in our consciences and not specifically through the law, God would keep us out of Heaven.

Now we shall return to the subject of the Redeemer that the Old Testament prophets spoke about. John the Baptist was a man that was born shortly before Jesus. He came announcing the arrival of the much predicted Messiah Jesus. In the Gospel of John, which was a man by the same name but was one of Jesus' disciples, John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God. John 1:29: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God **who takes away the sin of the world**!" (emphasis added) You see, the birth, life, and death of Jesus were the fulfillment of thousands of years of prophesies going all the way back to our old friend Job,

and our lovers in the Garden of Eden; Adam and Eve. God knew from the eternity past that the only way to redeem mankind was to present Himself into the form of a man and offer this perfect sinless sacrifice for all of the sins of mankind. This is not something that can be earned – we cannot earn the acts of a sovereign God in sending Jesus, but we must accept it in order for the gift to be **OUR** GIFT. Revelation 3:20 records "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,not of works, lest anyone should boast." Another name for the gift, is grace, which means "undeserved merit." Actually, we deserve eternal punishment in Hell for our sin. John 3:3 says: "Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

We are born physically alive, but spiritually dead. When we believe, we can be born spiritually and we will see a great change in our lives. We may not have a feeling, but we will know that something is different. This is what we call being born again. When you begin to believe in the absolute truth of God revealed in the Bible, you have to realize that you can either be absolutely right, or absolutely wrong. In either case, you are still a sinner. But when you are born again, you have HOPE. Hope is what differentiates a born again believer from someone that has not trusted in Jesus. Jesus, in the New Testament book of John records: "Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) Jesus is the only way. Our Good works won't do it. Church attendance won't either. Only Jesus can. Jesus is the Passover Lamb that died for our sins! All that we have to do is believe. I need to make one more very important point here. If you are curious about what God has shown you through the Bible verses that you have read, then without a doubt you are being called. You should continue to seek God and answer the call. Talk to others around you that you know are Christians. Ask them what God has done in their lives.

> **Nor** is there salvation in any **other**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by **which** we must be saved. Acts 4:12

You may ask if I believe, what must I do to be saved. The answer can be found in Romans Chapter 10:

> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. (Romans 10:9-13)

Does this sound too simple? It is. Salvation is a free gift. Our main problem is that we want to do something to earn it. We cannot, it has been purchased for us. All we have to do is to seek God, and He guarantees you that He will show Himself to you. I have watched God work in the lives of dozens of people. I am absolutely sure that He will work in your life! I know that I called upon God and He answered me!

The next things that we need to discuss are the attributes of God. Many people have a personal view of God which may or may not be correct. They may be absolutely wrong in their view. Or their god may not really be God at all. For years my god was myself, I sought pleasure as my source of personal fulfillment. Here is what God says about Himself in His book, the Bible.

(1) God is a Holy God.

The word holy means separate. When applied to God, holy means apart from sin. Heaven as a place of God is holy. "And there shall in no wise enter into it [Heaven] anything that defileth…" (Revelation 21:27 KJV). People measure themselves by many different standards. These include (A) their own standards, (B) society's ever changing standards, and (C) their church or other religious institution's (or cult's) standards. It is worthwhile to ask ourselves where we fall upon these standards of judgment. Are we at the top of our class in our own standards? What about the standard set by our society? Since God is holy, He measures us by His holy standard. If God measured us according to His holy standard, where would we fall? The answer according to God, is FAR SHORT. Remember,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) If we measured anyone against this standard, where would they fall? Again, they would fall FAR SHORT.

Since God is Holy, and Heaven is God's home and is also holy, would anyone be good enough to earn his or her way to Heaven?

(2) God is a God of Justice

The Bible records in Genesis 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25c) God must do right. Let's suppose that a person measured up to God's standard of perfection, he fulfilled all of the requirements. What would God have to do? The answer is that He would have to let him into Heaven.

Here are several illustrations that help to explain the concept of justice.

(A) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge, and he let me go. Would that be just?

(B) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him I am sorry I won't do it again. Then the judge let me go. Would this be just?

(C) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him that I'm sorry, I won't do it again, and I will do some good deeds to make up for the murder of the person. Would that be just?

The key concept of God's justice is that sin demands punishment. God cannot excuse or overlook sin.

In light of God's holiness and justice, who deserves punishment and is anyone good enough to earn their way to Heaven? The answer is ALL deserve punishment, and no one is good enough to earn their way to Heaven.

