

BY LEE ROY MARTIN

SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

WE BELIEVE that justification, regeneration, and the new birth are wrought by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

HURRIEDLY AND FEARFULLY, they prepared their evening meal. This was no ordinary meal; it was the Lord's "passover." The Lord said He would come down that night and destroy the firstborn of Egypt. If the Israelites were to be saved, they must follow Moses' instructions to the letter. They must slaughter a lamb, being careful not to break any of its bones, and they must spread the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and lintel. "When I see the blood," the Lord promised, "I will pass over you." At midnight the Lord came down as He had warned, and only the Israelites were saved. The next morning, while the Egyptians were mourning the death of their firstborn, God led His people out of bondage, and they set out for the Promised Land, having been saved by the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12).

The Exodus from Egypt is the prophetic model for all of God's saving acts, including His greatest act of salvation, which came centuries later. On the banks of the Jordan River, as Jesus of Nazareth approaches, hear the proclamation of John the Baptist: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NKJV). Jesus Christ is the "lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). The great multitude who stand before the throne of God have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). Peter says we are not redeemed by silver and gold but "by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). Our salvation comes not by good works but by faith in the blood of the Lamb that was slain (Romans 3:25).

When speaking about salvation, the Bible uses a rich variety of words and symbols, each one emphasizing a specific benefit of God's grace. Through faith in the blood of Christ we are justified (Romans 5:9); we are redeemed (Ephesians 1:7); we are forgiven (Hebrews 9:22); we are converted (Matthew 18:3); we are adopted

(Galatians 4:5); we are born again (John 1:13); we are cleansed (Hebrews 9:14); we are reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20); we are delivered (Romans 5:9); we have eternal life (John 6:54); we are healed (12:40); we are washed (Revelation 1:5); we are made new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In these mighty acts, God transforms sinners into saints. He restores the broken relationship between God and humanity. He restores in us the image of God. He rescues us from the kingdom of darkness and brings us into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). He makes us His children, part of His family (John 1:12). In this study we will look at two of these works of grace: *justification* and the *new birth*.

Justification

Justification became an important word for Saul of Tarsus when, on the road to Damascus, he met Christ in a vision (Acts 9:1-22). Saul had been busy persecuting Christians, throwing them in prison and even killing some of them (see vv. 1-4; 26:10), but when he met Jesus, everything changed. The persecutor became a prophet; the murderer became a minister; the agitator became an apostle. Paul learned that justification is pardon, and he wrote, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). He learned that justification is forgiveness and that it is receiving the gift of righteousness. *Justification* and *righteousness* come from the same root words in the original Biblical languages. To be justified is to be given the righteousness of God by the Spirit of God (Romans 3:22). Paul had thought he was righteous (Philippians 3:4-6); he had thought he was doing what was right. But only in his transformation on the Damascus road was he made righteous. Only through Christ did Paul receive "the righteousness which is of God by faith" (v. 9). Before he met Christ, Paul had lived under the burden of judgment; but after Paul surrendered to Christ he was

no longer guilty, no longer condemned (Romans 8:1). He learned that when we are "justified by faith, we have peace with God" (5:1).

Justification is more than a theory or a doctrine. It is more than a theological point for discussion. God called out Abra-



ham and gave him the promise of children and the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:1-3). To Abraham, therefore, justification means family, home, and a future for his children; it means that God's promises would be fulfilled. God justifies the ungodly by faith (Romans 4:5), and Abraham "believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (v. 3). Justification is of vital interest to Zacchaeus, a man known by everyone to be a sinner. Because Jesus is "just and the justifier" of those who have faith in Him (3:26), Zacchaeus hears Jesus say, "Today salvation has come to this house" (see Luke 19:2-10, *NIV*). To the thief who hangs dying on a cross, justification is a genuine concern. To this wicked man, whose last breath is a plea for forgiveness, justification means being snatched from the flames of hell that are licking at his feet. Because God justifies sinners, the thief hears Jesus say, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43, *NIV*).

Regeneration and New Birth

The Ethiopian eunuch experienced the new birth, as he was riding in his chariot and reading the prophecy of Isaiah: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Acts 8:32, *NIV*). The Ethiopian asked, "Of whom does the prophet speak?" and Philip the evangelist began at that scripture and preached about

Jesus. The Ethiopian believed the Scripture and was born again by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:27-39). He learned that to be born again is to have a new origin and a new nature by the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23), to be re-created in the image of God, to have a fresh start with God and a fresh start in living by the Spirit of God (John 3:3-8). (The words *regeneration* and *new birth* have the same meaning. For example, in Titus 3:5, some translations read "regeneration," but others read "new birth"). To be born again is to experience the restoration of purity, to be as guiltless as a newborn baby. If we go back to the symbolism of the Exodus, to be born again is to pass through the waters of birth like Israel passed through the Red Sea. After passing through the sea, Israel began a new walk with their Savior; and after passing through the waters of the new birth, the Ethiopian eunuch entered into the new covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 12:24) and set out on the life of faith as a part of the family of God (see Galatians 3:26).

To be born again is to be given new life by the Holy Spirit. This new life is more than an extension of the old life or an improvement of the old life. This new life is the life of God himself given to us in the body and blood of Jesus (John 6:53). In fact, the old life is not really life at all; it is death (5:24). To be born again is to have new life that is given and sustained by the Word of God, a life that can live victoriously over sin and the devil (1 John 3:9, 10). Those who have been born again cannot be hurt by the second death (Revelation 2:11). Regarding the person who is born again, God has a final word to say: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (21:7). ☩



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