

The Steps in Conversation

The Christian Bible reports about Jesus' return to heaven saying that after Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven, the news spread rapidly because the disciples and new believers told what they had seen with their own eyes. They described the incredible love of Jesus on the cross. They said it was their own sins that put Him there. They told with excitement about their disappointment because of Jesus' death and how they had been encouraged by Jesus appearing before them and letting them touch His nail scars with their hands. They had even seen Him go up into the air and return to heaven. Thousands were convinced that what Jesus said was absolutely true. They believed, repented for their sins, and their lives were also changed.

If we had seen Jesus go to heaven with angels just as in this story above, surely nothing could keep us from believing in Jesus. The Bible clearly says that hundreds saw these events. This is truly an unusual and very special story.

1-Jesus Transformed the Heart of a Wicked Person

One man who was not happy about this story was an official called Saul. He was a Jew who believed in the Bible, went to worship God regularly at church and often gave offerings in order to help the church and poor people. He even carefully followed the laws of his religion. However, he did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God nor did he believe that Jesus had died for the sins of people. Instead, he believed that this was a story that the disciples made up to hid their shame. Because of this Saul was very angry with the Christians. He began to work vigorously against them, arresting them, and even sentencing them to death. He obtained permission from

the top religious leaders for this work.

One day, while Saul was riding a horse capture some Christians, there was suddenly a bright light from the sky which blinded him. He fell from the horse and onto the ground. He heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." His soldiers helped carry Saul and they could hear someone speaking with him but could not see anyone. Saul traveled to the city of Damascus, his eyes were blind, he could not see anything.

He felt very bad about the things he had done against Jesus. He fast and prayed. Jesus sent one of His disciples to go and pray for him. Suddenly something like the scales of a fish fell from his eyes. He was able to see again after being blind. The Bible says that Paul was not only able to see physically, but was also able to see spiritually. He saw that he was a sinner even though he'd done many good things. He saw that disbelief in God and Jesus was a great sin. He saw that He needed God's forgiveness. From that time forward, Saul left behind his cruelty in fighting against Christians and chose to follow Jesus instead.

Saul's proud and mean heart became gentle and full of mercy. If God could change Saul's heart from bad to good, He can also change our hearts from hatred to love, from worry to happiness, from revenge to forgiveness and from greed to kindness. How can God do all that? Let's study more to find out.

The Problem with our Hearts

If you have a sour mango tree, is it easy to change? You can pour sugar into the ground. Will that make a difference? You can tie sweet mangoes on it. Will that help? No. You have to start all over with a sweet mango tree.

Saul found that it was the same for him. He did many religious ceremonies and good deeds, but his heart still had some anger and hatred. No matter how good he looked on the outside to others, God could see the inside and knew that there was nothing Saul could do to change it, except to choose to let God give him an entirely new heart.

The Burmese have a saying, "Because of one dead fish, the whole boat stinks." Sometimes we are like that. We do many good deeds, but with selfish motives. The selfish thoughts make the whole action decrease in value. The Burmese go on to say, "Even though we do our best for others, still the bad word falls into the middle. All the good deeds are like water upon the sand." Have you felt this way? Have you sensed that the heart is difficult to change? There is hope for us. God has a plan.

God's Plan for Salvation

What does God plan to do for us? It is similar to what the mechanic can do for an old car. There are some who buy an old car, and sand and repaint it to make it beautiful. Looking at the outside, a person could be satisfied. But the machine is still old. No matter how good it looks on the outside, it still can't run. The mechanic must change the engine. He can place a brand new one that will cause the car to race down the streets.

In the same way God has promised, "I will give you a new

heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezekiel 36:25-27). You can choose to have new thoughts, feelings and actions through the mighty power of God.

There are three simple steps to receiving God's forgiveness and a new heart. They are:

Confess your sins.

Turn from your sins.

Ask and receive God's help.

1. Confess Your Sins

We can better understand these three steps by thinking about a man with cancer and a doctor. Suppose you are very sick. You have a choice. You can either pretend that you are okay and tell everybody you are fine. You can stay away from hospitals, doctors and act like you are healthy. Or you can go to a doctor, receive an examination and admit you need help. Which do you think is wiser?

In the same we each person must decide if he will admit that he is a sinner who needs God's forgiveness and help. Many people boast about their good deeds and the ceremonies they have done to make merit. They feel they have not broken any big precept and fail to see the ugliness of their thoughts, feelings and motives. They do not understand that they have neglected to worship the very God who gave them life and sent His Son to die for them.

You now have seen how much every person needs a Savior. What will be your choice? Will you admit your need to God and confess your sins to Him?

Others don't want to admit that they need anyone's help. They want to solve their problems all by themselves. The Khmers have a proverb that says, "Don't sit on a rice-sifting basket and try to lift yourself." No one should be so proud that they refuse other's help when they need it. We truly recognize that all the good deeds we have done are not enough for us to escape suffering and death. We need God's forgiveness if we hope to go to heaven forever.

Are our good deeds wasted since they are not enough? Of course not. They are still very important because they help other people. Jesus said that every kind action done to help someone in need will be remembered by God and rewarded.

2. Turn from Your Sins

If the doctor tells you he that you have cancer it is very frightening. If he says he must do surgery and remove the cancer, you may want to run from the room in fear. But if he tells you that it is the only way to stay alive, you will probably agree and enter the hospital. Cancer is deadly. It must be cut out.

