

How to Be Saved



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 5:27–32; 13:1–5; Matt. 22:2–14; Zech. 3:1–5; John 8:30, 31; Luke 14:25–27.*

Memory Text: “‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

As the Israelites were being bitten by snakes in the desert, God instructed Moses to make a bronze one and place it on a pole so that whoever was bitten could look at it and be saved.

What healing properties can a bronze snake have? None. Healing came only from God. By looking at the bronze statue, however, the Israelites demonstrated their faith in God as their only hope of life and salvation.

The Lord wanted to teach them a spiritual lesson. He transformed a symbol of death into a symbol of life. That bronze serpent was a symbol of Christ, who became the Bearer of our sins in order to save us. By faith we can all look to Christ lifted up on the cross and find a cure from the deadly sting of the old serpent, Satan. Otherwise, we are fated to die in our sins. The Word of God expresses what should be painfully obvious: as human beings, we are sinners in need of grace. That grace has been offered to us in Christ Jesus.

This week we will look at Jesus' teachings regarding the simple practical steps needed for salvation.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.

Recognize Your Need

Read Luke 5:27–32. How can you know which group you are in?

Many people are physically healthy and “have no need of a physician.” Who, though, is truly spiritually healthy? Of all human beings “there is none who does good, no, not one” (*Ps. 14:3, NKJV*); nobody is righteous by themselves (*Rom. 3:10*). We may do some morally good actions, but we cannot make ourselves righteous before God. Hence, by saying that He had “ ‘not come to call the righteous’ ” (*Luke 5:32, NKJV*), Jesus was referring to the Pharisees, who thought they were righteous although they were not. Unfortunately, though they believed that they were in good standing before God, they were blind spiritually (*John 9:40, 41*).

The first step, then, to receive the cure from sin is to recognize our state of sinfulness and our utter inability to heal ourselves. But how can we see our real need if we are blind? How can we acknowledge that we are sinners if it is precisely our sins that are preventing us from recognizing our true condition?

How can our spiritual eyes be opened so that we may recognize our desperate need of a Savior? See *John 16:8*.

The only eye salve that can make us see our real spiritual status is the Holy Spirit. Before any other work He may do for us, He has to convict us of sin. Persistently He calls to our conscience in order to produce in us an inescapable awareness of our sins and a deep sense of guilt, which leads us to long for a Savior. When we hear that call, we must listen and obey it; otherwise, sooner or later, we will be so hardened against the Holy Spirit that nothing can be done for us. What a scary thought!

Though guilt is often a bad thing, in what ways has the Holy Spirit been able to use guilt to your own spiritual advantage?

Repent

Recognizing our sins is not enough; it must be accompanied by repentance. The biblical meaning of repentance includes three aspects: acknowledgment of one’s sin, sorrow for having sinned, and the desire not to sin any more. If one is lacking, there is no true repentance. For example, Judas admitted his sin, but he lacked grief for having betrayed the Master (*Matt. 27:3, 4*). He was overwhelmed with remorse, not with repentance. His confession was generated by fear of the consequences, not by his love of Christ.

We can see the importance of repentance by the fact that John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministry by preaching, “ ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ ” (*Matt. 3:2, 4:17, NKJV*). Later, when Jesus sent the Twelve on their first missionary trip, they went out, preaching “that people should repent” (*Mark 6:12, NKJV*). And after Pentecost, Peter exhorted the crowd to do the same (*Acts 2:38, 3:19*).

Look at the strong words Jesus used to emphasize the universal need for repentance in order to be saved. What message is He giving us here? See *Luke 13:1–5*.

Jesus affirmed the sinfulness of all people. Therefore, He urged His hearers: “ ‘Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.’ ” (*vs. 5, NKJV*). Without repentance, redemption is impossible, because the absence of repentance demonstrates that people refuse to surrender to the Lord.

Now, we have been told “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (*Rom. 2:4, NKJV*). What does that mean? A block of ice can be broken into small pieces, but the resulting pieces will still be ice. That same block of ice can be placed next to a heater, and it will melt away into water. The ice of our pride can be thawed only if we are exposed to the warmth of God’s goodness and love. Thus, how crucial for us to dwell, as much as we can, on all the evidences we have been given of God’s love for us.

“We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 189.

What are the evidences of God’s love? What have you seen and experienced and learned that gives you powerful reasons to trust in His goodness? Why is it so important always to dwell on those reasons, especially in bad times?

Believe in Jesus

True repentance goes hand in hand with faith in Jesus as our only Savior. Jesus frequently talked about the need to believe in Him in order to receive His blessings. “ ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes’ ” (*Mark 9:23, NKJV*). Faith is essential if we are to be saved. Satan knows that, which is why he makes every effort to keep us from believing (*Luke 8:12*).