(3) God is a God of Love

God cannot violate His holiness or his justice. He cannot tell us that I love you; I know that you have sinned, and technically you cannot go to Heaven but I will let you in anyway. God's love cannot violate his holiness and justice. He has to satisfy them. How? To satisfy God's justice, someone has to pay the punishment for our sins. We need a substitute. I cannot pay the punishment for your sins because I have also sinned. The only one that can pay the punishment for our sins is somebody who has never sinned. The only one that has never sinned is God. How can God die for our sins? The only way that God could die for our sins is to become a man.

> For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (Gospel of John 3:16-17 KJV)

> But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 KJV)

Jesus Christ died for your sins past, present, and future. Does that mean that everyone is going to Heaven? No. What determines who goes to Heaven? What is the difference between the sinner, and the redeemed forgiven sinner? There is a condition that must be met for those that are going to Heaven. Those who meet the condition MUST go to Heaven. Those who do not meet the condition MUST go to Hell. This condition is shown below.

(4) God is a God of Mercy

The condition that we must meet in order to go to Heaven is found in the book of Romans, and it reveals God's attribute of mercy. The Book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to Gentiles (non-Jewish people) like myself:

> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord

> over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the LORD **shall be saved**. (Romans 10:9-13)

What does the Bible promise if you meet the condition of God's mercy? The answer is, you WILL BE SAVED. When we look at the passage in Romans above, we see several things.

> (A) You must believe that you are a sinner and as a condition of God's justice is headed to **Hell.**
> **Hell = No Hope**

> (B) You must receive the free gift of salvation without believing that you can earn it by good works. After this God's justice and mercy requires that you go to **Heaven.**
> **Heaven = Hope, through the Promise by God through saving faith.**

The Bible says:

> "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20)

You have to believe and answer the calling from the Lord Jesus to save you. He will not force you to do this.

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Jim Hill, http://www.christiansforchrist.org

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What Does it Mean to Be Saved?



In the Bible, the book of The Acts of the Apostles records a story about an encounter that Paul had with a slave girl that was possessed by a "spirit of divination" who made her masters money by fortune telling (Acts 16:16). At the time, Paul, a new minister of the Gospel, was staying in the home of a woman named Lydia along with her husband. Paul, an unmarried man, was a recent convert from Judaism to The Way (Acts 9:2), as these early Christians were referred to. The label "The Way" was applied to followers of Jesus, and actually came from the mouth of Jesus Himself as recorded in the Gospel of John.

Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) What did He mean by this?

The story in Acts unfolds with the possessed woman following the group including Paul and crying out "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." As if she wasn't troublesome enough, she kept following the group. After many days, Paul was annoyed and turned to the woman and said "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." (Acts 16:18). After this, the evil spirit which had provided her with certain magical abilities shortly left her body. This angered her masters, who had now lost their source of income. So the slave girl's masters dragged Paul and his companion Silas off to the magistrates. When the slave owners made their case against Paul and Silas before the magistrates, they made the following accusation:

> "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful to us, being Romans, to receive or observe." (Acts 16:20-21).

The men's accusers managed to stir up such a commotion that the magistrates became very angry and commanded that they be beaten with rods, even though they had not been convicted of any crime. After they had been severely beaten, they were thrown into the highest security area of a prison, and as an extra security measure were bound in stocks. Then, Paul and Silas began doing an amazing thing. Much to the amazement of their fellow prisoners, they began singing hymns to God and praying! And the prisoners were listening to them.

Next, an amazing thing happened. An earthquake shook the prison and immediately all the doors of the prison were opened and everyone chains were removed. This caused great fear for the head of the prison, since he assumed that all of the prisoners had escaped. Under the Roman government, this would have resulted in his execution. Because of this, the Philippian jailor drew his sword to kill himself, since this would be much preferred to becoming a victim of the Roman system of justice, even though he had nothing to do with the miraculous opening of the prison. Paul cried out to the jailor, telling him not to harm himself, that all of the prisoners were still there. Then, Paul asked for a light to be brought into the dark confines of the inner prison, and began to speak to the jailor there. The jailor asked:

> "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30)

Paul told him:

> "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and all your household." (Acts 16:31)

Paul and Silas then proceeded to speak the word of the Lord to the jailor and all that were in his household. After this, the jailor took them and washed their wounds, and was baptized along with all his family. That was all there was to it. The jailor heard the word of God, and was saved. As an outward expression of his faith, he was baptized, identifying himself as a believer in Jesus Christ.

Grace means "unmerited favor." The jailor WAS saved by:

• God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, which came by hearing God's word.

