

# Conditions of Forgiveness

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Having read Matthew, xvi, 13-20, I now read in the second chapter of Acts of Apostles, verses 37 to 41:— *"Now when they heard this" (the preceding discourse by Peter) "they were pricked in their hearts." (I suppose we have all felt that sensation, as if something sharp had been stuck into our hearts suddenly), "And said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins ; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying," (this is the substance of it) "Save yourselves from this crooked generation. They then that received His word were baptized ; and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls."*

When the conversation which I read to you from the 16th of Matthew occurred, the Savior was nearly through with his Galilean ministry. It lacked only a little over six months to the day of his crucifixion. He had not, while going about in Galilee, told men who He was; But He had taught them in their synagogues, had preached the Gospel, had healed all manner of diseases and sickness among the people, and cast out demons; and had left every man to form his own judgment as to who He was. Now, when the people and the disciples had seen a full representation by a multitude of examples of His marvelous power ; had heard Him set forth in discourse all his teachings, and nearly all that He intended to say about the coming kingdom; He calls upon the disciples to tell Him, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?"

People, of course, could speak more freely their opinions of Jesus in the presence of the disciples, and in conversation with them, than they would in addressing Him. Hence, they had opportunities to hear the opinions of men of all classes, which Jesus Himself had not. "Who," then. He says to them, "do men say that I am?" The answer is a very significant one. \*'Some say that thou art John the Baptist" (that was Herod's opinion, amongst others), "raised from the dead. Some say that thou art Elijah; some, that thou art Jeremiah" (of course come back from the dead). "Some say that thou art one of the prophets;" and these last had not made up their minds which one. It seems then that these are all the opinions that these disciples had heard expressed about Jesus, and you will observe that they had not heard a single man say that this Jesus is nobody but a common man; not one had said that. And they had all come to conclusions, which, as is usual with unbelievers, were harder to believe than the truth itself. It seems to me that it was a great deal harder to believe that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead; or Elijah come back from heaven; or Jeremiah, who had been dead over six hundred years, alive again; or any of those old prophets; than to believe that He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Then He put the question to them, "Who do you say that I am?" And by this question He wished to draw out from these disciples a free and full expression of the judgment that they had formed about Him, from all that they had seen and heard. Peter, always the foremost to speak, but in this instance expressing the judgment of them all, because the question was put to them all, and not to him alone, says: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That is the judgment that we have formed. He blessed Peter: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee." If you had listened to Herod, or to the priests, or the scribes, or the people, you never would have come to this conclusion; but "my Father in heaven hath revealed it." God had revealed it to Peter by what Jesus had said and done, Peter's mind being open to hear the silent voice of God which spoke through all these wondrous words and wondrous deeds.

### **THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM**

Then Jesus painted a picture before the minds of these twelve disciples, a very striking picture. He represents Himself as about to build a Church that He compares to a great walled city with gates to it, and He paints Peter as the gate-keeper, and He is going to build that Church on a rock,—solid foundation that can not be undermined — and he depicts that before them. Then there is another city, with its walls and gates painted in dark colors, death pouring out of those gates to make war upon this first city; but he says it shall not prevail. He paints the picture in these words—"On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it; and I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." In that picture, notice, He makes Himself the builder of the City, and in the painting you will see Jesus standing on some high position, giving directions to all the workmen. He paints Peter standing by one of the gates, with a bunch of keys in his hands.

Then He paints a great ledge of rock, lying under the whole city. What does that rock symbolize? Some say it means Peter, but it would spoil the picture to say that. You would have to take Peter away from the gate and change him into the great ledge of rock, to make him the foundation. Others say it is Jesus Himself; but that also would spoil the picture he has drawn; you would have to take him down from the high wall as the chief architect, and change Him into the great rock, and stretch Him out under the walls. That is not the picture which Jesus painted. Leave Him where He is. Leave Peter where Jesus placed him; and hunt for something else to stand for that rock. What is it? Undoubtedly it is that which Peter had confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" for on that truth the Church is built on that truth it stands today. If infidels could disprove the proposition that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God," the whole Church would tumble into ruins the very moment they did so. As long as that fact remains true in the estimation of men, the Church stands on an impregnable rock, where, according to the assertion of Jesus, all the powers of Hades can never prevail against it. This is the picture drawn, and this is the lesson taught; and from this lesson starts forward the great current of subsequent history in the labors of these apostles.

