

SEEKING AND SAVING THE LOST

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The name “Jesus” is the Hellenized (Greek) form of the Hebrew name “Joshua.” In Hebrew, Joshua literally means “Jehovah-saved.” When Jesus was conceived in his mother’s womb of the Holy Spirit, God sent an angel to her espoused husband Joseph and said that “she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: *for he shall save his people from their sins*” (Matt 1:20-21). Thus, the Father chose a name for his Son that would reveal the heart of his work, to save the souls of mankind.

Saving the alien sinner

It is God’s desire that everyone be saved (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” to save us all (John 3:16). “*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him*” (1 Thes 5:9-10). John the Baptist said of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus is the the door of salvation, and the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep (John 10:9-11). He died for us when we were without strength, ungodly, unrighteous, and in our sins (Rom 5:6-11). Concerning the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Acts 4:12 says, “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” He is truly the *only* way a soul can be saved (John 14:6). When he met Zacchaeus as he passed through Jericho, Christ went to his house and taught him, and the man repented (Luke 19:1-8). “And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forso much as he also is a son of Abraham. *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:9-10). Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul was another sinner who was saved by Jesus Christ. In 1 Timothy 1:15-16, the divinely inspired Paul wrote, “*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.*” Thus, everyone has the opportunity to have the same salvation as Paul. Titus 2:11 says, “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.*” Therefore, there is universal *opportunity* for salvation. However, there is no universal salvation, as Jesus Christ our Savior has conditions for us to be saved by him. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace are ye saved *through faith*” (see also John 3:16; 8:24). That faith comes by hearing God’s word (Rom 10:17), which is why Romans 1:16 tells us that the gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” If we reject his words, and do not believe in him, we will be condemned by his word on Judgment Day (John 12:46-48). But faith in Christ also *requires obedience* in order for us to be saved. James 2:14 asks, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” The answer is an emphatic, “No!” James 2:19-20 says, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” Hebrews 5:9 says of Jesus Christ: “*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*” This is why Christ himself said in Mark 16:16: “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” This is the same gospel we have been commanded to preach to every

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(continued)

creature (Mark 16:15; Matt 28:19-20). But not all of the effort to “seek and save the lost” is to be directed towards those who have never known Christ.

Restoring lost sheep

In Matthew 18:5-10, Jesus urges his disciples to receive all of his “little ones,” and warns us not to offend or despise even one of them (Matt 18:6-10). These “little ones” are those who *believe* in Christ (Matt 18:6). Thus, the context of this passage is dealing with Christians. Jesus gave the underlying principle for his dealings with his disciples in Matthew 18:11: “*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*” But part of Jesus’ work of saving sinners is reclaiming disciples who have gone astray. In Matthew 18:12-14, Jesus speaks of these sheep who go astray, and the fact that he refers to them as sheep and identifies them as part of his flock once again shows that he is referring to wayward Christians: “How think ye? if a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goes into the mountains, and seeks that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” It is in this context of making every effort to regain erring children of God that Jesus gives instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 for restoring a brother guilty of sinning against another brother. Matthew 18:15-17 deals with one specific kind of erring Christian and gives the proper procedure to follow to bring him to repentance so that he may be restored to the flock. The goal behind the procedure in Matthew 18:15-17 is to regain the wayward sheep, so that he will be saved and not perish. In following this procedure, we need to have that goal in mind and approach a brother who has sinned against us with an attitude that is sincerely seeking to have his soul saved. This leaves no room for hatred, anger, harshness and severity in dealing with him. The situation cannot be *ignored*, because that would be tantamount to letting the sheep who is astray remain astray, which would ultimately cause him to perish. Jesus identified the second greatest commandment in the Law of Moses as, “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*” (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31). This commandment was originally given in Leviticus 19:18. The preceding verse, Leviticus 19:17 says, “*Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.*” Allowing a brother to persist in sin without trying to correct him is equivalent to *hating* him. Galatians 5:14 says, “*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*” Christ’s instructions in Matthew 18:11-17 certainly fulfill the command to properly love our brethren in Christ. Therefore, we must precisely follow the guidelines Christ gives us in Matthew 18:15-17, but we must do so for the purpose he gives in verses 11-14, to seek and save the lost. This also requires having the proper spirit (see also 1 Cor 4:21; 2 Cor 10:1; Gal 6:1-2; Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:12-15; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Titus 3:3; Jas 3:13-18). James 5:19-20 says, “*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*” Thus, to follow Christ, we must seek to save *all* the lost, including alien sinners as well as erring brethren. “*Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved*” (1 Cor 10:32-33).