The jailor WAS NOT saved by:

• His good works
• Going to church
• Being a good person
• Thinking kind thoughts
• Giving to charity
• Being approximately 51 percent good or more

• Following the Golden Rule
• Having a second cousin that was a preacher

The Bible says that we are saved by "grace, through faith, and not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) The Bible also records that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:13) And, in Second Corinthians 6:2 "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." The Book of Acts in the New Testament tells a story about a rich ruler that desired to hear Paul's testimony of salvation through faith in Jesus. But he said that he would do it at a "convenient time." The time never came for this man; God never forces himself upon a person. For another example of another man that put this important decision on the back burner, refer to the story of Felix in Acts 24:24-25.

I have been called as a messenger. If you decide to move forward and place your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, speak to Him in prayer in the privacy of your home. Remember, it is not the prayer that saves you, but the fact that you are deciding to place your trust completely in Jesus. And the first thing that I would do immediately afterwards is to speak with other Christians about it.

There are three ways you can go:

1. To say yes, to accept God's free gift of salvation by putting your trust in Jesus Christ.
2. To say no, to reject God's offer of salvation. The Bible says that those who make this choice will spend eternity separated from God in a place called Hell.
3. To say maybe, to try to put off the decision to a more convenient time. The Bible does say that God is patient, wanting everyone to come to the point of accepting His gift of salvation (II Peter 3:9). But none of us is promised that we will be here tomorrow, and because of this "x-factor" of death, trying to put off our decision by saying maybe automatically puts us in the "no" category.

If you believe and are sorry for your sins you would pray something like this:

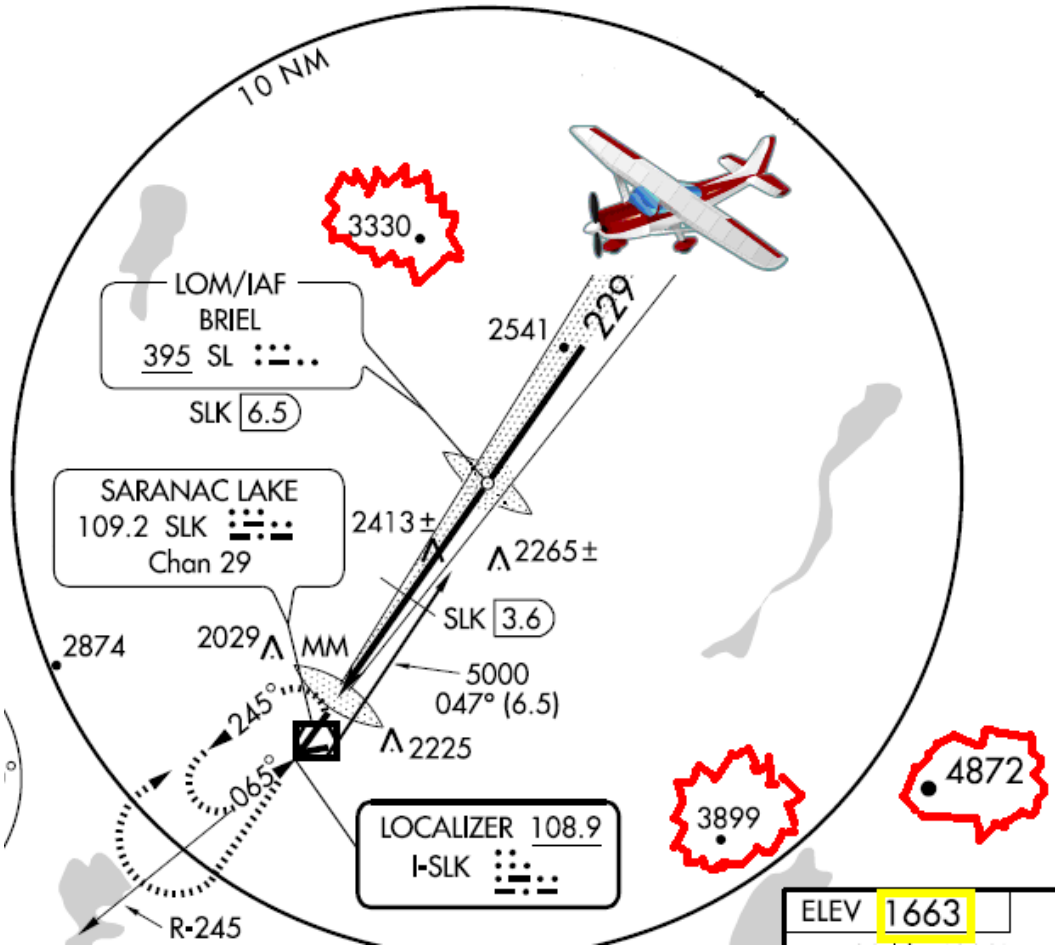
Father in Heaven,
I know that I am a sinner
and need forgiveness.
I believe that Your Son Jesus
died in my place,
to pay the penalty for my sin,
and rose again for my salvation.
I want to turn from my sinful ways,
so I now ask you,
Lord Jesus, to come
into my life as my Savior
and my Lord.
In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Please reach out to me by email or leave a comment if you responded to this message. Thanks, Jim Hill.

