

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

by John R. Rice

Salvation is free and available to all through faith in Jesus Christ, and it is instantaneous, not requiring a process of mourning or sorrow.

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Repentance And Conversion"

Description

John R. Rice preaches about the essential question 'What must I do to be saved?' as answered in Acts 16:29-31, emphasizing the need for every soul to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. The sermon highlights the universal truth of all being sinners in need of salvation, the inability to save oneself through good works, and the necessity of repentance as a change of heart toward God and sin. It stresses that salvation is instantaneous through faith in Jesus, not by works or prolonged periods of mourning. The sermon concludes with an urgent call to trust in Christ for immediate salvation and the importance of public confession and joining a church after believing in Jesus.

Transcript

What must I do to be saved? Here in the simplest, shortest form is put the question to which every man must learn the answer, or spend eternity lost, away from God, suffering the torments of the damned! Thank God, this question is asked and answered in the Word of God so simply that every soul can understand it. There are other questions in God's Word which affect the soul's welfare, and many places in the Bible is the plan of salvation made plain, but only one place is this question given word for word, and there, too, we find the answer.

Paul and Silas were in jail in the city of Philippi and at midnight they sang and prayed until God broke down all the doors and broke the stocks which held their feet, with a mighty earthquake. The poor jailer, frightened and convicted of his sins, came to these two preachers and asked this question. Read it in Acts 16:29-31:

"Then he called for a light and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

"What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"! There is God's plan of salvation, the only plan He has for every man, woman and child who was ever born into the whole world.

WHAT MUST I DO?

Sinner, there is something you must do if you would be saved. There was hope for this jailer because he saw himself a lost sinner and came trembling to inquire, "What must I do?" Reader, you are a sinner. The Word of God from beginning to end emphasizes that fact. In Isaiah 53:6 we learn:

"ALL we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned EVERY ONE to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us ALL."

We have all gone astray! The Lord is not content for sinners to be left believing themselves good. In Romans the third chapter, how positive, how certain is the Word of God that every man, woman and child is a sinner!

"What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are ALL under sin; As it is written, There is NONE righteous, NO, NOT ONE: There is NONE that understandeth, there is NONE that seeketh after God. They are ALL gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is NONE that doeth good, NO, NOT ONE!"--Rom. 3:9-12.

In verses 22 and 23 it is stated again that "there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." That is the reason Jesus said to Nicodemus in the third chapter of John, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN." And a little later in the same chapter, verse 18, He said that the man who has not believed in Jesus is already condemned.

Certainly these Scriptures must make it clear to every man who believes the Word of God that he is a sinner, and until he has believed in Christ and has been saved, he is a lost sinner and needs saving. The heart is wrong, and only God can make that right. Then if you want to be saved, you must admit in your own heart, "I am a sinner. I am lost and need to be saved." No one ever was saved without coming for salvation as a sinner.

CHRIST DIED TO SAVE SINNERS, NOT GOOD MEN

Oh, I beg you, see it today! You are a poor, lost sinner, a Hell-bound sinner! Your heart is black. You have hardened your heart, you have resisted the call of God, you have rejected Christ. However good you are in man's sight, you are a terrible sinner, and unless you turn to Christ you must spend eternity in Hell. A SINNER! That is what you are. Admit it in your own heart, confess it to God. You are a sinner and you need saving worse than you need anything else in the world.

If you have settled in your heart that matter, then you are ready to learn God's answer to your question, "What must I do to be saved?"

BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Here is God's simple way to be saved. You are a sinner, your heart is wrong, you cannot save yourself, you are already condemned. The thing you are to do then, to be saved, is to simply trust the Lord Jesus with that matter. When you do trust Him, then you have God's promise, "Thou shalt be saved."

I do not mean that you are simply to believe that there is a God or that there is a Saviour. Devils believe that and tremble (James 2:19). You can believe that a certain physician is a good doctor without calling him to be your doctor when you are sick. You can believe that a certain man is a good lawyer without

taking him as your lawyer to defend your case. You are not just to believe the truth about Jesus; you are to believe on Him, that is, depend upon Him, risk Him, trust Him; and when you do, you are saved.

NOT SAVED BY GOOD WORKS

Of course, you do not deserve salvation. There is nothing you can do that will make you worthy of it. You cannot be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, for the Scripture clearly shows that you have not kept them. Romans 3:20 says:

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his own sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

The same thing is told in Galatians 3:11 which says:

"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

Many, many Scriptures repeat again and again that there is no salvation through human goodness.

"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 Ghost."--Titus 3:5.

"FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES; IT IS THE GIFT OF

GOD: NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST."--Eph. 2:8, 9.

