

Metaphors of the Saved

Can You Imagine...

- A kingdom without any citizens
- A family without any children
- A body without any parts
- A flock without any sheep
- A building without any stones or building materials
- A bridegroom without having a bride

Yet we are told that being a part of the Church is non-essential to salvation. Each one of these represents the saving relationship we have with God through Christ in His Church.

Citizens of the Kingdom

There are only two spiritual kingdoms. You are either in the kingdom of Satan or the Kingdom of Christ. Every man is a member of one or the other of these kingdoms. Christ in the one and only king of His Kingdom. As citizens of His kingdom, we must recognize His authority. “We must live in the kingdom or under the government of Jesus Christ if we would enjoy the blessings of his reign.” (Alexander Campbell, Millennial Harbinger, Vol. 2, p. 53).

Christ is the King and the Church is His Kingdom (Mt. 16:18; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Jn. 18:36). Just how does one get into the kingdom? Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and asked the same question. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3-5). A person becomes a part of the Kingdom of God by being born again of water, that is, baptism. Likewise, a person becomes part of the Church via baptism. To be in the Church is to be in the Kingdom of Christ. To be out of the Church is to be outside of the Kingdom of Christ. One must be a citizen of the Kingdom of God to be saved (Col. 1:12,13). The Kingdom will be delivered up to God at the end of time “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). When Christ comes again, only those in His Kingdom will make it to Heaven.

Children in the Family

Just as there are only two kingdoms to be a part of, there are only two spiritual households to be members. A person is either a Child of God or a child of the Devil (Jn. 8:42-44). God's family is “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Can a person be saved with the Devil as his spiritual father? Absolutely not! Therefore, a person must be a member of God's house to be saved.

As part of the family of God, we are blessed with a relationship (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 2:19, 20; Heb. 12:22-24); a new family name, Christian (Isa. 62:2; Acts 22:16); privileges or blessings (Jn.

14:6, 14); divine assistance (1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 8:26); and an inheritance (Jn. 14:1-3; I Pet. 1:4). All of these are essential to your spiritual well-being and eternal destiny.

Elsewhere in the Scriptures, we find that the Church is made up of family members showing us that the family of God is the Church. It is the “brethren” who constitute the “churches.” “Judas and Silas ...exhorted the brethren...and strengthened them” (Acts 15:32). Paul went out “strengthening the churches” (Acts 15:41). The disciples sent relief funds to the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:29), and Paul brought it to the “churches of Judea” (Gal. 1:21).

One becomes a member of God’s family by being born again (John 3:5). The new birth or being “born again” puts one into Christ. After baptism, one arises out of the water to walk in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:3f). He is now a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul told the Galatians, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). The next verse tells us how faith operates to make us family members. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). There is no such idea in the Bible as a man becoming a Christian and then looking about for a Church that suits him to join. The same thing that made a man a Christian in New Testament days also at the same moment made him a member of the church of the Lord. In Christ, in the body, a new creature, born again, in the Church are all synonymous terms.

Can one be a child of God and not be in His Family or Household which is the Church? If one can be saved out of the Church, he can be saved without becoming a Child of God. If becoming a Child of God necessitates one’s entering the Household of God, which is the Church, salvation outside the Church would be salvation without being a Child of God. Does God have illegitimate children- children outside His Family? I think not!

All Christians are Children of God. All of God’s Children are in God’s Family. God’s Family is the Church. If one is not in the Church, he is not a Child of God; and if he is not a Child of God, he cannot be saved. Being a part of His Household is essential to salvation.

Members of the Body

Christ “is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). This particular metaphor speaks to the inseparable connection Christ has with the Church. You cannot have a head without a body anymore than you can have a body without a head. Can one be “in Christ” and not be “in His body”? Can a person be saved without the Body of Christ? If one is saved out of the Body of Christ, he is saved without being connected with the Head.

Just how does one become a member of Christ’s Body? We get into Christ and into the Church the same way, namely, by being baptized into the one Body (I Cor. 12:13) and being baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). These cannot represent two different baptisms because there is one baptism (Eph. 4:4).

Perhaps the most important passage demonstrating the Church’s essential role in salvation is found in Ephesians 5:25 where it states that Jesus Christ is the “savior of the body.” We, therefore, must be a part of the Church to be saved. Otherwise, you would have to assume that one can be saved without a Savior. If you can tell me how one can be saved without a Savior, I will tell you how to be saved without being a member of the Church. The deduction is certain: if one is not part of the Church, he does not belong to that of which Christ is the Savior.

Glory, Prophecy & Typology

Some argue that the Church is not important. They say that one can be saved without ever being a part of any Church. However, according to Paul, the glory of God comes through the

Church. According to Isaiah's prophecy, salvation is in the Church. According to the book of Hebrews one cannot get to Heaven except through the Church.

Glorify God Within the Church

To glorify means "to esteem of great value, to give one's appraisal of item's or a particular person's worth." How important and valuable is God? Paul says that God is glorified by Christ in the Church: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:20,21). To glorify God by Christ Jesus, one must be in the Church. One can no more glorify God outside the Church than he can glorify God outside of Christ.

There is no evidence in the Scriptures that God is to be (or even can be) glorified in a denomination. Jesus prayed that His disciples would be one as He and the Father are one. As a matter of fact, the oneness of the disciples in the one Church brings glory to Christ. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one" (John 17:20-22).