In the same way our sins will destroy us. Saul turned from his sins. He was later called Paul and wrote some of the ancient scriptures. He wrote "The wages of sin are death, but the gift of God is eternal life" (Romans 6:23). He knew it was dangerous to hold on to sin and we do too. By God's power, we must turn from our sin and surrender to God's way. Jesus' disciple, Peter said it this way, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

When you change the oil in your motorcycle you must remove the black, dirty oil first. In the same way, God has promised to take out our sin so that He can fill us with His own goodness. Will you let Him do it? Can you see that there is no pleasure in this world that is worth holding on to and losing

eternal life with God in heaven?

3. Ask and Receive God's Help

Some people admit that they have sin. Some people try to stop doing the sin. They fail because they do not ask the Father of Life for help. There are some people who study religion very carefully. They may even study many religions because they believe that all religions teach people what is good. It is true that religion usually instructs people about the right path for life. However, religion is like a mirror. The mirror shows you where your face is dirty. It never lies. But the mirror has no power to wash your face. You have to have soap to do that.

In the same way, religion shows us where we are wrong. The law tells us that we have sin in our actions and our thoughts. But it does not have enough power to cleanse our hearts. This is where we need the death, resurrection and continued help of Jesus. Jesus' death for us is what God uses to cleanse us. Jesus' disciple John wrote in the scriptures, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7b).

God has promised to help us. Paul wrote, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him....Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:21, 17).

Do you believe it? Will you try it for yourself to see His way will work? Choose carefully. If you have cancer, you will choose the best doctor to remove the cancerous parts. If you need an organ transplanted, you will search for the best expert. Have you seen that the Father of Life has a good plan for you? Doesn't it seem that He alone has provided a sufficient way to escape suffering in this lifetime?

He is gracious and ready to forgive. We must ask and then believe that we have received what He promised He'd give.

Hearts of Gratitude

If you recovered from cancer, would you ever forget your doctor? Wouldn't you be extremely grateful and tell many others of the expertise of your doctor? How much more so if we find someone who can cure our sin and suffering problem and give us eternal peace!

A man struggled to survive in Cambodia during the war under Pol Pot. There was an aunt who gave him one boiled potato. He was so happy and he gobbled it down thinking the entire time about this wonderful gift. Later some soldiers were preparing to capture him and take him away to kill him. One of the young soldiers told him so he could escape. When he was free, he never forgot what the young man had done. Even when he grew old, before he died, he called his children together and told them to respect and befriend the soldier who had helped him, seeing that they owed him so much.

How much more should our hearts be filled with joy and gratitude to God for what He has done. We should want to give Him our highest loyalty and do whatever He commands.

An Example of Salvation

There was a family with two children. The oldest girl was in high school and the younger had not yet started school. The father was a gambler and drinker and the mother was often away from home. The father and mother often fought and there never seemed to be enough money.

One day, the oldest daughter came home from school late

because she had gone to a Christian church. The father was very angry and began to beat her. Yelling and cursing her he forbade her to attend the church again. "If you don't obey me," he said, "I will beat you until you die." Crying and praying the girl picked up her Bible and read in Psalm 85:8, "I will listen to what God the Lord will say; he promises peace to his people, his saints-but let them not return to folly."

Three more times her father beat her but she continued to go to church asking her pastor to pray for her. The next time she came home late she expected to see her father angry with her again, but this time her father didn't beat her. Instead he looked at her and said, "What does that church give you that makes you like to go there so much?" She replied that her teacher could tell him more clearly than she could. The father agreed to let his daughter invite the pastor to their home. When the pastor came he explained about the love and power of Jesus, especially regarding how God had helped the man's daughter become a loving and kind person.

After studying the Bible every day for one week, the man had stopped gambling and drinking and the family was filled with love and peace.

Don't you want the same? Wouldn't it be wonderful to have each person in your family filled with the kindness, self-sacrifice and loyalty of Jesus? It can be yours. Follow the three steps and pray this prayer today:

Dear gracious heavenly Father. Thank you for Your mercy in sending Jesus to receive my sins on the cross. I confess my sins and ask You to forgive me. In specific I confess my sin of _____ (tell Him specifically what you see that is wrong). I thank You for forgiving me and I receive Your forgiveness! I reject these sins. I receive the new heart You promised and I turn from these sins to a new life through Your power. Make

me like Jesus. I ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen

Points to Remember

* Washing off dirt is easy, but cleansing the hearts of people is difficult, but Jesus can do it.

* Three things that bring Jesus' salvation to us:

1. Confess your sins.

2. Turn from your sins.

3. Ask and receive God's help.

* Jesus will give a valuable gift to whoever believes in Him. It is "eternal life."

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Questions

1--Underline the sentences that are correct:

Saul was a good man.

Saul was a believer in Jesus.

Jesus changed Saul's heart.

Saul changed from bad to good through Jesus.

2--Put T in front of the true sentences and F in front of the false sentences:

___ No one is sinless.

___ Man can escape sin by himself.

___ Christians believe that Jesus can help them escape from sin.

___ Jesus cleanses man's heart just as a person can put a new engine into an old car.

3--Summarize the three steps to salvation.

A.

B.

C.

4--Fill in the following blanks.

One night, Saul and his friends were _____ and praise to God.

The prison guard asked Saul, "What must I do to be _____ ?"

The prison guard's family were _____ and _____ received.

5--Put a check in front of the answer that you think is correct.

If someone could give you life, how would you feel?

___ Normal

Thankful and want to fully follow him.

Not very happy because I do not really want to live.

6-- If this statement is true of your choice today, check it:

I confess that I need God's forgiveness for I am a sinner

I ask God to forgive me through Jesus' death and I thank Him.

I ask God to make me a new person by cleansing my heart through Jesus.