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Where does Spiritual Life Really Come From?

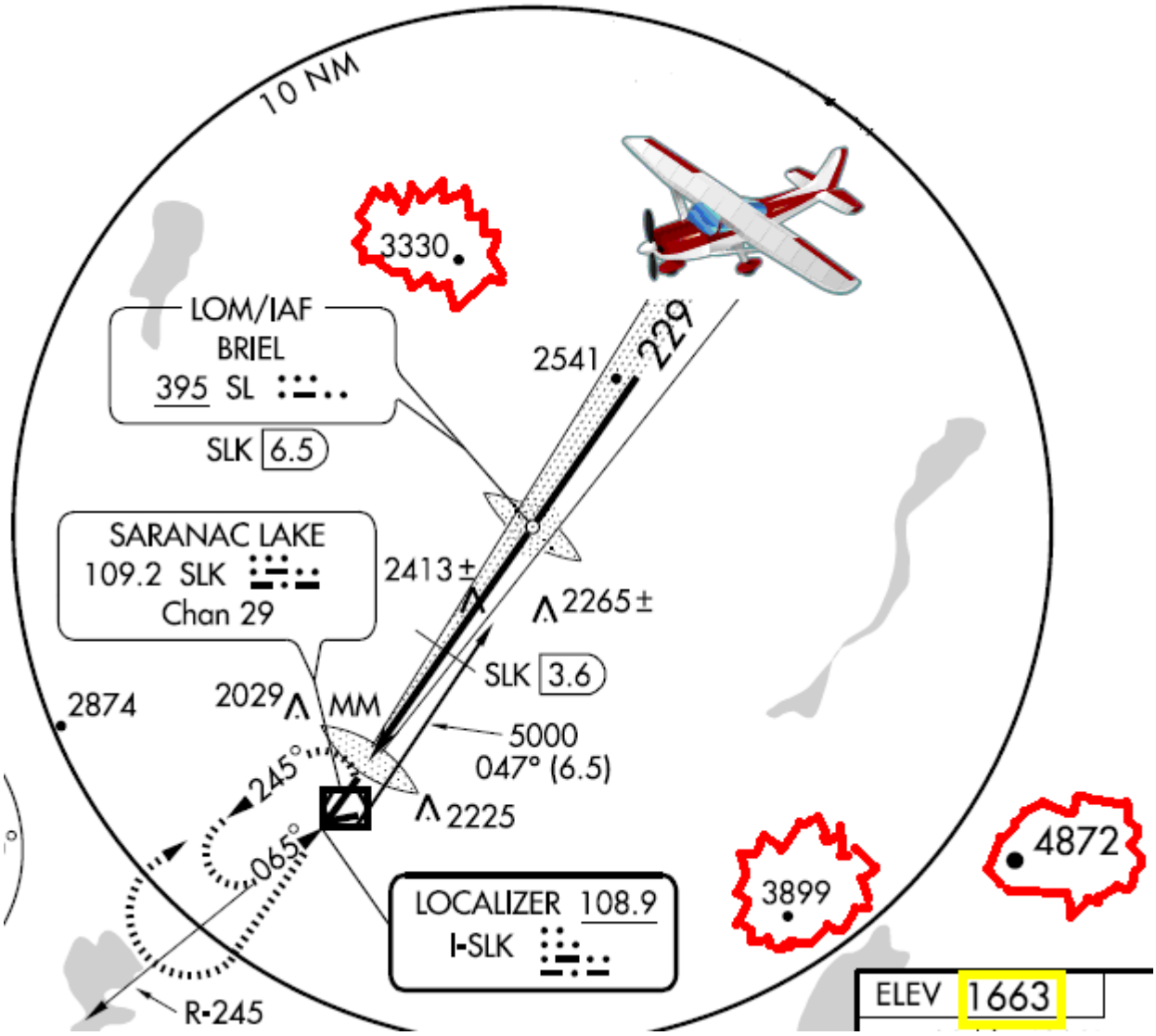


Where does Spiritual Life Come From?

