

Salvation is Revelation

By Paris Reidhead

(Transcript of Tape)

I suppose it was as many as fourteen years ago in a time of fellowship with a group of brethren, one of them said, "You know, salvation is revelation." It made an impression on me at the time, but throughout the years this truth has gained its hold on my mind and heart.

Years ago in Africa I had gone into a village that had not seen a missionary or had any contact with the gospel. I had an excellent interpreter and was able to get as near as we could to the minds of the people. I asked them about sin, which they knew they had committed, about the fear of death, which they certainly had. Then I asked them if they would like to go to heaven when they died. They raised their hands in agreement. So I taught them the sinner's prayer which they prayed with some degree of sincerity.

I went back home as soon as I could and wrote my prayer letter informing the folks at home about this marvelous work of God... that at the first visit to a village there had been converts. However, when we returned to that village a short time later, we found that the people were still going to the witch doctor, the demon dances, the beer feasts, and were clinging to all their superstitions, but still said they were "Jesus boys." It took an experience in Africa to show me how wrong this approach was. You see, these people had an intelligence regarding sin. They knew that God was holy and they were wicked and that God was angry with them because they were wicked, and that they were going to be punished when they died. But I had made the mistake of assuming that this knowledge of sin is conviction of sin. Therefore, I had to do a great deal of heart searching, study and careful thinking.

Actually it wasn't until some years later that I began to see how shallow and superficial my ministry must have been for so many years, and the ministry of others as well.

Some years ago I was in Atlanta, Georgia ministering in an Alliance church. In the congregation was Mrs. J. D. Williams. She and her husband had been instrumental in founding the St. Paul Bible College and Simpson Bible College for the Christian & Missionary Alliance. She was lovingly called "Aunt Harriett" by all who knew her. Aunt Harriett was in her eighties, alert and fragile as a china doll. As I spoke to the small group, her eyes sparkled and her face beamed.

At the close of the service, she said, "Oh, I am so grateful for what you said. Would you come and have tea with me this afternoon?"

"I would be delighted."

"Brother Reidhead, you used two words this morning I have been using for years. Will you promise to use them wherever you go? The first word is **meditation**. People don't think anymore. They just listen, and if they have heard truth before they are not in agreement. And if they haven't heard it before, they mentally comment 'well, isn't that interesting'. But they don't apply the truth to themselves. There can never be a real **conversion** unless you can get people to meditate."

And then Aunt Harriett added, "The second word is revelation, revealing, unveiling, uncovering, disclosing. People must meditate until God reveals."

Now those two experiences, one in Africa and one in Georgia, brought together this truth into the place of paramount importance in my thinking. Salvation is revelation. Read Matthew 16:15-17. Christ is speaking to Peter.

"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.'"

Now I suppose that anyone can say that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. You have read it in the Bible, and you could repeat it. But the fact that you have read it and can parrot it back does not mean that you can comprehend this truth. The insight that Peter has into the person of Christ, the nature of Christ is called revelation.

When God begins to work with a man or woman the first thing He has to do is to awaken him/her. He has to get their attention, to cause them to break the train of thought which has become habitual. Before a child is born heredity is important; after birth environment, influence and teaching are vital. The average "pagan" American has no contact with religion whatsoever. But he has a plan of salvation. This plan may be absolutely improper, unscriptural and inadequate, but it satisfies him at the time. It may be that the person doesn't get drunk on Sundays and beats his wife only occasionally, or pays most of his bills on time... something else that he has fabricated some structure of consolation, comfort, and security.

A man came into the Tabernacle in New York City while I was pastor. He indicated that he would like to join the church. I am suspicious of that statement at the very outset. I talked with him briefly. "What is your job?" I questioned.

His response: "I am a mechanic." Well, that sounded honorable enough, didn't it?

"For what company do you work? Do you work in the neighborhood?"

He responded that he did. I was not aware that there was much manufacturing in mid-town New York.

"Oh, you don't understand the term mechanic. I run a crooked dice game for some of the gangsters down the street."

I hadn't been in New York City long and was somewhat naïve. "And you want to join this church?"

"Yes, I do. I am a very good man. I take good care of my wife and children. I don't run around; I have been faithful. My wife and daughters don't know what my work is. I just feel if I could become a church member it might help me to work my way out of my profession and into something else that I could share with them."