At the close of the conversation, however, a very remarkable restriction is laid upon them, that they should not tell any man that Jesus was the Christ, until He should be risen from the dead. When the

apostles were sent out to preach under their first commission, they were not to preach Jesus; they were to announce that the Kingdom of God was at hand, but they were not to say a word about their Master; and now he tells them that not even in private conversation, much less in public discourse, were they to tell any man that He was the Christ, until He should have risen from the dead. I think that must have appeared very strange to them.

About six or eight days afterward, He was on a high mountain, and in the darkness of the night, when the apostles had fallen asleep while He was praying, they were awakened by the sound of voices. There stood Jesus transfigured in glory ; there stood Moses on one side and Elijah on the other in glory; and there came a bright cloud up against the side of the mountain, and out of that bright cloud, they heard the voice of the eternal God, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear Him." Those men fell like dead men, overpowered by what they had seen and heard; but when they finally recovered, there was no one there but Jesus, and night had resumed her sway. This vision taught them an additional lesson. He is not Elijah; He is not one of the prophets; but He is so far above them, being the Christ, the Son of the living God, that hereafter we are to hear Him instead of them. Moses and the prophets are laid aside, and Jesus is the authority to whom we must hereafter bow. But strange to say, as they came down from the mountain the next morning. He said to them, "Tell no man of this vision, until after the Son of man is risen from the dead." Brethren, what a burning secret those three disciples had locked up in their bosoms the rest of the time of the life of Jesus; the greatest vision that their eyes had ever witnessed ; the most impressive one that their hearts had ever felt; and they were told not to tell it ; not to tell it to a brother disciple; not to tell it to their nearest friend. Keep it as a secret in your own bosoms. I wonder if they did. They were better at keeping secrets than some of us, if they did.

And if they did, what a struggle they had to make to keep from telling it. They followed Jesus for six months or more afterward, seeing wonderful things, and if they ever felt like telling any one that He was the Christ, they had to hold in. If they ever felt like telling anybody the glorious vision they had seen on the mountain, they must grit their teeth and hold their tongues. And I suspect they wondered how long that was to last. Until the Son of man is risen from the dead? They did not believe he was going to die, and of course, they did not believe He would rise from the dead. They thought He was talking in parables. What mystery and wonder were wrapt about their thoughts! But finally he did die. Their hearts sank within them. They wept and mourned, and when Mary came running to tell them He was risen, she found them weeping and mourning, and they would not believe it. But they saw Him themselves. They rejoiced to know that He meant just what He said when He said He was going to be put to death and to rise again on the third day; and here He is, alive again. They were glad to know that He was alive, but that was all they knew for a time, until finally, having met them on the mountain in Galilee, He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth, is given to Me." What an amazing statement for a man whom the chief priests had taken and condemned, and whom Pilate had killed and laid in the grave. But they believed it. Having said this to show them that He had the right and authority to speak the words that came next, He says to them: "Now, do you go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." I wonder how those twelve poor men, feeling their weakness—I wonder how they thought and felt when they were told to go and make disciples of all the nations of this earth.

They were not to go yet, however, for He had locked their lips. He had said, do not tell any man that I am the Christ; do not tell that vision; and they must have special direction unlocking their lips before they begin their mighty task. So, on the very day of his ascension to heaven, he said to them again: "Go ye and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned;" but tarry here in Jerusalem until ye be clothed with power from on High; for not many days hence, the Holy Spirit shall come upon you ; then shall ye testify of Me in Jerusalem, in Samaria, in Judea, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. (Mark xvi. 16 ; Luke xxiv. 46-49 ; Acts i. 5-8). So, after they had gazed until He ascended up into heaven, and was seated on the right hand of God, they came back to Jerusalem, and were daily in the temple waiting— they did not know how long they had to wait—waiting for the coming of the Spirit which should open their lips to speak to the world in His name.

