

CHAPTER 8

HOW TO BE SAVED

*what about sickness and death?
...and how about healing and life!*

Before reading this chapter, how would you answer the question,
What do you have to do to get right with God?

We need saving!

Every one has sinned and needs saving from the certainty of hell. We need a way whereby we can come into God's presence and remain there when we die.

Thankfully, God has provided a way for us where we can do this—a way He calls the gospel.

Acts 16:30–32... “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. (NKJV)

The gospel, which literally means ‘good news’, can be stated simply—believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It is so easy that children can believe it, yet so complicated that learned men are not able to understand it (Luke 10:21)¹. The thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him and that alone was sufficient for him to enter into paradise (Luke 23:39–43). If we respond to the gospel and believe in Jesus, we will have the assurance of not only avoiding hell, but also inheriting the Kingdom of God.

What is heaven?

Heaven is an involved word and needs explaining. Paul uses the term ‘third heaven’ which implies heaven can refer to at least three different places (2 Corinthians 12:2). Unfortunately for us, he does not elaborate on what these places are.

Heaven, in a physical sense, means the sky where birds fly (Job 35:11), the solar system (Joshua 10:13), and outer space (Deuteronomy 10:22).

Heaven also describes the spiritual place where the Father and Jesus reside (Matthew 6:9; 1 Peter 3:21–22) and where the angels live (Galatians 1:8). In this place, there is a temple containing a throne, a golden altar (Revelation 7:15), and the ark of His testament (Revelation 11:19).

Heaven and earth are connected

Earth and heaven are linked in some way. We can see this when Jesus rose up from the earth into the sky and then into heaven (Acts 1:9–11) and also when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in the appearance of a dove (John 1:32). Our prayers link earth and heaven (Revelation 8:3–4).

Matthew 18:18 ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven...’ (NIV)

Wars in heaven

We like to think of heaven as a peaceful place, especially as that is where God’s throne is and indeed Jesus says that God’s will is done in heaven (Matthew 6:10). However, evil spirits enjoy access to heaven so it cannot be that peaceful. Satan seems to spend most of his time around the earth, although, along with other evil spirits, he appears before God at set times (Job 1:6–7; 1 Kings 22:21). He must have a lot of access to God as he accuses Christians day and night (Revelation 12:10). At times there is a war going on in heaven (Matthew 11:12; Revelation 12:7) and Jesus sees Satan falling from heaven to earth in response to His disciples’ testimonies of casting out spirits (Luke 10:18). There is a time when Satan and his angels are permanently cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7–9).

Spiritual area around the earth

There is a spiritual area around the earth which is not heaven itself. It is likely that after Jesus rose from the dead He spent forty days in this area before ascending to the Father (Acts 1:1–12). We also see in the Old Testament that God temporarily moved His throne from heaven into this area so He could live among the Israelites (Exodus 29:45). He moved it back later on (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:22–23).

New heaven and earth

If we die with our sins forgiven, we will enter heaven and be with God (Revelation 7:9–17). This will not be our final home though. Sometime in the future, God will destroy the old heaven and earth and replace them with a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem. This is our inheritance.

Revelation 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. (NKJV)

The Bible describes our inheritance using very positive language.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (NKJV)

There will be no more weeping and sorrow (Revelation 21:4) and God will wipe away all our tears (Revelation 7:17). We will never hunger or thirst (Revelation 7:16). We will drink of the fountain of water of life, and we will inherit all things (Revelation 21:6–7). We will delight in the abundance of peace (Psalm 37:11) and we will see God face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Importance of the gospel

The gospel is a precious truth. Jesus dying on the cross and being resurrected is, without doubt, the most important event ever to have happened in the history of mankind. We will see in the next chapter that it is the one and only event which allows mankind to have a relationship with God. The prophets who lived before Jesus Christ came into the world inquired about it diligently and even angels desired to hear it (1 Peter 1:9–12). Many people have risked their lives or even given their lives just to share the gospel (see for example 2 Timothy 2:8–10). It is therefore well worth our spending much time in this area thinking and learning about the gospel.

Understanding the gospel

In order to understand the gospel, we need to make a distinction between man's wisdom and God's wisdom. We cannot use our natural wisdom to understand things about God (Matthew 16:15–17).

1 Corinthians 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe (NIV)

Man's wisdom is gained through experience and knowledge and depends on an ability to understand. God's wisdom is a gift from above and comes through revelation. The world's wisdom is limited to things of the world which we can observe physically using one of our senses. Nicodemus could not understand what it meant to be born again because God had not given him revelation.

John 3:3–4 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 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?” (NKJV)

The reply Jesus gave him shows that we can benefit from the gospel without having to understand it.

John 3:7–8 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 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 (NKJV)

Responding without full understanding

God, in His mercy, calls out to us with the gospel and expects us to respond without fully understanding it (Revelation 3:20; Isaiah 55:1). Only after we believe will He give us understanding.

Proverbs 1:23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. (KJV)

If we respond to the gospel, He will increase our understanding, but conversely if we reject the gospel, He may take understanding away from us (Ecclesiastes 2:26; Daniel 2:20–21; Matthew 13:11–13).

Luke 10:21 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.” (NKJV)

The reason for this is because if we refuse to follow God until all our questions are answered, then we are saying we do not trust Him. This will not please Him.

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (NIV)

We should not find it difficult to believe the gospel because God is someone we can fully trust. He is a good God and will lead us in ways of righteousness and peace (Psalm 23; 25:8–10; John 16:13).

