

HE SHALL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21).

These are the words Joseph heard from the mouth of the angel who was telling him to marry Mary. This direction and promise of salvation from sins gave Joseph assurance where he had had doubts before.

These same words have given many people down through the ages assurance that their sins are forgiven through Jesus.

The problem is that these words and similar salvation promises are often taken out of the larger Gospel context. They are misquoted to assure people of eternal salvation in the context of partial obedience or even outright sin.

There were two conditions that qualified and energized the salvation that Jesus brought. Those conditions must still be met today if we would find our names written in the book of life.

First, we must be willing to own our sins, including our sinfulness, in humble, honest repentance and confession.

Many of the Pharisees did not want to acknowledge their sinful state. Here are some phrases taught in John 3:18-21 that help us grasp this obstacle. *And ... men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprove. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

In a performance-based culture, it is humiliating to acknowledge sinful acts or habitual practices. It is tempting to acknowledge mistakes with vague acknowledgments such as "... I haven't always done as I should have." Owning our sins is the very narrow gate that all must enter who would be a part of the kingdom of heaven.

In a sense, the publicans and harlots had a lower hurdle for entering salvation. People already knew their sins. They readily acknowledged their needs, and this opened their hearts to Jesus' ongoing Gospel message. (See Luke 7:29-30.)

The more difficult challenge came to those who had carefully hidden their sins. We all have sins, but some are open and may be sent beforehand to judgment. The hidden ones cannot be forgiven and will meet the sinner at his final judgment. (See 1Timothy 5:24-25.)

The second condition is that we must be willing to turn away from the practice of those sins.

Jesus' other requirement for forgiveness may be discerned in a few of His directives to penitent sinners:

... And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more (John 8:11).

... go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me (Mark 10:21).

... when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren (Luke 22:32).

... And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it (Luke 9:23-24).

Today, the popular version of the Gospel is that when a person believes in Christ, he is forgiven of all his sins, past, present, and future. Divorced and remarried couples are assured they may stay in that state. Those with extravagant or selfish lifestyles are assured of a loving heavenly Father. Christians supposedly live as sinners; they just live without any guilt! Really?

Will John the Baptist need to apologize to Herod for not offering to take him to Jesus so he could be forgiven and remain with Herodias? (See Mark 6:16-28.) Did he really have to be so confrontational and thereby lose his head?

No, Jesus came to save people from their past sins and their sinful/selfish lifestyles. Let us not compromise His message and experience the torments of an eternity without the Gospel.

Rather, let us be true to the cross-bearing that Jesus taught the world so we can be partakers with the truly redeemed in eternity. Let us also be brothers to others in cross-bearing, helping them to live a life of Christian obedience, truly free from both past and present sins.

~Steve Ebersole