### **THE DAY OF PENTECOST**

The day of Pentecost came; there they were as usual, seated in the court of the temple. Suddenly, a sound rumbled through the sky as if a great tornado were tearing the air, although it was probably perfectly still, and these men felt themselves moved inwardly by a new power. They saw flames like tongues from heaven, and under the power that came upon them, they began to speak to the multitude in the temple, addressing all in all the different languages represented by the nations there assembled. They were full of the Spirit, and the Spirit now moves them. The time when they can tell all they know about Jesus freely and fully to the world, has come. Jesus had been taken to His kingdom in heaven. His kingdom has been set up there.

And when they had praised God to the amazement of those people, in all their tongues—sitting there in their places— Peter arose. He has the keys of the kingdom of heaven now in his hand ; he is now going to execute his high commission to open the gates, already established, and let in those who are entitled to enter, and for the first time in his life, he begins to tell men who Jesus is.

He delivers a discourse in which he shows them that the same Jesus whom they had taken with wicked hands, crucified and slain, God had raised from the dead. That, in accordance with God's own predetermined will and foreknowledge, he had been delivered into their hands.

He quotes from the prophets to prove this. He brings forward the testimony of himself and companions to the effect that He had been raised from the dead, and they had seen Him with their eyes, and handled Him with their hands. He goes farther, and shows that God had said to Him, "Sit thou on my right hand, until I make all Thy foes Thy foot stool." He winds up his argument with the thrilling announcement, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ"—Lord of heaven and earth, and the Christ who was predicted by the prophets. This was Peter's first sermon—the first one ever delivered since the ascension of Jesus to heaven — the first one ever delivered since the blood of the covenant was shed on Calvary—the first discourse ever preached in the kingdom of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in which we live.

What was the effect of it? A vast portion of that countless host who stood within the range of Peter's voice, felt pricked in their heart—that sense of guilt which must overwhelm a man when he realizes that

he is guilty of murder—that lie is guilty of the murder of the Son of the living God, the greatest crime that human beings ever committed. And there came a voice from three thousand of them all at once, crying out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Do for what? Do to get rid of this pricking at our hearts. Do to get rid of our awful crime; do to get rid of our sins before God, and escape the wrath of God in the eternal day? That is what they meant. What is his answer? *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Oh! What an easy escape! How promptly, how quickly it enables them by doing this to escape from the fearful condition in which they are trembling and guilty! And then to assure them still further, "The promise is to you"—the promise of this remission of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit, "is to you," not only to you, but "to your children, and to all that are afar off"—for they had been commanded to carry it to the whole creation. But Peter did not stop there. After the manner of modern preachers, knowing how hard it is to move men; knowing how often men are unwilling to do their duty when it is pointed out to them, he went on with many other words to testify and to exhort them, all of his exhortation being expressed in the text by the one sentence, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." This crooked generation is like a sinking ship; save yourselves from its fate. It is like a burning house; save yourselves from its fate by coming out and doing what I have told you. How different the result was from what we so often see in great assemblies of modern times. As many as received that word were baptized, and three thousand of them were added that very day. Peter had come in contact with three thousand men of tender consciences, strong wills, and decision of character, who had only to know their duty, to do it without a moment's delay; and before the sun had set that evening, they were rejoicing in the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. There the first Church was established—started on its career. There the kingdom of God was organized, and it was built on that same rock of which Jesus had spoken, belief that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter had opened the gates. It was he to whom Jesus had said, " whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;" and what he said was ratified on the throne of God. It was the absolute, the eternal, the unchanging truth.

### **CONDITIONS OF SALVATION FOR US TODAY**

Now, let us see if we can gather from this brief story what conditions we have to comply with in order to receive the benefit of the redemption, even the forgiveness of sins, which is provided in the blood of Christ. Remember, what Peter said was addressed not only to them, but to their descendants, and to "all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call to Him;" and that includes you and me. What conditions did they comply with? First of all, we see as plainly as if we heard them say it, that they believed what Peter preached; for they would not have been pricked in their heart, and cried out in anguish, "Brethren, what shall we do," if that story had passed idly into one ear and out of the other. They believed it profoundly.