According to Jesus, what does it mean “to believe”? It is more than a vague feeling that something will just happen. It is more than a mental exercise. Saving faith is not devoid of content. On the contrary, faith has a definite object: Jesus Christ. Faith is believing not only in something but, especially, in Someone. Faith is believing in Jesus and His death for us. Believing in Jesus means knowing Him, understanding who He is (*John 6:69*), and receiving Him personally (*John 1:12*).

God so loved the world that He gave us Jesus, so that all who truly believe in Him will have eternal life. His death does not mean that everyone will be saved, however. We have to be covered by His righteousness. By believing in Him, we have righteousness, we have assurance, and we have the great promise that He will raise us up at the last day (*John 6:40*).

To a woman who had lived a sinful life, Jesus assured her: “ ‘Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you’ ” (*Luke 7:48, 50, NKJV*). What does that mean? Does our faith save us?

According to the Gospels, when Jesus healed some people, He said to them: “ ‘Your faith has made you well’ ” (*Matt. 9:22, Mark 10:52, Luke 17:19, NKJV*). By saying these words, He was not assigning any healing power to their faith. Their faith was just a complete trust in Jesus’ power to heal them. The power of faith does not come from the person who believes but from the God in whom that person believes.

Why must we be very careful in how we understand the role of faith in regard to prayer, especially about healing? Why is it wrong to conclude from the above verses that if healing doesn’t come as we pray, it’s because we don’t have enough faith?

The Wedding Garment

Jesus sat before the people and uttered what must have been to them shocking words: “‘Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’” (*Matt. 5:20, NKJV*). Few were more scrupulous in the observance of the letter of the law than were the Pharisees. Nevertheless, they failed because their behavior was intended to impress men more than to please God. Jesus warns us not to do likewise (*Matt. 6:1*).

How, then, can we be righteous before God? The parable of the marriage feast gives us the clue in finding the source of true righteousness.

Read Matthew 22:2–14. Why did the king want to be sure that every guest had the wedding garment for the feast? What did that garment represent? See *Isa. 61:10, Zech. 3:1–5*.

The king provided the wedding robes free of charge. Those present were invited randomly while traveling on the highways and probably did not have the appropriate attire for the wedding, nor money to buy it. Both the invitation and the garment were gifts from the king. The only requirement needed to attend the feast was to accept both presents.

Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, every human being is spiritually naked. Adam and Eve felt naked after disobeying, and they attempted to cover themselves by sewing fig leaves together, something utterly uncomfortable and ineffective (*Gen. 3:7*). The best righteousness that human effort can achieve is “like filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6, NKJV*).

As in the parable, God provides the garment we need. He made garments for Adam and Eve and clothed them (*Gen. 3:21*), a symbol of His righteousness covering the sinner. The Lord also provides the garment of Christ’s righteousness for His church, so that she may “be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright” (*Rev. 19:8, NKJV*), “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (*Eph. 5:27, NKJV*). This robe “is the righteousness of Christ, His own unblemished character, that through faith is imparted to all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 310.

Above and beyond anything else we believe, why must we understand that our salvation comes only from the covering that Christ gives us as a gift? Why must we always remember this?

Follow Jesus

When in faith we recognize our need, repent, confess our sins, and claim Christ’s righteousness for ourselves, we become His disciples. During His ministry, Jesus called different people, such as Peter and James and John, to be His disciples, a call that implied leaving everything in order to follow Him (*Matt. 4:20, 22; Mark 10:28; Luke 5:28*). In fact, in the Gospels the verb *to follow* practically became a synonym for *disciple*.

What two elements are essential in order to be a disciple of Jesus? See *John 8:30, 31*.

Some people try to separate faith in Jesus from adherence to Jesus’ teachings, as if the first would be more important than the latter. But Jesus did not make such a distinction. For Him, both aspects are closely interrelated and fundamental for true discipleship. A disciple of Jesus is committed to His person, as well as to His words. Though there is always the danger of getting so caught up in doctrines and forms of faith that we lose sight of Jesus Himself, we must also be aware of the danger of thinking that all that matters in our walk with the Lord is to believe in Jesus.

What is the high cost of being a disciple of Jesus? See *Luke 14:25–27*.

Jesus used the verb *to hate* as a hyperbole meaning “to love less.” The parallel passage in Matthew clarifies the meaning of Jesus’ words: “ ‘He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.’ ” (*Matt. 10:37, NKJV*). Jesus must have the first place in our lives if we want to be His disciples.

What has following Christ, being His disciple, cost you? What does your answer say about your walk with the Lord?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Repentance,” pp. 23–32, in *Steps to Christ*.

“We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 26.

“As we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul.”—Pages 26, 27.

