

# PRESENT TENSE SALVATION

November 23, 1958

Scripture: John 5:24-29

Text—"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.

Let me ask you something. Did you ever hear anyone pray, "And save us in heaven at last?" Is it proper to pray such a prayer? Perhaps you ask, "What difference does it make?" It makes all the difference in this world and in the world to come. For it involves the very nature of salvation. Such a prayer speaks only of a future salvation. It literally reeks with uncertainty, implying that if you hold out to the end of life, you will be saved *then*. It says that you can have no certainty about it until you stand before the judgment bar of God and hear the final verdict. So you go on day after day, trying to be saved, hoping that you will be saved, yet never being quite sure.

According to some you can be saved and then be lost, thus having to start all over again. These refer to Galatians 5:4 where Paul says, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; *ye are fallen from grace*" (author's italics). However, a careful examination of this passage reveals that Paul is contrasting the grace way with the legal way of salvation. He says that if you are trying to be saved by keeping external laws of conduct or by observing rites and ceremonies in preference to accepting salvation by grace, or as a gift from God by faith in Jesus Christ, then you have fallen out of or away from the grace way of salvation.

These same people turn to Hebrews 6:4-6 where the Bible says, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost (Spirit) . . . *if they shall fall away*, to renew them again unto repentance . . ." (author's italics). Thus they

insist that it is possible for one to be saved and then lost again. Actually there is a much more plausible interpretation of this verse in keeping with the larger teaching of the New Testament. The entire book of *Hebrews* deals with the problem of Christian people failing to grow in grace, knowledge, and service in their Christian experience. You will not think me immodest when I suggest that you read my little book *Studies in Hebrews* for a fuller treatment of this theme. You can find it at any Baptist Book Store.

## IMPOSSIBLE TO RENEW

However, the thing which I wish for you to see is that, even if we admit that this verse means that it is possible for you to be saved and lost again, I warn you that it also specifically says that "it is impossible . . . to renew them again unto repentance." None of us will go so far as to say that.

Suffice to say that those holding to the view that one can be saved and lost again also insist that salvation is a matter of faith in Jesus Christ *plus* your own good works. The greatest theological battle of the first Christian century was fought over this question. The verdict was overwhelmingly in favor of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ wholly and apart from your works.

Which brings us to the question: in what tense does the New Testament phrase the experience of salvation? Is it past tense, present tense, or future tense? Obviously in so brief a time allotted to this message we cannot cite every scripture reference dealing with this question. Therefore, will you focus your attention upon our text, "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." Examine this verse carefully as we

indulge in a simple lesson in English grammar.

### VERY IMPORTANT

Notice first of all that Jesus introduced these words by calling attention to their gravity. "Verily, verily (truly, truly) I say unto you . . ." This means that He is about to make a revolutionary statement of supreme importance. It is His way of saying, "Stop, look, and listen!" His hearers were steeped in the idea that salvation was achieved through one's own works of righteousness. But Jesus is about to say something quite different. To you also He is saying, "Listen carefully to what I am about to say!" And what does He say?

Jesus begins by setting forth a certain class of people. He does not say, "He that is rich, educated, good, white, black, red, yellow, or brown." He says, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me . . ." Actually He uses two *present* participles, "The one hearing my word, and believing on him that sent me . . ." Here then are two *present tenses*.

You must *hear* the word of Jesus before you can *believe* it. The "word" of Jesus is the Gospel. That is why Jesus tells us to preach the Gospel to the whole world. That is why there are churches in your community. That is why we are broadcasting this message to you right now. It is that you might hear the word of God. The fact that you listen to these hymns and to my voice at this very moment is proof that you are hearing the word of Jesus. And well you may, for the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:13-14 says, "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? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

### YOU MUST BELIEVE

Which suggests that your *hearing* this message is not enough. You must *believe*. Believe what? The truth of the message?

Yes! But there is more. You must believe on him that sent Jesus into the world. You must believe in or rely wholly upon God, not merely as the Creator but as your Saviour. Do you ask, "What about Jesus? I thought I had to believe in Him." That is true. However, you must believe that Jesus *is* God, that Jesus is God in the flesh for your redemption. That is what Paul meant in II Corinthians 5:19 when he said, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself . . ." Thus you must believe not only that Jesus is God but that as such He died on the cross and arose from the dead for your salvation.