In the second place, they were told to repent; and when a man, standing before the bar of God, is called upon to repent, it means that he must repent of all this ungodliness. In the third place, they were told, and the apostle is very specific in this, "Let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus." These three things they were to do. And then they were to receive, first, remission of sins; and second, the gift of the Holy Spirit; so that from that time on they might have that Spirit of God, of which the Apostle Paul

says, that he who has not the Spirit is not His, but if we have the Spirit of God, then God will raise again our mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in us. Can there be any doubt about this? Can there be any doubt that when those men believed, repented, and were baptized that day, that every one of them received the remission of sins? that every one of them received the gift of the Holy Spirit? And if there is no doubt about this, if you and I do the same to-day, will we not receive the same blessings?

But let us notice before we conclude, that exhortation of Peter—"Save yourselves." There are two things in this little piece of history that come right in the face of a great deal of the preaching of the present day. The first is the question of those people, "Brethren, what shall we do?" How many preachers there are in the present day who would scoff at the idea of doing. Do? Why, you are mistaken ; sinners are dead ; they can not do anything. All the doing is to be on the part of God and the Holy Spirit ; you have nothing to do ; you can not do anything. And this idea has become so popular that it has gone into the song which expresses the sentiment, "Down with your deadly doing." Did Peter tell them they could do nothing? When they cried out, "What shall we do," he told them something to do. This shows that it is an awful mistake to suppose that the sinner has nothing to do, and can do nothing. The other remark is this: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." Where will you find the preachers of this day, who would exhort sinners to save themselves?

If Peter were to come into some modern congregations, and get up before ungodly men and use this exhortation, saying, "Save yourselves' what an awful heretic he would appear to be! That shows there is something wrong, either in Peter, the man who held the keys, the man who had power to open and to shut the gates, whose word was ratified in heaven—something wrong about his preaching, or something wrong about a good deal of modern preaching. There is a sense in which a man can no more save himself than he can make a world.

He cannot make an atonement for his sins by blood. That Jesus did for him. He can not forgive his own sins, and thus save himself. That is done for him by the Heavenly Father, through the blood of Christ. On the other hand, there is a sense in which, if a man does not save himself, he will never be saved. Who is it that is to believe"? God cannot believe for us. We do the believing. Who is it that is to repent? Neither God, nor angels, nor our godly parents, can repent for us.

We must repent. Who is to be baptized? The living can not be baptized for the dead. No human being can be baptized for another. It is an individual—a personal duty to be baptized. So then, when Peter told those people to believe, to repent, and to be baptized, that they might receive the remission of sins, and then right after that, says, " Save yourselves," not a man in that audience was so stupid as not to see what he meant. If a man were out in the water by the side of a ship, struggling, you throw him a rope, and say, \*' Save yourself, sir;" he would know what you meant—that he must seize that rope and cling to it, to be pulled on board. And so, in being saved by the grace of God, we must seize the help that God holds out to us from heaven.

Now, are there any unsaved souls in this house this morning? Are there any still under the wrath of God, because all their sins remain unforgiven? Christ has died for you, my dear friends. He has made it

possible for God to be just in justifying you; but then, there are conditions laid down for you to comply with, in order that you may receive the benefit of that shed blood.

Here they are: Do you believe that Christ is the Son of the living God? Are you penitent? Do you mourn over your sins? Are you willing to forsake them? Can you make up your mind today that you will, without further delay, forsake all sins, and come to God and serve him? If so, you have repented. Now, show that you have repented by doing what you have resolved to do. Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, rise from that watery burial with the assurance given by the promise of God that your sins are forgiven; then do as these people did, be steadfast from that day on, in the apostles' teaching, in the breaking of bread, in fellowship, in your prayers; and when your journey is ended. He whom you have served will receive you, and say to every one, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."