Prophecy of Salvation Within the Church

Isaiah prophesied that "salvation would be in Zion" (Is. 46:13; 2:2,3). The Hebrew writer identifies Zion with the Church (Heb. 12:22-23). After His resurrection and before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus promised, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46). In Acts chapter two we find the fulfillment of these prophecies when the Church was established at the preaching of Peter. Peter preached repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. Those who were saved were added by God to the Church (Acts 2:47).

Typology of Salvation Through the Church

The Tabernacle and the Temple were composed of two compartments divided by a veil. The first room was called the Holy Place. Here the priests served God daily at the table of showbread, in lighting the candle sticks and altar of incense. Once a year, the High Priest would enter behind the veil into the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people.

The tabernacle is said to be a pattern for the Church and Heaven (Heb. 3:4-6; 8:4-6). The "most holy place" was a type of Heaven (Heb. 9:24). The "holy place" was type of the Church. There was only one way you could access the Holy of Holies and that was by going through the Holy Place. Therefore, the Bible teaches in type that man must go through the Church to get into Heaven.

Staying Safe

When disaster comes and dangers arise, one must follow good advice on how to stay safe. The safest thing to do when a hurricane or tomado is approaching is not to run outside to watch, but to stay safe it is advised to stay inside and away from the windows. During a hail or lightening storm, it is best to stay inside to stay safe. Even if the house is on fire, it is best not to run out through the blind smoke but to stay close to the floor and crawl to safety.

Once a sinner has been saved and added to the Church by God, how can he stay safe? Believe it or not, staying safe requires one to stay in the Church where God has placed the saved. Perhaps, that is why God adds one to the Church as soon as he is saved, so that He can keep them in the safest place on earth.

Throughout the scriptures, we find that God knew how to keep the righteous safe. When the world was so wicked that God was to destroy it by way of a global flood, God was able to save Noah and his family by sealing them up in an ark. So long as Noah stayed on the ark he was safe. All those who chose not to heed the preaching of Noah were not on the ark and were not saved (Gen.7:7,23; Heb.11:7; 1 Pet.3:19-21).

During the tenth plague upon Egypt, Death was to pass by each house and kill the first born. The Israelites needed to be saved from this plague. To do so, they were instructed to keep the Passover feast. The blood of the Passover lamb was to be sprinkled on the door post and door header of each home. When Death saw the blood he passed over the house and the firstborn occupants were saved. To stay safe, they had to stay in the house that night (Ex.12:7,12,13,29,30).

When God gave instructions in the Law of Moses, a law was given on how to deal with an accidental death. For example, if a man was chopping wood with an axe and the head flew off and killed his neighbor, he could be in danger of losing his life from the next of kin. However, he could flee to one of six cities strategically placed throughout the Promise Land and save his life. These were called cities of refuge (Num. 35:26-28). In order to stay safe, he had to remain there until the death of the current High Priest.

As the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan River, they faced the walled city of Jericho. Two spies were sent in to check it out. Their lives were spared by Rahab. Because of her kindness, by the grace of God, she was to be saved when the rest of the city of Jericho was destroyed. The Israelites marched around the walls a total of thirteen times, and they shouted as the walls came down. Every one in the city was killed except Rahab and her household. However, to stay safe she had to stay in her house - the only place of safety in the entire city (Josh. 2:19).

In the New Testament, Paul had been arrested by the Jews and examined by the Roman governors. Since he appealed to Caesar, he was on his way to Rome. The trip was long and became quite perilous. However, God showed Paul that all the lives of those who stayed on the ship would be saved. When some of the sailors tried to abandon ship Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31). The place of safety was on the ship. Outside the ship was certain death.

After Judgment Day, souls will go to either Heaven or Hell. There is no other place of safety than Heaven. "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie" (Rev. 22:14,15). You must be in Heaven to be saved, and you must stay there. Who would want to be anywhere else?

All of these examples serve as an illustration of the Church. All the saved are added to the Church by God the moment they are saved (Acts 2:47). No saved are outside of the Church. You must be in the church and stay in the Church to be saved and stay safe. Does that sound preposterous? Can you imagine anyone asking, "Do you mean to tell me that I have to be in Christ and stay in Christ to be saved?" Imagine one of Noah's sons arguing, "Do you mean to tell me that I have to be in the ark to be saved and stay on it to be safe?" How about Abraham arguing with God by saying; "Do you mean to tell me that Lot and his family must be called out and get out of Sodom

in order to be saved? Do you mean to tell me Lot has to stay in Zoar or a particular mountain to stay safe?” During the tenth plague, imagine one of the Israelites arguing with Moses, “Do you mean to tell me that I have to be in the house with lamb’s blood on the lintel and post to be saved and stay in it to be safe?” Or someone who killed a neighbor arguing with Moses, “Do you mean to tell me that a manslayer has to stay in one of just six cities to stay safe?” The Roman centurion did not argue with Paul by saying, “Do you mean to tell me that everyone has to be in the boat to be saved and stay in it to be safe?” And you will never hear anyone complaining to God in Heaven by asking, “Do you mean to tell me that I have to be in Heaven to be saved for all eternity, and I have to stay in Heaven?”

Speaking of Heaven, did you know that the redeemed have their names written in the Book of Life. If your name is written in the Book of Life you will be saved in Heaven. “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life” (Rev. 21:27). If your name is not written in the Book of Life, you will be lost. “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book’” (Ex. 32:33). “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). Now consider this: those in the Church of the firstborn have their names written in Heaven. The writer of Hebrews states, “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23). In summary, if you are not a member of the church, your name is not written in Heaven. If your name is not written in Heaven, then you are lost!

Is being a part of the Church essential to your soul’s salvation? Absolutely!

– Daniel R. Vess