Spiritual Sally loved going to her Bible-believing church—she was the one that everyone called when they needed someone to pray for them. Why do some people develop spiritual insights while others, or even whole churches full of people, seem to remain in the dark? What do these enlightened, "Spiritual Sallys" have that the others do not? The prophet Hosea 4:6 said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Flashing forward to the Book of Acts in the New Testament, Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the Old Testament, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch answered, "Well, how could I unless someone guides me? (Acts 8:30-31)." The passage this Bible lesson will lead us through shows a similar situation for Nicodemus in chapter three of John's Gospel, a man without a complete understanding of the things of God. How could he understand spiritual life except if Jesus explained it to him? Since spiritual life is a crucially important mystery entirely done by God, we must trust in Jesus and not our own wisdom.

Before we turn to the text, another illustration from my life might help set the stage for faith. It was a classic dark and stormy night, and I was flying with two friends in my small airplane from Troy, Michigan, to the resort town of Lake Placid, New York, to do some snowboarding. It was a 2 ½ hour trip, and the time went fast with all of us using oxygen pipes because we needed to stay out of the icy clouds down low. As we approached the airport area, I added a layer of intensity to the white knuckle situation. I told my passengers I would need to concentrate until we landed, so they should not say anything unless it was an emergency. As we descended and were in the clouds, it was pitch black. We started having some rather sporting turbulence. This added another element to this inky black approach.

The pilot's navigational chart below, which I have annotated, shows the approach route. That little shaded area is the route inside of which I had to fly. The lens-shaped images are electronic radio beacons that serve as aural reminders through the radio navigation system.



This is why things were a bit more interesting. See those three jagged circles? Those are mountains! The box marked ELEV at the bottom indicates the elevation of the airport. Looking closely, you may see that the airport elevation is some two thousand feet lower than the three mountains. In fact, the one on the bottom of this drawing is three thousand feet above the airport! Boy, that's a bit

interesting to be flying into there at ten o'clock at night, in solid clouds, with moderate turbulence and two friends who have never been on a long trip in a small plane!

The air traffic controller had a very gentle, nonchalant voice. HE wasn't the one who had to fly between mountains! "Bonanza nine eight zero quebec, descend and maintain seven thousand, cleared for the ILS 23 approach." As we were maneuvering and descending, I knew that the mountains were out there, because of what others had told me – the ATC controller, my charts, and my instruments. Did I mention that we were flying between two large, rugged mountains that wouldn't budge if we ran into them?

I would fly safely into that upstate New York mountain airport that night. Since I was a very experienced pilot, I had to believe and trust in the air traffic controller, my instruments, and my flight training. That's what spiritual life is about, trusting and believing in Jesus Christ, not ourselves. Paul said this in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast." But how can we trust in something we can't see? We do it all the time. We use electricity, and we know about magnetism. Just because we can't see them doesn't mean they aren't there. So just because we can see spiritual life doesn't mean it isn't there. But we can sense it; see the evidence of God working in people's lives.

Can you really understand spiritual life and being born again? Even if you can provide some descriptions of people who seem to have spiritual lives versus people who don't, it still does not explain where they come from and how they work. Like the wind, like electricity, you know when it's there, but you still can't see it. You may even be able to explain its characteristics, but you do not know its origins or the extent of its power. That's because it's a mystery. Spiritual life is a mystery. Perhaps even more of the mystery is that we must trust in Jesus Christ. This is what we are going to find next in our Bible study. Since spiritual life is a crucially important mystery entirely done by God, we must trust in Jesus, not ourselves.

Let's go back to my story about flying to New York. Can you imagine what that would have been like, hitting the side of a mountain? Flying along in a nice warm airplane with your friends one minute, and the next minute you are gripped in a few seconds of sheer panic as you try to cope with the incomprehensible circumstances of the last few moments of your life? What was worse was that I was shepherding my friends on the plane that night; they trusted me to keep them safe. I felt a great responsibility for them. So it is with this Bible study message. I have a great responsibility to bring you the truth. We will read an account of Jesus talking with Nicodemus, a pious Rabbi. We are going

to see that Nicodemus reasoned with Jesus, that Jesus had a great responsibility to tell Nicodemus the truth to keep him from proverbially "slamming into a mountain" along with his friends.

