

2013 Fall Newsletter
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SALVATION

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:17

Very shortly we will be celebrating Christmas. For the Christian it is a time to commemorate the birth of Jesus. For others who will also enjoy the holiday, it is a time for parties, gifts and Santa Claus. Most biblical scholars admit that the actual time of Jesus' birth is not precisely known, but was not December 25. From other scriptural indicators, it would seem more likely that it was in early October. However, Jesus did not instruct his followers to celebrate his birthday, but only to commemorate his death. Therefore, it is unimportant when that event of such great importance to all is celebrated, and we can rejoice with all those whose hearts are in an attitude of love and appreciation toward God and toward the Savior.

Most of us take great pleasure in celebrating our birthdays. We do not give such emphasis to our deaths. Yet, for Jesus the reason for his being was to give his life "a ransom for all." (1 Timothy 2:6)

When God created man and placed him in the garden of Eden, he declared his creation "very good." (Genesis 1:31) Man was perfect, in the mental image of God, far above the animal creation. He was given dominion over all the earth and all the animals. But, through the sin of disobedience to God in eating of the forbidden tree, man lost his dominion, his Edenic home, and his life. The consequence of his disobedience was that he began to die.

Cast out into the rough, unfinished earth, man was doomed to labor by the sweat of his brow. Slowly he would sicken and finally he would die. Adam and Eve and all their children through all the millennia of mankind's existence have shared the curse upon Adam, learning to know evil and all its bitter consequences. Thus it would have continued forever except that God, in his abounding love for the fallen human race sent his own beloved Son

into the world that he might be their Savior. (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14)

At Jesus' birth, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward man." (Luke 2:14) Yes, praise and glory to God for his most unspeakable gift, his only begotten Son, and for God's good will manifested to man. The time for the beginning of God's great plan of salvation had come. After Jesus' crucifixion, when the perplexed disciples stood before their master's empty tomb, once again angels, appearing as men in shining garments, proclaimed Jesus' resurrection, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee saying, the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." —Luke 24:5-7

Jesus' mission was to give his life to ransom Adam and his race from death. John the Baptist, under the influence of the holy Spirit declared, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the **sin** of the world." (John 1:29) Note that the scripture says "sin" not "sins." Jesus' death was for the first, the original sin, by which the whole race was plunged into death. The Apostle Paul stresses this correspondence when he calls Jesus "the last Adam." "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening [life-giving] spirit. ... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. ... For as in Adam **all** die, even so in Christ shall **all** be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:45,47,22)

The Apostle Peter in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost declared, "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) By his obedience "unto death, even the death of the cross," (Philippians 2:8) Jesus became the owner of the entire human race, Adam and all his posterity. That is why the Apostle Paul said, "Ye are bought with a price," (1 Corinthians 6:20) The price of man's salvation was given at Calvary—with his own blood he bought us. (Acts 20:28)

However, the salvation purchased by our Lord by his death on the cross is, by God's design, to be poured out according to a specific timeline. Paul tells us that Christ gave himself "a ransom for all to be testified **in due time**." (1 Timothy 2:6) The Apostle James outlines God's plan of salvation in Acts 15:14-18: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will

build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."

By this we learn that first God is calling a church for his Son; then he will restore Israel as he promised (Jer. 32:37; Ezekiel 34:13; 37:21; Romans 11:1,25-32); finally his spirit will be poured out upon all flesh and the remainder of mankind will be taught the way of life. (Joel 2:28; Isaiah 11:9; Zephaniah 3:9)

Jesus purposely excluded the masses from much of his teaching and gave his disciples private instruction. (Matthew 13:11-16) Jesus said, "no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." He further told his disciples, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

Was Jesus purposely condemning those people? Our banner text tells us that Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it, (John 3:17) so why did he not want to convert all the people? Because their time for conversion was not then according to the plan of God.

Thus, the work of this age is the calling out from the world of a faithful class who will be joint-heirs with Christ in his kingdom. (Romans 8:17; James 2:5; Revelation 20:6) Paul writes of the Christian's call in 1 Corinthians 1:26-30, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called..." and Peter says of them, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

The Scriptures describe these as "saints" (Ephesians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1), as the "elect" (1 Peter 1:2) and "the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Revelation 19:17,18) They are also Abrahams' seed which is to bless all the families of earth. (Galatians 3:8,16,29)

Paul told the Roman jailer, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31) Reading Paul's words in the 21st Century does not give the reader the full impact of what he was telling the Roman jailer. To become a Christian implied an

entire change of life. To become a believer in Christ meant becoming an outcast from the prevailing society; becoming the object of persecution; perhaps even forfeiting your life. Remember that Paul and Silas had been beaten and were in prison for preaching Jesus. Stephen had been stoned to death. James was beheaded.

On the eve of his crucifixion Jesus warned his disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you **out of** the world, therefore the world hates you." — John 15:17,18 NKJV

The Apostle Peter wrote, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." (1 Peter 4:12-14) How different from the condition of church-goers today.

In today's nominally Christian society, Christians are in the main-stream and churches make a good show in the world. Once Christianity became the official religion of Rome, the church saw that the conversion of pagans would be easier if it adopted the old pagan festivals and fit them into a Christian context. Consequently, December 25, celebrated by the Romans as the day of the birth of Mithras, and the winter Saturnalia, a time of drinking, gift-giving, bonfires, and candles, were reborn as Christmas. Today's Christianity embraces, or at least tolerates, many things which God condemns, and salvation is offered by the mere confession of belief. Thus, in its eagerness to gain converts, the church has absorbed many worldly persons and the Apostolic standard has been lost.

As the account of Paul and Silas and the jailer continues we learn: "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." —Acts 16:32,33

Paul later elaborates on the content of his message by saying, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: But declared first to those in Damascus, and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and **do works** befitting repentance." (Acts 26:19,20 NKJV)

Among the things Paul may have told him is, "**work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**" (Phil.2:12) Or he may have echoed the words of Peter, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, **give diligence to make your calling and election sure.**" —2 Peter 1:5-11 Did he express his own concern that he remain faithful lest, "I myself **should be a castaway.**" (1 Corinthians 9:27) The reward offered believers now is "glory, honor, immortality, the divine nature" (Romans 2:7) but attainable only by those who overcome the world through a transformation of character and are faithful unto death.(Revelation 2:10,26; 3:12,21) "To whom much is given, from him much will be required." (Luke 12:48)

God is already beginning phase two of his plan by reestablishing Israel in its land. Future still, however, is the time when they will recognize the one "whom they pierced" as the means of their salvation. (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:25-32)

Lastly, all who are in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth.(John 5:28,29) In this great time of "restitution" of all that was lost through sin—dominion of the earth and life—obedience to Christ will be required and conformity to all God's laws. God has permitted sin for man's education, but he will not tolerate it a second time. All the enemies of God will be destroyed. (1 Corinthians 15:25,26)

***"Blessed are those who do His commandments,
that they may have the right to the tree of life."
Revelation 22:14***

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