

## THE SINNER'S PRAYER

*Adapted from a tract entitled "The Sinner's Prayer" by J.C. Choate*

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Many preachers have promoted what they call "The Sinner's Prayer." How many times have you heard it? Or perhaps you have recited the "sinner's prayer." Do you know that the Bible does not teach that a sinner can be saved by prayer?

At the close of their sermons, we have heard many preachers invite people who are not saved to come forward and repeat the so-called "sinner's prayer." They ask those that come forward to repeat something like this: "Father in heaven I come before you as a sinner, believing that your Son, Jesus, died on the cross to save me from my sins. I ask you now to forgive me of my sins and accept me as your child. In the name of Christ I ask this. Amen." The preacher then announces that those who said the sinner's prayer have been forgiven of their sins and are now Christians. The problem is that saying this prayer is not what the Lord Jesus Christ taught about saving sinners. That's right! This prayer did not originate with God or Jesus, nor their apostles. It originated in the mind of a man. They people who say this prayer have not obeyed Jesus. Thus they are not saved. And because they have been deceived into thinking they are saved, those who recite the prayer are still lost and will not realize it, unless they read and study their Bibles.

When you read through the book of Acts and study carefully the 11 stories of conversion your eyes will be opened to what the Lord wants the lost to do. And you will never read the sinner's prayer. Not even once! What will you read about? How did sinners come to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins? It is true that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. It is also true that Jesus Christ is the son of God. The book of Acts begins with the Ascension of Jesus back to His heavenly Father. But before He left He gave what has become known as His Great Commission. This commission is written in similar words in the closing chapters of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Matthew records that Jesus said,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matt 28:18-20 (ESV). Mark's rendition reads where Jesus said,

"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. <sup>16</sup> Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. Mark 16:15-16 (ESV)

"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Luke 24:46-47 (ESV)

Before Jesus ascended, He told His apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they had received power from on high. Ten days after Jesus' ascension the day of Pentecost arrived. Pentecost was always celebrated by the Jews on the 50<sup>th</sup> day following the Passover Sabbath. The 50<sup>th</sup> day always fell on the first day of the week. The Jewish feast of Pentecost brought the Jewish people together from all over the Mediterranean world. Luke records that people from 17 different nations were present on the day that the Apostles received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in the languages of those people. A great multitude gathered when they heard about this fantastic phenomenon of 12 men who were speaking fluently in languages they had never learned. The apostles were preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. We have Peter's words recorded in Acts chapter 2. Peter explained that the prophecies concerning the Messiah, the Christ of God, were being fulfilled. He showed how Christ had lived among men doing good, and that with wicked hands He had been crucified. But death could not hold him. God, His Father, had raised Him from the dead on the third day. Furthermore, Jesus had now ascended to His Father where He was seated at the right hand of God. Peter concluded by saying:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Acts 2:36 (ESV)  
Many of the listeners believed what Peter had said about Jesus. They were cut to the heart and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

<sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2:38-41 (ESV)

These people were not taught the "sinner's prayer." They had believed what Peter had preached about Jesus being the Christ. They believed that they had had a hand in crucifying the Son of God. They repented and were baptized in water for the forgiveness of their sins.

After these people had become Christians they were urged to pray. In Acts 2:42 we read that those children of God were continuing "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." Before they repented and were baptized those people were still in their sins. They were not on "praying terms" with God. In fact, Peter had accused them of crucifying the son of God! But, after they had repented of their sins and were baptized in water, then they could pray, and they did pray.

But let's consider another case of conversion. In Acts 8 we read about a preacher named Phillip and an Ethiopian man who had traveled to Jerusalem to worship. The Ethiopian was in his chariot on his way home. While traveling along the Ethiopian was reading from the prophet Isaiah when he was suddenly asked by a man on the road, "Do you understand what you are reading?" You know, reading the Bible is a wonderful exercise, but if we do not understand what we are reading it will do us but little good. If all of us ask ourselves that question then we all might study more diligently the Word of God. Well, the Ethiopian man replied, "How can I except some man should guide me?" And so the Ethiopian invited the preacher Phillip to come up and sit with him. The scripture in Isaiah that the black man was reading came from what we call the 53 chapter. Phillip began at that same scripture and preached to him Jesus. In preaching Jesus Phillip must have said something about baptism because when they came to a certain water, the Ethiopian man said,

"See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" <sup>37</sup> Phillip replied, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, [both] Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8:36-39 (ESV). From that time onward this Ethiopian man could pray. He was now saved. He was a Christian. The Lord Jesus had added the Ethiopian to His church, His kingdom. As a Christian, this man was now in a position to pray.

The case of Saul of Tarsus is also one of the cases of conversion that you can read about in the New Testament book of Acts. Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor of Christians and a blasphemer against Jesus Christ. He did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, until on the road to Damascus. Damascus is an ancient city...some say it's the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Well, there were Christians in Damascus and Saul wanted to root them out and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains.

Jesus Christ appeared to Saul in a tremendous burst of light as Saul neared the city of Damascus. Saul fell to the ground. Jesus spoke, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul said, "who are you Lord?" "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," said Jesus. "Saul humbly asked, "what shall I do, Lord?"

And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' <sup>11</sup>

Saul waited in the city for three days before a preacher came to him. The Bible says that Saul was praying that whole time. When Ananias the preacher finally came to Saul, he said,

'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' [And as Saul later reported] And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. <sup>14</sup> And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; <sup>15</sup> for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' Acts 22:10-16 (ESV)

Saul had been praying for three days...but evidently he knew nothing about a "sinner's prayer", because when the preacher finally came he said "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." Even after three days of

praying, Saul still had his sins! That's right! Furthermore, Saul even received his sight at the hands of the preacher, but he was still in his sins until he got up and submitted to baptism, calling on the name of the Lord. You see, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ IS what it means to "call on the name of the Lord." Calling on the Lord is NOT a prayer, but an obedient action on the part of the sinner. Calling on the name of the Lord is NOT the sinner's prayer, but a repentant believer's baptism into Jesus Christ. Have you called upon the name of Lord the way Saul did? Have you gotten up and been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? The Bible calls this "obeying the gospel" in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, and also in Romans chapter 1 and chapter 16. Have you obeyed the gospel of Christ? I hope you will. I hope that you want to be saved. If I can be of help, please let me know. Thank you for listening today.