He was absolutely sincere...and absolutely wrong!

Sometimes those of us who have been reared in a Christian home or in an evangelical church are equally smug. Some years ago in Florida I preached a series of fifteen sermons in a two week meeting on the Psalms speaking on Psalms 7:11-13. Two dear ladies converged on me one night after the service, one on the right and the other on the left. I was caught in the middle with no way of escape.

"Oh, Brother Reidhead. That was a dreadful message."

I quite agreed with them, but not for the same reasons, because the truth was a terrifying truth, an awesome truth.

"God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors." (Psalm 7:11-13)

Now that is a terrible subject. In this series of meetings I had spoken several evenings on the love of God and the grace of God and the mercy and compassion of God. But when I dealt with His anger against sin and sinners these dear sisters objected. They felt anger was a blemish on His character. They admitted it was true, but that you shouldn't dwell on it...a blot on the family escutcheon, so to speak. They concluded that before I had closed the message I should have told the listeners that God loved them.

"Oh" I responded. "But God is angry with the wicked. That's the message God gave me to give. I could not mitigate it or change it."

It is so difficult for us to understand that the love of God is the answer to broken repentant sinner's cry for mercy, but it is the justice of God, the holiness of God, the righteousness of God that becomes the yardstick by which men perceive that they have come short of the glory of God. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but it was not his righteousness that he preached, but the righteousness of God. There are righteous expectations that God makes upon men made morally in His image with the capability of responding to that which He expects and demands.

Some years ago in northern Minnesota there lived a young man whose mother was a very earnest Christian. Victor was just one of the lads of the community, worldly and godless. One evening, over the protests of his mother, he decided he was going out with his buddies, probably to get drunk or do whatever he wanted to do. But he ran out of money. He knew his mother was at the church. She had asked him to attend with her that night and he had refused. He also knew that she had five dollars of his wages in her purse. And he wanted it in order to continue his partying with his friends. So Victor planned to be at the church when she came out the door. It was a warm evening, with the church windows and doors open, so he sat on the steps to wait. Inside the preacher was making the closing point of his message. Victor had never met the man, but he heard the evangelist repeat over and over again to emphasize his final point, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Proverbs 29:1) Again and again this scripture came. Before the service was over Victor had gotten into car quietly and driven home. He didn't go out to finish the night partying with the gang. He stayed in his room and wrestled with God. He had been smitten by the Word that God is angry with the wicked every day..."He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

This was a revelation to Victor. It was a revelation of God's just anger against sinners, because sin is treason against justice and proper government. Sin is open, defiant revolt against the One sovereign worthy to rule. Sin is transgression of the law that has been established for the protection of all, including the sinner. Sin is that anarchy that says there is only one principle of government I regard, my pleasure.

Oh, we must see and understand this truth concerning the justice of God, the holiness of God, the wrath of God, the anger of God with sinners. This truth has to pierce the sinner's heart for him to grasp that he stands in mortal jeopardy. Jonathan

Edwards drove this truth home to his Massachusetts congregation in Puritan New England. Strong men took hold of the posts in the sanctuary visualizing the flames that were eating at the roof of hell, causing the roof to crumble and plunge them into a Christless eternity. And they cried out for mercy and God heard them. But it was the justice of God.

But we know that our generation doesn't like to learn of "sinners in the hands of an angry God." But this godless generation must hear! The justice of God is as much a part of His character as is the love of God. There is no fear of God before their eyes. There has to be a revelation of the holiness of God, of the justice of God and the anger and the wrath of God before sinners are awakened. Awakening is a sovereign supernatural gracious work of God. Many awakened have fallen into the hands of bungling personal workers who have given them a superficial assumption that the promises of mercy apply to them. David Brainerd, a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards, was a missionary to the Indians. We would do well to read his journal from time to time. Unfortunately the unabridged version is unavailable. Brainerd tells of going into a village of Indians to preach the gospel. They were hungry and persecuted by their neighbors. Out of compassion he witnessed to them the comforting truths of the Word of God. He informed them that God loves them. To his amazement fourteen professed peace with God and faith in Christ. That night when he retired to sleep in his humble hut God confronted him with the awesome possibility that these Indians were still in their unconverted state not having a saving faith. He struggled with the fact that they might have mistaken the comforts of the Christian erroneously. The next day, after a fitful night, Brainerd visited the home of each man who had professed Christ. (Brainerd was suffering from advanced tuberculosis at this time and succumbed to the disease before he was thirty.) This is what he reports:

"Alas, to my grief of the fourteen I found that eleven did not have grounds for hope in God. Think what it would have been in the judgment day, rising up from the lake of fire, that these eleven would have condemned me before God and the saints and angels as an unskilled workmen who deceived them in the most important issue of their lives. Praise God for the three who understood."