Let's read the Bible in John chapter three:

> John 3:1-12 NKJV 1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? 11 "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. 12 "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

One of the things that Jesus points out to Nicodemus is that since spiritual life is a crucially important mystery entirely done by God, we must trust in Jesus for eternal life and not in ourselves. We must hear this as good news, for our strivings have failed to earn us the right to be called God's children.[1] Hearing the Gospel, which means "good news," should elicit a response or an action on our part. Even though Nicodemus did not understand the fullness of the Gospel, he must have seen something different in Jesus than the other religious leaders. Being around Jesus elicited a response. In verse 2, the text says, "This man came to Jesus by night." Nicodemus took both great initiative and significant risk in meeting with Jesus. Jesus, on the other hand, took time out of his busy schedule and met with him, likely after teaching all day himself. "Nick" came at night, Nick at night, and took some considerable risk in doing so. We know he was one of the Jewish Supreme Court's Sanhedrin. This shows Nick's great initiative, since he was a very public figure, and even meeting with Jesus at night brought elements of danger if the rest of the ruling council discovered this secret meeting. In the same way, we have to take some initiative in seeking God. Perhaps this is the secret of the spiritual Sallys. Often, he won't just appear to us in a vision; we need to pursue him. For most of us, the hard knocks of life force this seeking. Questions like, "Where is God in the midst of my pain?" or "Why did God allow this to happen to me?" cause us to seek spiritual answers to life's most profound questions. Finding spiritual life takes some personal initiative. We must search for truth,

and when we hear the Gospel, "good news" of being saved by grace, that is our opportunity to act upon the message.

Looking back on my life, there was a time when I left a mechanical engineering job in automotive plastics and went to work running a consulting company with my brother. I distinctly remember kneeling and praying to God to reveal Himself to me. If you have already found God, you may celebrate this today. If you have not, I ask that you consider taking this step towards Him. Pray something like, "God, please show yourself to me. Show me how you have revealed yourself in my past, through miracles and people you have sent my way."

Returning to our text in John chapter three, notice that verse 3 reads, "Most assuredly." In the original Greek, this literally reads, "Amen, Amen," a double amen. This meant that whatever Jesus was going to say next was of crucial importance and was undeniably true! Some versions say "most assuredly," some say "verily verily." What Jesus said next was, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus uses a metaphor of physical birth to describe the dynamics of spiritual beginnings. Spiritual birth is a prerequisite to seeing the kingdom of God.

It's worth pausing momentarily to introduce a theological principle called the principle of first mention. This is a theological principle that the first time something is mentioned in the biblical text, we must pay particular attention. This is the first time we see this double amen, and that's because the subject is of crucial importance: "You must be born again." In other words, spiritual life is crucially important; we must hear and act on the Gospel. The second time we see this double amen in this text is when Jesus gives an illustration regarding this teaching of being born again, a point at which a person receives spiritual life. The third time we see this phrase in this short passage of 12 verses, Jesus points out that he is the resident expert on heavenly things because he comes from heaven. His ability to be accurate is undeniable.

Another principle arises from the text. Spiritual life is a mystery. Since we can't figure it out, we have to trust. At first, this may seem like "bad news" for it is difficult for us to give up control and trust another person. But it is good news if we think about it further, for we often find that we can't even trust ourselves. I make New Year's resolutions that I can't keep. I promise people things that I end up not fulfilling. I fail at living up to my standards of being good, let alone God's. So the mystery of spiritual life can be "good news" if we end ourselves and our own failed efforts.

We find that Jesus used two different word puns in the text, one to explain his point and one to

illustrate it – just like a good preacher would do! Notice what happened in verse 4. Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus' use of a particular word in the original text, meaning "again" and "from above." From this context, we can clearly see that Jesus meant you must be born "from above," which refers to the working of God. But Nick thought he meant "again". He gives his misunderstanding away by his question: "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" There is a second word pun that Jesus used in the text. In verses 8 and 9, Jesus illustrated using something Nick could understand – the wind. Again, we see that Jesus used a Greek word that could be understood in two ways. The word is "pneuma" and is where we get our word "pneumatic." It meant either "wind" or "spirit." Jesus used these two words to bring out a crucially important truth: Spiritual life is a mystery, we can't figure it out, we have to trust. We can't see the wind but know it's there; the wind is mysterious. So it is with spiritual life. We can see its effects, but we cannot see it like picking an apple from a tree! We have to trust. In verse 12, we know the word "believe" twice. Jesus is accusing Nicodemus, and by extension all of the Jews, of unbelief. Jesus is saying that you must believe to receive this spiritual life.

