

18

SALVATION

Salvation for the individual is the chief objective of all Christian teachings. But it does not belong to Christianity alone. Every religion—Christian, Islam, Judaism, and others—has held out some hope or some program of salvation. There are as many different ideas as there are different religions as to the meaning of salvation and how it is attained. The Restoration has brought a unique challenge to the religious world in regard to the final destiny of the soul of man.

As a result of the many philosophies, it would be wise for us to consider well these questions: From what does man want to be saved? To what does he hope to be saved? By what means does he go about being saved? We realize that salvation has two sides from which it can be viewed—what we are saved *from* and what we are saved *to*. We may be saved from the burning house and still lose all our possessions. The criminal may be saved from the electric chair but still have a life sentence. In our spiritual warfare, we may be saved from everlasting torment but fall far short of celestial glory. Because of our principles and religious teachings, we may be saved from being tempted by the evils of society but at the same time fail completely to catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. Jesus came preaching and teaching a way of life that would not only save mankind from the terrible destruction coming upon the earth but it would also save man to the Kingdom of God.

MAN'S FALL

In Genesis, we read that man was created and placed in the garden of Eden, where Adam conversed with God. When Adam and Eve were disobedient, they were cast out of the garden and from the presence of God. Because of the fall of man, a plan of salvation was prepared from the very beginning. This plan was revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Therefore, salvation lies in man finding the way prepared and qualifying himself to come again into the presence of the Father. The Lord said, “If you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you” (D&C 77:1g).

Salvation is the act of both redeeming man from the fall and bringing him back to God. The fall is described as “that our first parents were cut off, both temporally and spiritually, from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 19:88). Therefore, salvation is the act of bringing man back into the presence of God to dwell with God and Christ. This is made possible only through God’s gift of mercy. However, mercy can have no claim upon us unless we repent. Repentance is not only ceasing to do evil, but also learning to do right (see Isaiah 1:16-17). “None but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 19:106).

MANY REWARDS OF GLORY

There are many rewards of glory. Celestial glory, terrestrial glory, and telestial glory are suggested in 1 Corinthians 15:40-42 and are described in D&C 76. Every person will be rewarded according to that which he has qualified himself to receive. “The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12).

When Jesus spoke of salvation, He referred to being saved to God and coming again into His presence. By His atonement, Jesus prepared a way for men to come again into the presence of the Father and inherit celestial glory. Therefore, anyone who has not qualified himself for full citizenship in the Kingdom of God (celestial glory) is not “saved,” regardless of what lesser glory he might achieve.

Many religions use the word “saved” to include all but the lowest reward—a kingdom of no glory. But Jesus apparently used it in the restricted sense to mean only the highest—celestial glory. The atonement of Christ brought about the resurrection of all men, and the law of mercy prepared the celestial glory for those who would live the celestial law.

Some people have thought that all the glories are included in the term salvation. This is true only

when we consider it from the standpoint of *what we are saved from*. The person who receives telestial glory is *saved from* the lake of fire and brimstone. Also, the person who qualifies for terrestrial glory is saved from the lesser rewards of the telestial glory.

It is evident that man can attain a lesser glory without accepting the gospel or the testimony of Jesus. In speaking of the telestial glory, the Lord says, "These are they who . . . received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus, neither the prophets; neither the everlasting covenant" (D&C 76:7m). The lesser glories are prepared because of the justice of God in rewarding every man for any good works he has done. The celestial glory can be attained only through Christ and by our obedience to His teachings.

REDEMPTION AND SALVATION

In some Scriptural references, the words "salvation" and "redemption" are used interchangeably and are generally thought of as meaning the same. However, redemption is different from salvation. If not for the plan of redemption, there would be no resurrection, and all men would become devils. "For behold, if the flesh should rise no more, our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the eternal God and became the devil, to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself" (2 Nephi 6:20-21).