“The humble and broken heart, subdued by genuine repentance, will appreciate something of the love of God and the cost of Calvary; and as a son confesses to a loving father, so will the truly penitent bring all his sins before God. And it is written, ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ 1 John 1:9.”—Page 41.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Many try to drown their sense of guilt with alcohol, drugs, worldly pleasures, or by cramming their lives with frenzied activities. Why do none of these methods really work? How would you help someone who is in this condition to find the true solution for guilt?
- 2 It is possible to recognize our sins without bearing “fruits worthy of repentance.” Why isn’t that true repentance? What is the value of these fruits? Are they good works done in order to gain God’s favor? Explain your answer.
- 3 Discuss the fact that Christ’s righteousness is free but not cheap. Although we do not have to pay for it, the Lord had to pay an infinite price at the Cross. Think about how fallen we are, and how serious sin must be, that it took something as “extreme” as the death of the Son of God Himself in order to save us from the consequences of sin.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 3:14, 15*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Learn the process whereby salvation is personally appropriated.

Feel: Rejoice that sins' stranglehold is broken through the liberating power of Jesus.

Do: Share this incomparable news with friends, relatives, business associates, classmates, and even strangers.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Salvation Is Appropriated Through a Process Involving Recognition, Repentance, and Belief.

A How can our eyes be opened to recognize how desperately we need spiritual deliverance?

B How can pride, self-confidence, and other barriers to repentance be overcome?

C Why is belief necessary to the appropriation of salvation?

II. Feel: The Freedoms That Christians Enjoy Lead Them to Rejoicing.

A Why do you suppose Christ selected a wedding, an unequalled celebration in Middle Eastern culture, as the backdrop for a parable about salvation?

B What happens to believers' rejoicing whenever they refuse the righteousness symbolized by the wedding garment? (Remember that this righteousness is twofold: forgiveness and overcoming.)

C How can Christians nourish that sense of freedom and celebration in their homes, churches, and Christian schools?

III. Do: Sharing the Good News of Salvation With Others

A How can believers engage nonbelievers in the process of becoming fully surrendered disciples of Christ?

B How do believers establish common ground with nonbelievers so that the gospel may have a hearing?

► **Summary:** Because God wants everyone to be saved, the process of coming to Him is simple and available to all. Recognizing our need, repenting of our sins, and believing in Christ, the only Savior the world has ever known, fills us with rejoicing.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 3:14, 15*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The provision of salvation must be accompanied by the personal appropriation of salvation accomplished through believing in Jesus Christ.

Just for Teachers: God has given every human being free will to determine his or her spiritual direction. Male, female, wealthy, impoverished, socialite, social outcast, intellectual, school dropout—everyone determines his or her spiritual course regardless of background. The fundamental decision concerns trusting God. Middle ground is nonexistent. Belief and nonbelief are mutually exclusive.

Marriage supplies an adequate illustration in service to the point referenced in the Just for Teachers section above. Either people are married, or they are not. “Partial marriage,” “limited marriage,” “part-time marriage,” “occasional marriage,” and similar terminology are oxymoronic. People dating are not married. Engaged people are not married. Until mutual commitment is established, marriage is nonexistent. Because of sin, this commitment is revocable. Divorces happen with increasing frequency. Marital status and privilege, however, terminate with divorce. People are married—or not. Now substitute “salvation” for “marriage.” Does Scripture teach “part-time salvation,” “partial salvation,” or “limited salvation”? Certainly spiritual divorces occur whereby previous commitments are scuttled. Nevertheless, the truth remains: either an individual receives salvation or that person does not. Such choices are his or hers alone. This week’s scriptural exploration offers another outstanding opportunity to emphasize the importance of spiritual decision-making. Honestly recognize that whenever people fail to choose salvation, they cannot be saved. Let this motivation guide your preparation to extend God’s invitation for their personal salvation.

Activity: Before leaving home, insert a model airplane (or automobile, battleship, and so on) into a carton (preferably approximating the size utilized in last week’s illustration) and gift wrap the container. During the opening of class, introduce the box again and poll the audience: “How many think we should open the box? How many think we should postpone the opening until later?” Your carryover attendance from last week will likely demand immediate opening. Talk about model assembly.

Substitute Opening Activity/Discussion: Discuss house construction in general terms. Avoid becoming overly technical so that nonbuilders

stay engaged with your discussion. What usually comes first? (Some platform or foundation.) What generally follows? (Walls, entrances, windows.) What normally arises afterward? (A roof.)

Consider This: Housing construction follows commonsense instructions. Why must parts be assembled in specific sequences? What happens when steps are omitted? Salvation similarly follows specific logical sequences. Understanding these progressions provides the foundation for comprehending salvation.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This week’s scriptural investigation guides us through the successive stages leading to salvation. Building upon the previously introduced analogy, these stages might be labeled courtship (dating), engagement, and marriage. Every analogy has shortcomings, this one being no exception. Nonetheless, this sequence supplies enough parallels to justify its usage.