Looking back to the night we were flying into Lake Placid, I remember an important detail. We ran into some extremely turbulent air. When I looked back, one of my passengers was turning green and hanging on for dear life! None of us would have argued that the wind was there, yet we couldn't see it, control it, or calm it. This was the illustration that Jesus used to explain to Nicodemus the nature of spiritual life. Like the wind, he couldn't see it; it was mysterious. We must trust Jesus that spiritual life is real, like the wind, even though we can't see or control it. Spiritual life is a mystery; we can't figure it out, we have to trust.

Third and finally, another spiritual principle emerges from the text. God entirely does spiritual life; therefore, we must depend on Him for our future. In our analysis above, we spoke about a word that Jesus used in verse 3 that meant either "born again" OR "born from above." Jesus used the word purposefully, knowing that to be born again was a birth that came only from above. Spiritual birth is entirely a work done by God! Verse 3 says, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus testified in verse 11 that He knew what He was talking about when He said that you must be born again and that the Holy Spirit did this. Jesus knew because He came from heaven. He is the God-man, the incarnate Savior of the world! In verse 12, Jesus said that if you don't believe me because of my simple illustrations concerning water and wind, how could we understand more complex truths? If we were to look back to chapter one of John's Gospel we would find in verse 12-13, "But 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 (family line), nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (emphasis added).

Next, when Jesus said in verse 5 that we must be born of water and the Spirit, Nicodemus would

have immediately recognized that Jesus was paraphrasing a specific teaching from the Old Testament, in Ezekiel 36:

> *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Ezekiel 36:25-27*

Jesus meant that spiritual birth was done by God, not by water baptism or physical birth. We cannot depend upon others for our salvation; we must rely on God! God entirely does spiritual life; therefore, depend on Him for your future.

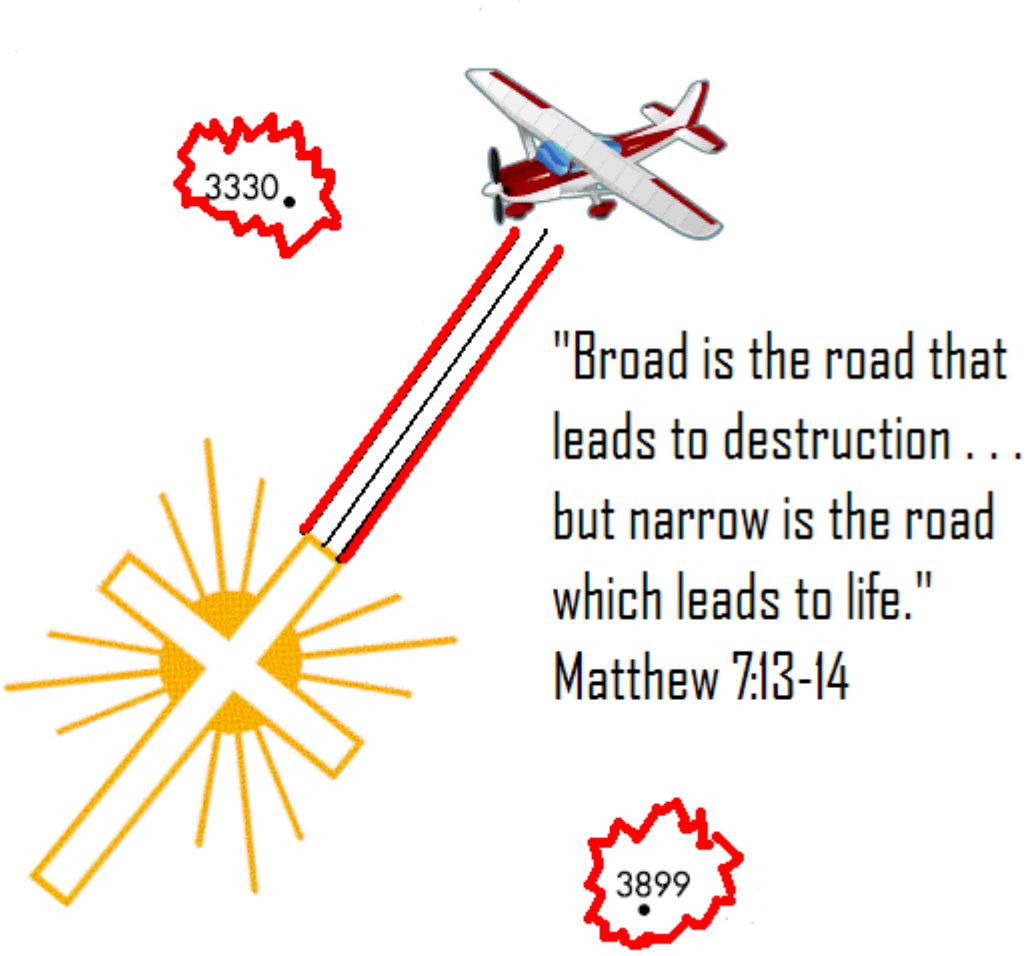
I recently watched a video called "Man in a Hole," which you can watch online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEpoHO_Ox6A. [You can watch the video in the window at the bottom of this article.]