The plan of redemption makes possible the resurrection from the dead and places man again under the law of God. "For it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him" (2 Nephi 6:10). Redemption is not to be earned; it is a gift. We can't redeem ourselves; it has to be done for us. Redemption makes possible the resurrection, the reuniting of the body and spirit, and bringing men back into the presence of God to be judged. "Redemption cometh in and through the holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth" (2 Nephi 1:71). Redemption is made possible through Jesus Christ, but it does not denote salvation.

CAN ONE KNOW THAT HE IS SAVED?

The Bible enumerates several things as saving us: saved by hope (Romans 8:24), saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8), saved by belief (John 3:15-16), saved by the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21), saved by works (James 2:14-25), and others. Each of these has its place in the plan of salvation, but no one of them is complete without the others.

In the eyes of much of the Christian movement, being saved seems to be a matter of a special experience in a moment of time. But, in its truest sense, salvation is a process which eventually leads us back into the presence of God. Yes, we should have some special experiences which indicate that this process has begun in our lives. But it is not likely at any given time in this life that we can know this process has been complete and has achieved its purpose.

To say that we know we are saved is to say that either we can never sin again or that sin will no longer have any effect on our salvation. To say that we have no sin within us is to classify ourselves with those who have not the truth within them (see 1 John 1:8). To say that sin we commit no longer has effect on our salvation is to deny the purpose and power of righteousness. Paul warned the Saints, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

IS BELIEF ENOUGH?

Inasmuch as some misinterpret the Scripture, "Whosoever believeth on him [Jesus] should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:15), we must analyze the word "believeth" and see what part it plays in our salvation. Belief is very closely akin to faith, and in some scriptural references they can be used interchangeably. Almost everyone believes in the ability of doctors to learn the function of the human body and that which causes disease. But would such belief in doctors save us from lung cancer if we continued to smoke? Only as we live *in accord* with our belief can we thus be saved. That is why Jesus said, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Belief alone is not enough. Sincere belief leads to action! Belief in Christ demands that we live according to His teachings!

GRACE

What about salvation by grace? We most certainly believe that salvation comes by grace. One of the best definitions expressed in recent years is that grace is the quality of God that causes Him to continue to reach out past the rejection of man, seeking to lift man from his fallen state and challenge him to live in accord with the good that was created in him. Paul wrote of his deep gratitude: "Being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

The fact that grace includes works is indicated by Paul, who says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith—and that not of yourselves; but it is the gift of God—not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The works he speaks of are those of the Mosaic law in which the Jews had placed so much trust.

Note that grace saves through faith. James clarifies this as he challenges, "What profit is it, my brethren, for a man to say he hath faith and hath not works? Can faith save him? . . . Faith without works is dead and cannot save you . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead" (James 2:14-25).

WORKS

Jesus taught: "It is not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, that shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:30). The Pharisees and Sadducees were told by John the Baptist, "Repent, therefore, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:35). Many things could be listed under the heading of works: baptism, sacraments, other ordinances, care of the poor, paying tithes, prayer, church attendance, bearing testimony, and others. Our reward and judgment will be according to our works (see Matthew 16:30; Revelation 20:12-13, 22:12). With this understanding of grace and works, the statement of Paul becomes most meaningful: "Work out your own salvation" (Philippians 2:12).

Further evidence of the importance of works in the process of salvation is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians. To those who felt works were unimportant, Paul wrote, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). John indicates that the blood of Jesus can cleanse us only "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 John 1:7).

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways are the plan of salvation and redemption different?
2. Salvation comes as a result of a man doing certain things. What are these things?
3. Salvation not only means saved *from* hell but saved *to* what?
4. In what ways do our works affect our salvation?
5. Explain why belief in Christ is not enough, in itself, for salvation.
6. How does preaching play a part in the salvation of man?
7. What responsibility do we have for the salvation of our neighbors? Our family? Fellow Church members?
8. What are some of the things listed in the Bible that will save us?