Through the proper use of the Word of God applied to the consciences of men and women awakening will move to a state called conviction. John 16:7-16 describes this as the sovereign operation of the Holy Ghost. Only He is able to do this work because of its nature.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: for he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall received of mine, and shall show it unto you. All that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father."

The Spirit of God convicts of sin. He it is who causes the sinner to see that he has been in open defiance and willful rebellion against God. Sin is a crime of the human spirit, not a disease as many in my generation had maintained. You can be convinced of danger if you are told that your parents had venereal disease and it was congenitally transmitted to you. You can regret to having made an unfortunate choice of parents. And you can feel yourself in jeopardy and danger, but you cannot feel yourself guilty. So it is, I am afraid that we have failed to emphasize the fact that God deals with men as criminals, rebels, traitors, anarchists, transgressors. Sin is a crime. It is the sovereign work of the Spirit of God, through the right and proper and skillful use of the Word of God to cause a sinner to understand that he is justly deserving of the judgment that God has pronounced upon him.

Years ago I asked a congregation of about a hundred people, "How many of you have ever been lost? Really lost? Aware of the fact you were lost. If you died as you were surely would have gone to hell? How many of you were in a conscious state of lostness?"

Four hands went up.

"How many of you are saved?" All hands went up.

"Isn't that amazing. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. The only kind of people He can save are lost people."

Do you know why more people aren't being saved these days? It is because our inadequate and improper use of the Word of God has disarmed the Spirit of God from the only tool with which He provided Himself to bring men and women to an awareness of their guilt and conviction of their sin. It is the law of God that is the schoolmaster to bring men and women to Christ. It is the truth of the holiness of God. (Galatians 3:24, 25)

A masterful sermon by Charles G. Finney proclaimed this truth wisely and well. "God has built as it were a nether mill stone into every human breast. That mill stone is the knowledge of Himself, of His truth and His character and what He expects of man, made in His image. Soon that nether mill stone is covered by incidents of conduct and attitudes until its cutting edge is dull. Though it still turns, it no longer affects the conscious of the man or woman in whom it rests." But, Finney added, "Let a skillful

preacher come and bring the truth of God, the law of God, that revelation of the nature and the character of God, as an upper mill stone, then...and then only...will the nether mill stone of the conscious rise to meet the upper mill stone of God's truth and the human spirit will be caught between and as grain ground exceedingly small."

This is the work of the Spirit of God. Our work is to apply the Word of God. Conviction is the sovereign, supernatural work of a gracious God, the Holy Ghost. You and I cannot awaken a sinner and we can't convict a sinner.

Salvation is revelation. Read the account of the repentant thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43.

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Visualize the picture of the leper in Leviticus, chapter 14. The leper was brought before priest when he was totally consumed by leprosy...not just a little spot. A certain ritual was performed involving the shedding of blood, the cleansing of running water, the releasing of a dove, shaving and personal cleansing, anointing of oil, specified offerings, and finally joyful restoration into communal fellowship. Cleansing comes to those who see the utter vileness of their sins.

"For the Son of Man is come to seek and save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) The work of the Spirit of God caused the publican to cry out "God be merciful to me a sinner." He had seen himself stripped, broken, hopeless, helpless. This is revelation. Telling savages about hell won't do it, or about heaven, regardless of where they live. (Luke 18: 13, 14) Repentance results from a revelation. Man can be awakened and not convicted. He can be awakened and convicted and not yet repented. As a personal worker you must be sensitive to his needs. Don't lead him to a presumptuous peace! He must see the nature of God that he might see the nature of his own sin. And then, when you've discovered that he, like that publican, is broken and crushed, you will lead him further to Christ. You will present Christ as Peter presented Him in Acts 2:29-36.