Romans 9:33 ...whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. (NKJV)

The gospel simplified

The gospel, out of necessity, has to be presented in a simplified manner to someone who has not heard it before. There is so much which could be said about it that a person hearing it for the first time simply could not take it all in. Also, as just shown, the person needs to respond to what they hear before they can receive further revelation.

Two ways of presenting the gospel

Broadly speaking, there are two distinct ways in which the gospel can be presented. Firstly, it can be presented as a help to those in desperate need.

Luke 7:22... The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. (NIV)

Secondly, it can be used to confront people of their sins and their need to be reconciled with God.

Mark 1:14–15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (NKJV)

Both presentations are valid. God wants to help us, but our sins separate us from Him and He will not hear our prayers. We must therefore ask for forgiveness before we can receive His help.

John 9:31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. (NIV)

(See also Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 15:29; Isaiah 1:15–16; 59:2; Ezekiel 3:16–21.)

The need for an atonement

In order for us to understand the gospel, we need to grapple with the concept of atonement. God cannot forgive our sins without a penalty being paid for them (Hebrews 9:22). If God forgave our sins just because we asked Him to, it would be the same as God saying it does not matter we have sinned. Because He is holy, it matters greatly that we have sinned and so we have to be punished. We need therefore, to offer an acceptable and willing alternative to take our place. An atonement is something which takes the punishment due us on our behalf.

God's plan for us

When God decided to create individuals with their own desires, He had to allow for the possibility that at some point they would do something He did not like. If He did not plan for this, the world would be a most miserable place indeed. We would experience His love and blessing, then one day we would momentarily sin, and then our eternal future would be spent in hell, suffering torment. Because God is merciful, He made sure there was a way we could be forgiven, so before He created the world He planned that Jesus should die for our sins.

1 Peter 1:18–20 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (NKJV)

(See also Matthew 25:34; Revelation 13:8.)

When we ask God to forgive our sins, we cannot expect an answer if we just appeal on the basis that God is merciful. We need to appeal on the basis that Jesus has already paid the price for our sins.

Jesus Christ is eternal

We will look at the relationship of Jesus Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit later on in this Bible study, but for now we will point out Jesus had no beginning and lived with God before the world was made.

John 1:1–2; 14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... (NKJV)

Jesus became a man for us

To fulfil God's plan of salvation, Jesus temporarily emptied Himself from His God-like attributes and took on a human body and became a man for our sakes (Philippians 2:5–8). He was born supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and so did not have an earthly father (Luke 1:34–35). He therefore did not inherit Adam's sinful nature. Because there was no sin in His life, His relationship with the Father grew freely, and He learned to do what pleased Him. As He matured, He gained wisdom and understanding (Luke 2:40–52). He was tempted to sin many times but overcame the temptations and remained righteous (Hebrews 4:15).

The start of Jesus' ministry on earth

God sent John the Baptist to speak to Israel to prepare them for the coming Messiah, or Christ (Luke 3:1ff; John 4:25–26). When Jesus was about thirty years old, He was baptised by John and in so doing received the Holy Spirit and gained supernatural power. The Holy Spirit immediately drove Him into the wilderness for forty days so He could be tempted by Satan and learn not to misuse the power that was given Him (Matthew 3:13–4:1). When He returned from the wilderness, He started to preach the gospel and heal the sick (Luke 4:17–19).

The communion

At some point, Jesus became aware that the Father wanted Him crucified, and He warned His disciples that it would happen (Matthew 16:21). Just before His death, He shared the Passover meal with His disciples. During the meal, He gave them bread which He said represented His body and wine which represented His blood.

Matthew 26:28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (NKJV)

Christians, from time to time, will re-enact this in order to bring to remembrance Jesus' death.

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (NKJV)

Jesus laid down His life for us

After the Passover, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed whether He could avoid being crucified. He made it clear though He would do what the Father wanted Him to do (Matthew 26:37–44). Judas, one of His disciples, betrayed Him into the hands of the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Him, and they came to arrest Him (Matthew 26:47–48). Even at this late stage, Jesus could have prayed for protection because He did not deserve to die (Matthew 26:53). However, He submitted to His Father's will and allowed Himself to be taken and crucified.

He chose to lay down His life for our sake (John 10:15) so through His death we could live.

Romans 5:6–9 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (NKJV)

The resurrection of Jesus

On the third day, as predicted by Jesus Himself (Matthew 12:40), He was raised from the dead. Some women came to prepare His body for burial, but when they came to the tomb they found it empty. Two angels told them that He had been resurrected and they then told the apostles (Luke 24:1–12).

For the next forty days, Jesus appeared to many of His disciples proving that He had risen (Acts 1:3). In one appearance over 500 people saw Him (1 Corinthians 15:6). At the end of the forty days, in the sight of His disciples, He was lifted up into heaven from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Acts 1:9–12). Jesus is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

Ephesians 1:20–21 . . . He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (NKJV)

The power of the gospel

It is important to note that the gospel provides more for us than just our salvation (although salvation is the most important part—see Luke 10:20). Because Jesus has been resurrected and sits at the right hand of God, He has overcome all the power of the devil. Through Jesus, we can overcome the devil ourselves, and therefore we can break free from all sinful habits and desires in our own lives.

Colossians 1:13–14 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (NIV)

Questions to consider

1. How important is the gospel to us?
 2. Do we know the gospel sufficiently well so that we can communicate it to someone else?
 3. Why did Jesus Christ have to die for us?
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References:

1 Charles Hodge quote, 'The gospel is so simple that small children can understand it, and it is so profound that studies by the wisest theologians will never exhaust its riches.' Christianity, February 2014, p53.

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