Bible Commentary

I. Recognizing Our Spiritual Need *(Review Luke 5:27–32 with your class.)*

Phase one of the successive stages leading to salvation involves recognition. Before courtships are launched, the interested parties have sensed personal emptiness or incompleteness, needs for companionship, and needs for understanding. These feelings constitute the recognition phase of courtship. Recognition, in another sense, happens when the gentlemen meet the ladies, and couples begin sensing their completion through another person. Wherever the recognition of incompleteness is nonexistent, the motivation for courtship is lacking.

Consider the spiritual implications. Wherever people are filled with self, failing to recognize their fundamental spiritual cravings, the motivation for spiritual courtship is lacking. Self-sufficient (arrogant?) people feel essentially complete. This was the Laodicean church’s signature transgression. “ ‘You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.’ ” (*Rev. 3:17, NIV*). Lacking this realization or recognition, the church was hopeless.

The introductory narrative for this section again illustrates this concept. Levi’s present condition threatened to exclude him from the kingdom. Had this persisted, he never could have been saved because he would have lacked the motivation for pursuing spiritual deliverance. Those who consider themselves righteous stand in spiritual quicksand. Until they

recognize their perilous spiritual standing, they cannot taste the pleasures of salvation. Returning to our analogy, recognition may likewise represent that moment when sinners initially encounter Christ and sense that their emptiness may be supplied through God's grace.

Consider This: What things block that realistic assessment of our spiritual condition that could usher in salvation?

II. Repenting of Our Sinfulness *(Review Matthew 3:2, 4:17, and Acts 2:38, 3:19 with your class.)*

Recognition is not sufficient for appropriating salvation. “Even the demons believe—and shudder” (*James 2:19, NRSV*). Repentance necessarily follows. Comparing repentance to engagement may seem far-fetched and probably represents the weakest component of this analogy. Nevertheless, consider the following. Engagement represents that period when two people eliminate those barriers that separate them, initially committing to a long-standing relationship. Courtship has served its purpose, leading from fascination and infatuation to substantive interest and meaningful interaction.

Consider the spiritual parallels. Repentance comprises that initial response that overcomes the barriers humankind has allowed between itself and God. Repentance includes acknowledging our sinfulness, experiencing significant regret, and turning away from sin and moving toward the right. This action grooms the pathway for an everlasting relationship. Spiritual courtship, characterized by an increasing knowledge of the Savior, escalating emotional investment, and ever-increasing fulfillment drawn from the relationship, has accomplished its work. Personal exposure to our Savior has highlighted our insufficiencies, revealed our wretchedness, and drawn us to repentance. Repentance overcomes spiritual barriers, thus preparing us for total commitment.

Consider This: What might happen if believers omitted one of the three aspects of genuine repentance?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Clothing in Scripture is frequently employed as a metaphor for character and personality. In some cultures, children create figurines from paper or native materials. By a change of clothing, the figurine could represent numerous professions, historical periods, lifestyles, and even personalities. Starting with Adam and Eve, clothing possesses spiritual significance. The parable of the wedding garment is representative of other parables whereby Jesus taught spiritual lessons

using clothing. What spiritual applications does this parable provide?

Activity: Using the metaphor of clothing and figurines, invite members to describe the clothing that would best illustrate their experience of salvation. Remember the three prerequisites or phases for appropriating salvation that were investigated through the lesson.

Thought/Application Questions:

- ① How can Christians avoid the trap of recognizing their utter wretchedness without maintaining a corresponding saving faith?
- ② How can Christians tell the difference between regret or remorse and authentic repentance?
- ③ What measurable evidences have accompanied your repentance?
- ④ How can Christians help others to recognize their true spiritual conditions?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Teachers are called to present opportunities for spiritual transformation. Has your presentation of this week's lesson provided fresh opportunities for your listeners to respond to Christ's personal appeal? As you invite your class to respond, take heart in the assurance that the Holy Spirit has offered to provide the words we should say.

Activities:

- ① Ask your class to write a short script based on the parable of the wedding garment as studied in the lesson. If applicable, present your sketch to the children's divisions in your church.
- ② Identify hymns that best express your experience of salvation and then personalize them with additional lyrics created by the class.
- ③ Make lesson plans whereby your class could present the concepts encountered in this lesson to share with others.
- ④ If your church offers witnessing classes, prepare PowerPoint presentations, utilizing exceptional visuals and graphics, to teach the recognition, repentance, and faith progression.
- ⑤ Encourage class members to do some self-examination to ascertain whether or not they are totally surrendered to Jesus. This might be facilitated by a period of silence or an invitation to silent prayer.