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, but he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

Acts 2:37 goes on to say: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

It was the revelation that this man Jesus had died a shameful death, and had been buried and raised from the dead and enthroned and exalted and given all authority in Heaven and Earth. It was this revelation that changed the shout of "Crucify Him" to a plea for mercy in His name and to humbly bow in worship.

We see this clearly in the conversion of Paul. Saul was on his way to Damascus, thoroughly convinced that Jesus was an imposter. He was satisfied that the greatest service he could render to Israel was to exterminate the knowledge of the name Jesus from the minds of the Jewish people. He had given himself in devotion to this task. Saul had stood holding the cloaks, encouraging the rioters to hurl the stones at Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen, instead of cowering in fear, shouted in triumph, "I see Jesus standing on the right hand of the throne of God." (Acts 7:55-56)

With that testimony, came the first break in the granite façade of Saul of Tarsus. It's a hairline crack, but it is there. He has seen Jesus through the eyes of one whose life he has taken.

Two days later on the road to Damascus a great light shines about Saul and a voice speaks to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." (Acts 9:5-7)

Immediately came repentance...change of mind, change of intention, change of direction, change of purpose, change of goal...everything had changed. It is the revelation that Jesus Christ is God. He is seated upon a throne and has been exalted and empowered to rule. This revelation moves the hearts of men to repent of their sin, to change their mind about who rules their lives. Men and women come to the place they are willing to let the only worthy sovereign do that which He alone is adequate to do. The sinner repents.

The revelation of God's grace that causes awakening, conviction and repentance is perquisite into further insight into another essential spiritual truth. The day Christ died for you 2000 years ago, you also died. It is on the basis of repentance that faith becomes a receiving experience. And thus it was that years later Paul said that continually he went everywhere teaching repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Then how do you know that faith is that transforming experience

that savingly unites you with God? How do you know it has been effective in washing away the stain of guilt and your uncleanness? How do you know that you have been accepted in the beloved? There again it is revelation.

John Wesley came to his day and generation to a church thoroughly committed to orthodoxy. The Church of England was loyal to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church. But there was one truth that Wesley proclaimed that was offensive to the organized church that caused them to slam their doors in his face and denied him the privilege of preaching in their pulpits. Do you know what it was? That no one had the right to assume that he/she had been converted and forgiven, born of God, unless he or she had received the witness of the Spirit. That one concept was sufficient to make Wesley an outcast and send Wesley to the fields and streets, with every church in England closed to him. He laid a blow to the premise that church membership is adequate without having had a personal experience of the grace of God.

Listen to the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1:11-17.

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it. And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."

Salvation is revelation, the revelation that Christ died for you, dying under the load of your guilt. Are you able to call God "Abba Father" as did our Lord in the Garden? (Mark 14:36) The Apostle Paul (II Cor. 13:5) cautioned the church at Corinth: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates." Oh, how important this truth is!

Some years ago I was speaking at a Bible Conference in Ashville, North Carolina. When I concluded the service with an altar call, three people came forward, the pianist, a respected church elder, and a renown woman from Chattanooga active in the Southern Baptist Women's organization and a national speaker. Each humbly testified that he/she had not been born of God, in spite of church leadership and national prominence.

I encountered these same three people on different occasions over the following weeks in my southern itinerary. In Hendersonville, NC, later in the summer, it so happened that all three people were in the congregation, the pianist, the elder and the woman from Chattanooga. I confronted each individual with the question, "How is it?" My responses were varied but positive. The Presbyterian elder, with the light of God on his face, proclaimed, "How is it? I have been born of God. I know that I am a child of God."

I turned to the skilled pianist with the same question, "How is it with you?" He responded that it was three o'clock in the morning, all alone in the living room of his home that he had passed from death to life, that God's Spirit had borne witness to his spirit that he was born of God.

And then I turned to the woman from Chattanooga with the same question. Her response was: "While quietly meditating on the Word of God, the Spirit of God assured my heart that I was His child. I have come to perfect rest in Him and I know my sins are pardoned and that I have been born of God."

Salvation is revelation. Do you have the witness of the Spirit? Let us pray.