Furthermore, Jesus says that if you hear His word and believe on Him that sent Him, you *have* everlasting life. There again you see a *present tense*. This means that you "keep on having" everlasting life. Or as one translator puts it, you "have already" everlasting life. This means that everlasting life is a present possession. You do not need to wait until "heaven at last" to be saved. The very second that you "believe" in Jesus you receive everlasting life.

Do you ask, "What about Jesus' word in Revelation 2:10, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life?" This does not mean that if you hold out until you die that you will be saved. Jesus is talking to those undergoing persecution. What He means is that if you are faithful even to the point of dying, He will raise you up in the resurrection. It is "everlasting" life that Jesus gives when we trust in Him as our Saviour. If language means anything it means that it is a life that lasts forever, not one that ends every time we commit a sin after having received it.

### "HAVE BEEN SAVED"

In Ephesians 2:8-10 we read, "For by grace are ye (have ye been) saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast. . . ." You will notice that I have translated it, "For by grace have ye been saved." This is because the verb is in the *perfect passive tense*, which signifies something which happened at the hand of another in the

past, is still going on, and will continue to go on. It means a finished work or a permanent condition. Thus if you believe in Jesus immediately your salvation is a finished work wrought upon you by a loving God; it is a permanent condition.

Do you ask, "But what if I cannot hold out?" My friend, you do not do the holding out. Jesus does that. In John 10:28-29 Jesus says, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Listen, your salvation does not depend upon your good works in the beginning. Nor does its permanency depend upon your good works. First, last, and always—it depends upon Jesus Christ. You may change, your feelings may change—but in Hebrews 13:8 the Bible tells us that "Jesus Christ (is) the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

#### NO CONDEMNATION

For this reason Jesus could say in our text, "And shall not come into condemnation." Actually here again the verb "come" is in the *present tense*, but the result extends into the *future*. Literally translated it means, "keeps on not coming into condemnation." The word "condemnation" translates a word meaning "judgment." One translator puts it, "He does not come to trial." I like that! When Jesus died on the cross your sins—past, present, and future—were judged in Him. When you accept that judgment by trusting in Him, it means that never again will your sins be called up for judgment.

This does not mean that you can live as sinfully as you please. It means that the power of sin in your life has been broken. It means that no longer will sinning be the habit of your life. The weakness of your flesh may cause you occasionally to yield to sin, but as a real Christian you will repent of your sin, confess it to God, and ask His forgiveness. In I John 1:9, written to Christian people, God promises, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Again in I John 2:1 we learn, "And if any

man (Christian) sin, we have an advocate with (face to face with or before) the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This means that your crucified and risen Saviour is constantly before the Father as a reminder that your sins have been judged in Him.

#### "DEATH UNTO LIFE"

The final word of our text tells you why you will never come into judgment: "but is passed from death unto life." The verb here is a *perfect tense*, expressing something that happened in the past, is still going on, and will continue to go on forever. It is a finished work, a permanent condition. The verb means to pass from one place or state into another. Thus the very second that you place your trust in Jesus as your Saviour you pass out of death into life—everlasting life—a finished work, a permanent state or condition.

It is no wonder, then, that Jesus began this tremendous declaration by calling your careful attention to it. "Verily, verily I say unto you. . . ." He is calling your attention to it right now. Notice that Jesus does not use a future tense in this great pronouncement. It is all *present* or *perfect* tense which emphasizes the permanency of it. You have heard His word that He has died for your sins and has risen from the dead for your justification. If you will believe that God was in Him doing this for you, and will trust in Him as your Saviour—the very second you do it, right now, you will have everlasting life. You will never be brought into judgment for your sins, because you will have passed out of the realm of death into the realm of life.

Surely, you cannot refuse such a loving offer as this! If I could extend my hand to you and say, "If you will accept Jesus as your Saviour place your hand in mine," would you do it? Very well! Suppose that you let your left hand serve in place of mine. If you will receive Jesus as your Saviour, then place your right hand in your left hand. Do you mean it deep down in your heart? If so, you now have this *present-tense-salvation*. I would be so happy if you would write and tell me so!