

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

WDXE – Searching the Scriptures – January 14, 2011

It was an historic day when the apostle Paul in chains stood before King Agrippa. The day was historic because it had been predicted shortly after Paul had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus told the Christian Ananias to go to Saul of Tarsus, as he was known then, because “he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” Jesus said that Saul would “bear [His] name” before kings. As far as we know, King Agrippa was the first one!

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Welcome to today's edition of Searching the Scriptures.

King Agrippa was a Jewish king. He had come to Caesarea on the coast of Palestine to welcome the new Roman governor, Festus. Agrippa's father was the Herod who had the apostle James the son of Zebedee killed with a sword (Acts 12:2). Agrippa was educated in Rome and later became the king over some territories in the land of Palestine. He and his sister Bernice had come to Caesarea to meet the new Roman governor. Paul had been a prisoner in Caesarea for two years. When he saw that Festus was going to hand him over to a Jewish court, as a Roman citizen, Paul appealed his case to the Caesar in Rome. When the young Jewish king arrived in the city Festus saw an opportunity get help from Agrippa, because he did not know what to write in his letter to Rome. He did not know how to explain why Paul was in prison. King Agrippa had probably heard about Paul; he was happy to hear him speak.

Paul also expressed his happiness to be speaking before King Agrippa.

² "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews,

³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. (Acts 26:2-3 ESV.)

Paul then began to tell the King and all those present about his conversion. He admitted to Agrippa that he himself once persecuted Christians.

⁹ "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. (Acts 26:9-11 ESV.)

But then Paul told about his conversion, how he had seen Jesus in the road.

¹⁹ "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." (Acts 26:19-23 ESV.)

When Paul had said this, Festus interrupted him by shouting "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." (Acts 26:24 ESV)

²⁵ But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. ²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" ²⁹ And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains." (Acts 26:25-29 ESV.)

With that great wish Paul concluded his remarks. Yes, Paul would have been happy to baptize all of those people who heard him that day. Becoming a

Christian is more than just taking on a name. Becoming a Christian means that there is something to believe, something to do, and something to experience.

In becoming a Christian there is, first of all, something to be believed. We are not required to profess faith in some creedal statement. There are three cardinal facts in a sinner's confession of faith. First, we must believe that Jesus Christ came in human flesh: "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all [acceptance], that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15 ASV). Second, we must believe that Jesus Christ died for us: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Third, we must believe that God raised him from the dead: "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" (Romans 10:9 NKJV). In a summary of these gospel facts Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4 NKJV).

But friends the mere belief of these facts does not make a Christian. In becoming a Christian there is something to do. Most of the preaching we hear today teaches that in conversion the sinner is a passive recipient and not an active agent. But yet the New Testament abounds with examples of people who asked the question "what must I **do** to be saved?" There was something for the believer to do. The simple narratives of the book of Acts clearly reveal what must be done to become a Christian. In the city of Philippi, Paul and Silas told an unbelieving jailer to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). On Pentecost Peter told believers to repent and be baptized for the remission sins (Acts 2:31-38). In Acts 22:15-16 it is related how Ananias told the believing, penitent Saul of Tarsus to be baptized to wash his sins away. To a casual reader examples appear to give three answers to the same question. But in each case the answer was given based upon the condition of the human heart of the one who asked the question. It is like asking the distance to a certain city. A bystander tells you how far it is to the city. You travel on down the road and then you ask again the distance to the city. The answer is different because you have traveled farther down the road to the city.

And so it is that people who ask "what must I do to be saved?" ask the question at different points. Some of you listening today may not know the first thing about Jesus Christ. In bringing you to Christ we would start at the beginning. But others of you who are listening know some things about Jesus Christ. In bringing you to Christ we might begin with repentance and baptism.

In becoming a Christian there is something to believe and something to do. But in being a Christian there is also something to experience. Feelings alone are not the evidence of pardon, yet rejoicing has its place in the gospel plan of salvation. That's right! When the treasurer of Queen Candace was baptized, he "went on his way rejoicing." When the Philippian jailer and his family was baptized the same hour of the night, he returned to his house "rejoicing, having believed in God."

Paul knew that he was a Christian, and said with emphasis to Agrippa, "I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am." Paul could say, "I am a Christian." We can also know it. The word of God reveals the conditions upon which salvation is promised, and when these conditions are met the promises of God are received. The evidence of pardon and the ground of our hope is the surety of God word.

¹⁷ So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.... (Heb 6:17-20 ESV.)

What surer evidence can one have than the unchanging word of God. Yet many people will put their feelings squarely up against the plain statements of God's word. Yes, when one comes up out of the watery grave of baptism there is God's word on it that we have received the remission of our sins by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But it should also be emphasized that baptism is not the end of obedience. That's right. The Christian life is a life of obedience. This is the practical meaning

of Christian experience. The Christian life is experienced as we exercise faith, hope, love, and patience. With such excellences of Christian character abounding, the experiences of the Christian life “grow sweeter as the years go by.”