In this spiritually themed presentation, a dingy-looking young man was trapped in a deep hole with vertical, slippery sides, making it impossible to climb out to safety. The narrator tells how the man was offered various escape options by enlightened ones fortunate enough to be at the top of the chasm. At one point, he was told he would escape by being a good person, eventually finding Nirvana. Another one told him to pray five times facing east. At the video's conclusion, our lonesome, lost soul is offered real hope by a person who offered to descend into the world himself to carry him and save him. This is what Jesus did for us. He descended into the lowly parts of the earth for us, to save us from our sin. We cannot pull ourselves out of our holes, up from our bootstraps, by being good and going to church. We have to believe in Jesus and let our faith in his work done on the cross save us. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus had to come and die for us to rescue us from the "hole" that we are in.

Our text said we must be spiritually born again by faith in Jesus Christ. God says in His Word, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "But while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:28). "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "You must be born again" (John 3:3). Jesus lowered himself down into our world. God became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. Jesus came to

earth for the express purpose of dying for our sins, the perfect man bearing the guilt and shame for our transgressions against each other and against God himself. The debt we owe can be paid in one of two ways. The default mode is for us to pay in hell for eternity. Or the faith way is to be born again, by trusting in Jesus' payment for our sin on the cross. His righteousness is credited to our account; the debt has been paid.[2] The choice is now ours. Acting on this as good news (the Gospel) means to accept Jesus as our Savior and look to Him for a new way of life. It is a radical life change, where Jesus is now in charge, and we surrender to his will in our lives. If we were already good people, our outward lives might not drastically change. But the inward motivation for our goodness now comes because Jesus lives inside us. We want to live His life for us in our daily interactions and choices. Our goodness is not self-effort; it is a fruit (or result) of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.[3]

Looking back again to when I was flying to Lake Placid, New York that night, I remember that I started thinking about the mountains being down there at one point. Then I remembered that if I turned the weather radar so that it pointed downwards, I would be able to see both mountains on either side of the plane, and hopefully I was going directly between them! It was a very narrow approach. For an essential illustration of this principle, study the picture below, a modification of the navigational chart we looked at before.



The approach to the airport between the dangerous mountains was narrow. Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, "Broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many go by it. But narrow is the road which leads to life, and few find it." Some do not like the "narrowness" of Jesus' teaching. They think that many roads lead to God. They want everyone's opinions to be correct. But if there is actual danger on either side of the narrow path (like there was in my flying experience), then it is actually

the kindest, most loving thing to do for Jesus to tell us that He is the way, the truth, and the life; that no one comes to the Father except through him.[4] There are a lot of mountains out there to run into along the broad road. But trusting Jesus for salvation is the narrow road to being born again. Jesus said that being born again is the prerequisite to seeing the kingdom of God.

Let's summarize our biblical message. We saw that spiritual life is a crucially important mystery done completely by God. We must trust in Jesus and not in ourselves. Hearing the Gospel and acting on it means recognizing the free gift of salvation through Christ as good news and asking him to be our payment for the debt we owe. Spiritual birth brings us into a right relationship with God, the Father, as we depend on Him for our future.

But how do we receive spiritual life, become a spiritual person?

1. Repent of our sin. This means that we must have a change of heart, a conscious turning away from our sin.

2. Believe the Gospel: Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, came to earth to die for us, rose from the dead, returned to heaven, and will come again.

3. Let God do the rest, pray that God gives us our spiritual life, pray to Him, and ask to be "born again."

If you want to receive spiritual life today and become born again, you can do so. A simple prayer, expressing your belief in Jesus begins the new life that God has for you. I urge you to pray right now, and after you are done to tell someone about it.

Dear Father, I have broken your laws, *and my sins have separated me from you. I am genuinely sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life and turn toward you. I believe your son, Jesus Christ, died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite*

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*Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.**[5]***

Please let me know how this study impacted your life. Our contact information can be found here. Please comment or send a link to this article to a friend.

Jim Hill

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[1] "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name . . ."(John 1:12).

[2] "He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

[3] "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:22-24).

[4] John 14:6

[5] Source: http://www.sinner-prayer.com/