We had as well admit, then, that no man deserves saving and no man can save himself. Salvation must be free or the sinner could never get it. In fact, it takes blood to pay for sin, for the Scripture says:

"Without Shedding of Blood Is No Remission"--Hebrews 9:22

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."--Rom. 5:6.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."--Isa. 53:6.

Peter tells us that all of us are bought by the blood of Christ:

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."--1 Peter 1:18, 19.

Every lamb, bullock, heifer, goat, turtle dove and pigeon offered in the Old Testament times on the altar pictured this: that man, a guilty sinner, must have some innocent one to shed his blood to pay for one man's sins. Jesus died for our sins, and, thank God, salvation is bought for every man in the world, if he will have it, as the free gift of God.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."--Rom. 6:23.

Dear sinner, remember that church membership will not save you. If you have been baptized that cannot save you. Baptism does not save, does not keep anybody saved. It is only an act of duty for those who have already found Christ as their Saviour. A moral life or lodge membership or good citizenship--these must all fail to bring salvation, for it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). Don't depend, then, on what you do, but on what Jesus did and promises to do for you.

WHAT ABOUT REPENTANCE?

Does not the Bible say that we must repent? Yes, the Bible plainly says that "God ... commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30), and again, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). This was the preaching of John the Baptist, of Jesus, of Peter and of Paul, that men should repent. And certainly repentance is God's plan of salvation. The trouble here, however, is that men misunderstand what repentance means, and there has grown up an idea that repentance means a period of weeping and mourning over sin, or sorrow for sins. This idea comes from the Douay Version of the Bible which instead of "repent" says "do penance." So the place of inquiry, where people should be taught the plan of salvation from the Bible, in revival meetings, became "the mourner's bench" and thousands of people have been taught that God would not hear their prayer nor forgive their sins until they went through a process of sorrow and mourning over their sins!

Do not misunderstand me. God is anxious for you to have a penitent, broken heart over your sins. You have gone away from God. You have trampled under foot the blood of Jesus Christ, wasted years of your life which you can never live over again. You have served your father, the Devil. There is plenty for you to weep over, and I am not surprised if you feel deep shame and sorrow in your heart that you have so mistreated the God who made you and the Saviour who died for you. I am not surprised if you cannot keep back the tears! But what I want you to know is that tears or no tears, however much sorrow you may have in your heart, or not have, those things do not save you.

You ought to be sorry for your sins and ashamed of them. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance" (2 Cor. 7:10)--the right kind of sorrow leads to immediate repentance, but mourning is not itself repentance.

"Could my tears forever flow, Could my zeal no respite know, These for sin cold not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone."

To repent literally means to have a change of mind or spirit toward God and toward sin. It means to turn from your sins, earnestly, with all your heart, and trust in Jesus Christ to save you. You can see, then, how the man who believes in Christ repents and the man who repents believes in Christ. The jailer repented when he turned from sin to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

INSTANT SALVATION!

The jailer did not go through a period of mourning. He was told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; he did just that and was saved, and his whole family was saved the same way, immediately, the same hour of the night. Everywhere you look through the New Testament you find that people were saved all at once without any process, without any period of mourning.

Zacchaeus, up a tree, trusted Jesus and made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully (Luke 19:6-9). Jesus said,

"This day is salvation come to this house." When Peter told Cornelius and his assembled household that they could be saved

by believing, immediately "while Peter yet spake these words," the Scripture says, the Holy Spirit came on them and they were happily saved (Acts 10:44-48). The thief on the cross, wicked sinner that he was, who a few minutes before had been railing at Jesus, was saved immediately when he inquired of Jesus (Luke 23:42, 43). In the first chapter of John, verses 35 to 49, we see where Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael were all converted, one by one, immediately by faith in Christ. There is no record of any person in Bible times who was ever told to wait, or mourn, or weep over his sins before trusting Jesus and being saved! One who believes in Christ has repented. Repentance and faith are the same thing put in different words, and neither requires a long period of time, nor a process of mourning and sorrow.

Salvation is instantaneous. All that keeps you today from being saved is the wickedness of your heart that holds on to sin and will not run to Jesus to trust in Him for salvation. I beg you, turn in shame and sorrow from your sins this minute, and trust in Christ and be saved!

CAN ONE BE SAVED WITHOUT PRAYER?

In the Bible there are many cases of sinners who prayed like the thief on the cross or the publican in the temple. In fact, Romans 10:13 says:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Many people believe that a sinner cannot be saved without a period of prayer, without consciously calling on God. However, the Bible does not say that a sinner must pray in order to be saved. In fact, immediately following the verse in Romans 10:13 is an explanation which shows that calling on God is an evidence of faith in the heart and that it is really faith which settles the matter. Read it again.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?"--Rom. 10:13, 14.

The Lord encourages the sinner to pray, and the Lord hears and answers the sinner's prayer, if that sinner trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation when he prays. He heard the prayer of the thief on the cross, of the publican in the temple, of blind Bartimaeus. But the Scripture says, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" Certainly every one who is to be saved must believe. Prayer is evidence of faith. No matter how long one prays, if he does not trust in Christ, he can never be saved. If he trusts in Christ without conscious prayer, then he is saved already. There is just one plan of salvation and just one step a sinner must take to secure it. That step is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

Some way we preachers have left the impression on this poor world of sinners that God is hardhearted and that it takes many tears and loud cries and long periods of sorrow before He will hear and save the sinner. We have left the impression that God does not care whether sinners are saved or not, and that sinners must some way touch the heart of God and get Him ready to forgive. What a slander on a good and holy God who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Man's sins are already paid for, God's wrath is already turned away from any sinner who wants to be saved. Both the Father and the Son are a million times more anxious to save every sinner than the sinner can be to get saved! Thank God, I do not have to beg God to forgive my sins. He will do it the minute I am willing to trust it with Him.

HOW TO GET THE CHANGE OF HEART

This simple way of being saved by faith seems so easy, and it is. Some sinner may say, "But I thought one must have a change of heart." So you must, dear sinner, but that is God's part. Jesus was talking to Nicodemus when He said, "Ye must be born again," and in the same chapter He tells Nicodemus how to get the new birth.

"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."--John 3:16.

The change in your heart, sinner, is God's part and you may be sure He will attend to that. Your part is to simply believe in Him. Whatever else is necessary in your eternal salvation, the Lord attends to when you trust in Him, or believe in Him.

HOW SHOULD I FEEL?

Some people have an idea that the change of heart is a matter of feeling. Some do not want to claim Christ as Saviour until they have the mysterious feeling that they want. Do not let the Devil deceive you here. I believe in heartfelt religion, and thank God for the joy which He gives to me day by day. But the Bible nowhere tells how one must feel before he is saved, nor does it anywhere say how you feel after you are saved. In fact, people do not feel the same. Feeling varies with the person saved.

Some cry when they are saved, some laugh, and a few shout aloud the praises of God. One is no more saved than the other.

What you want, dear sinner, is salvation, and you should be satisfied to feel any way that will please the Lord, just so He forgives your sins.

Be sure you notice another fact, too, and that is that you cannot feel right until you get right. Rejoicing does not come before you trust the Lord. One does not feel the result of medicine before he takes it. The Children of Israel in the wilderness, bitten by fiery serpents and at the point of death, were not healed and did not feel healed until they looked to the brass serpent on the pole (Num. 21:6-9). People are not saved by feeling; they are saved by trusting in Christ. The prodigal son, away from home in the hog pen, decided to arise and go to his father, but he did not feel good. He was without shoes, clothed in rags, without the ring of sonship, without any evidence of his father's forgiveness, perishing with hunger! Yet he arose and came to his father, not by feeling, but by faith in his father. Thank God, his father received him, like God receives every sinner who will come. And when the prodigal boy sat down at his father's table, with shoes of the gospel of peace, clothed in the garments of righteousness of Christ, with the ring of sonship on his finger, eating the fatted calf at the right hand of the father, happy in his love, then he has plenty of feeling. Feeling comes after salvation. Leave the feeling with the Lord and come to the Saviour by faith today.

After you are saved, you will get peace and joy out of following the Lord in baptism, reading His Word, winning souls and otherwise pleasing Him. You need to go to the Lord again and again day by day for the joy of a Christian life. But thank God that salvation is settled once and for all when you simply depend upon Christ as your Saviour.

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC CONFESSION?

Every person who is saved ought to publicly confess Christ. Matthew 10:32 and Romans 10:9 plainly teach that God will claim as His child any of us who will claim Christ as our Saviour, but we simply confess with the mouth what we have already trusted in our hearts. Concerning that very matter Romans 10:10 says:

"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

To claim Christ as your Saviour simply proves that you trust Him in the heart. Likewise with all other promises in the Bible about how to be saved. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," says John 6:37; and salvation is promised in John 1:12 to as many as receive Jesus. But you could not come to Christ without trusting Him, and John 1:12 shows that receiving Jesus is the same as believing on His name.

Dear sinner, do not make this a difficult matter. There is one simple step between you and Jesus. When you trust Him, everything else is settled, and you have repented, you have come to Christ, you have received Him, you have done everything necessary to be saved. Take the answer in Acts 16:31 at face value: "BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED"! In dozens of Scriptures all through the Bible salvation is promised to those that believe. Read carefully the following Scriptures and see that again and again, many, many times, God has promised all any poor sinner would ever need when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that BELIEVE on his name."--John 1:12.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever BELIEVETH in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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."--John 3:14-16.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that BELIEVETH not is condemned already, because he hath not BELIEVED in the name of the only begotten Son of God."--John 3:18.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that BELIEVETH not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."--John 3:36.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and BELIEVETH on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."--John 5:24.

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and BELIEVETH on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."--John 6:40.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that BELIEVETH on me hath everlasting life."--John 6:47.

"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever BELIEVETH in him shall receive remission of sins."--Acts 10:43.

"And by him all that BELIEVE are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."--Acts 13:39.

Read again the Scripture we started with:

"What must I do to be saved?"

"BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."--Acts 16:30, 31.

Trust Jesus, the Great Physician

If you were sick and about to die, and there was some good doctor whom you could trust, would you not risk him to take your case, give you the necessary treatment, and with God's help get you well? Then just like that, trust in Christ, depend on Him for your salvation, and turn it over to Him today. With the same kind of faith that will call in a doctor and risk him for your body, you can call in the Lord Jesus Christ and risk Him to forgive your sins and save your poor lost soul! He said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31). He is the Great Physician and will heal your soul instantly if you will trust Him. As you would trust a doctor, submit to his treatment, depend on him for results, so trust Jesus today about your soul. To be sure, human doctors fail many times. Their results at best are gradual, and so no doctor is a perfect picture of Jesus. The doctor can work no miracles, but Jesus can, and the change that is needed in that poor, wicked heart, He will make immediately, instantly, without any further effort on your part, when you trust Him!

JESUS IS OUR LAWYER

If you had committed a crime and were thrown in jail, probably the first thing you would do would be to send for some lawyer in whom you had confidence and trust him with the entire matter of your defense. In God's sight you are a criminal, condemned already and with the wrath of God upon you day by day. But God has provided somebody to take the part of us poor sinners, criminals before the bar of God's justice, and Jesus is that lawyer, for the Scripture says:

"If any man sin, we have an advocate [or lawyer] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world."--1 John 2:1, 2.

Jesus will not only be your lawyer to defend your case; He has already paid the penalty and you may safely trust Him to have you immediately pardoned and justified! Why not simply risk Jesus as you would risk a good lawyer? Jesus is better than any lawyer, of course, and you do not have to pay Him a fee, and He never fails.

A WEDDING

A young man and young woman stand together, side by side, before the preacher. The preacher says, "You will join right hands." Then to the young man he says, "Do you take this young woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to love her and cherish her until death do you part?" He answers, "I do." To the young woman the preacher says: "Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband until death do you part?" She answers, "I do." Then the preacher says: "I pronounce you man and wife," and they are married in the sight of God and man.

What a simple picture of salvation! Jesus is the bridegroom and we who trust Him are to be His bride. Already Jesus has loved you and has long urged you to accept His love. Jesus invites you to accept His love. Jesus invites you to believe in Him right now and be saved and so become a part of His bride. Will you not right now with the same simple faith of that young woman who takes a husband, accept Jesus as

your Saviour and say to Him, "I do."?

MAKE IT SURE--CLAIM HIM TODAY!

The way is plain and you can be saved this moment if you will.

Surely it has become plain, dear lost sinner, that it is your own fault if you are lost! Do you hate Jesus Christ? Will you hold on to your sin and go to Hell for your stubbornness? Nothing in the world could show your wickedness like postponing this matter. You can be saved right now, this minute. I beg you, do it now. Turn your whole heart from sin to trust in Christ. Choose for Heaven against Hell, choose for Christ against Satan. Do not let Satan deceive you any longer. If you delay, it may result in a hardened heart, a wasted life and a tortured soul in Hell! And if you are not saved, when God has made the way so plain and paid the price for your sins, then you have no one to blame but yourself. Will you trust Jesus Christ today and be saved?

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."--Prov. 27:1.

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."--2 Cor. 6:2.

"Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts."--Heb. 3:7, 8.

God has given you this heartbeat, this breath, this moment in order to trust Christ, but there is no promise of another. I beg you do it right now, and then claim Him as your Saviour.

One who trusts Jesus Christ as personal Saviour should publicly claim Him before men. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).

After trusting Jesus Christ you should join a church and be baptized. I hope you will find a good Bible-believing church and attend faithfully.

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