

“Compromising God’s Plan to Save Us!”

Acts 20:17-24

Intro. – This past Monday, fourteen of us were able to encounter the ark in Williamstown, KY. What a great experience it was! The built to scale ark is huge (largest timber structure in the world) 51’ tall, 85’ wide and 510’ tall. And the displays on the three decks inside are amazing. If you ever get the opportunity to go – GO.

Jim DeWitt and I were wandering around on the third deck when we came across a movie presentation entitled *As in the Days of Noah*. It was 25 min. long, professionally done presentation concerning the purpose behind the ark – why it was built etc. This presentation was a well done and impactful UNTIL the very end when the plan of salvation was shared. Right up to the point/time when one becomes a Christian immersion into Christ was conspicuously missing. Here was a tremendous opportunity to share God’s plan to save us, but then it was compromised. All of which prompted me to cover this very matter in our study of the book of Acts

We are focusing this morning on the last words of Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus. The first matter that is mentioned in vv 20-21, Paul did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable, teaching publically and from house to house to both Jews and Gentiles repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In short, Paul preached the plan of salvation without compromise. What is so special about that?

Nothing is more important/basic to preaching the Gospel than the plan of salvation. There wasn’t one formula for the wealthy/privileged, and another plan for everyone else. Each person comes to Christ on the same terms for the same results. In the first gospel invitation, Peter told those who had crucified the Lord, “Repent and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). How then, have we come to a place where most churches offer invitations that include instructions never given to anyone seeking forgiveness as recorded in the Bible? Today the more popular ways of offering salvation include, “the sinner’s prayer” or “just ask Jesus into your heart” or “trust Jesus as your Savior.” This is the way Satan has always worked -- compromise God’s instructions, change it just a little (remember Nadab and Abihu). Same has happened to plan of salvation through the years.

Purpose: to present God’s plan of salvation without compromise

I God’s Plan of Salvation COMPROMISED

- it will be wise to give a church history lesson at this point to show how God’s plan of salvation has been compromised through the years since shortly after the beginning of the church:
- A. The First Fifteen Hundred Years
 1. From Pentecost (the beginning of the church) through the first fifteen hundred years there was a virtual consensus that baptism is the point of time when God applies/gives His gift of grace...
 2. For the first 1,500 years in church history there was virtually no variation from this view of baptism
- B. Then came Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)
 1. Zwingli was Martin Luther’s Swiss counterpart in the Reformation back in early 1500’s.
 2. He made baptism a “work of man” stating “In this matter of baptism, all the {teachers} have been in error from the time of the apostles.” He also wrote: “Christ Himself did not connect salvation with baptism.”
 3. He went on to say, “Salvation is always by faith alone.” Thus, baptism is not necessary for salvation, neither as its *cause* nor as its *occasion*.
 4. How then does he explain baptism? In short he said, “Baptism is a person’s *pledge of allegiance* to the Christian Community – an outward sign of his inward commitment to live the Christian life.”
 5. Despite fifteen hundred years of agreement concerning baptism as ***the occasion for salvation***, Zwingli’s new view has become *the view* in the Protestant/Evangelical world of today.
- C. From Zwingli Until Now
 1. During mid 1700’s preaching then emphasized the need for an adult confession/experience. Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield and John Wesley pushed the idea of a *radical repentance* and relied heavily upon Revelation 3:20 telling people they needed to “let Jesus into their hearts.”

2. During the 1730's and 40's the use of the mourner's bench came into practice. This was used by Charles Wesley, but it took nearly 100 years for this practice to take hold:
 - sinners were seated in the front pew and told "salvation was looming over their heads."
3. In 1820's Charles Finney used a combination of the mourner's bench and emotionalism and took all of this to a new level. Finney called it the "Anxious Seat."
 - a. his justification = "The church has always felt it necessary to have something of this kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles, baptism answered this purpose. The gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ, were called out to be baptized. It held the place that the anxious seat does now as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians."
 - b. Finney's own words may come back to haunt him at the judgment
4. By the 1860's Dwight Moody took Finney's system and modified it more.
 - instead of calling for a public decision, he asked people to join him and his counselors in a room called "The Inquiry Room." There they were taught Scripture and then led in prayer. The idea that prayer was at the end of the process of conversion became the standard **technique** for "receiving Christ." This was the beginning of the "Sinner's Prayer" but it would not be called that until 40 years later with Billy Sunday.
5. Billy Sunday was the popular preacher of the early 1900's.
 - a. he would preach fire and brimstone sermons mixed with humor and entertainment and then offer an invitation at the end, often it was associated with a prayer (sinner's prayer)
 - b. at other times individuals were told they were saved because they simply walked down his tabernacle's "sawdust trail" to the front where he was standing.
 - c. Billy Sunday died in 1935 but left behind hundreds of imitators
6. Billy Graham was "converted" in 1936 at a Billy Sunday style crusade. Next Big name in crusades
 - a. by the 1950's his crusade counselors were using a prayer that had been used for some time. It began with a prayer from his "Four Steps to Peace with God."
 - b. in late 1950's Bill Bright originated the popular "Four Spiritual Laws" that took the crusade experience right in the home of those who heard. This method ended with "The Sinner's Prayer."
 - c. in 1977 Billy Graham wrote his now famous book *How to Be Born Again*. Never once does he refer to or use Acts 2:38, the hallmark rebirth event in the Bible. Why? Because the emphasis on repentance and immersion for the forgiveness of sins was incompatible theology.
7. Kenneth Taylor's *Living Bible* (paraphrase) in the 1960's became "the bible of choice" for these crusades. John 1:11-13 reads: "Even in his own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few welcomed and received him. But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. **All they needed to do was to trust him to save them. All those who believe this are reborn!** – not a physical rebirth resulting from human passion or plan – but from the will of God."
 - a. this paraphrase is not even close to the original Greek and is nothing more than a blatant insertion into the Word of God of one man's opinion.
 - b. the phrase *receive Christ* or *trust Jesus as your personal Savior* filled airwaves, sermons and books. Men everywhere were trained with "Sinner's Prayer or Altar Call Theology"
 - c. between Graham and James Kennedy's "Evangelism Explosion", any other plan of salvation was considered "heresy".

To all of this let me say to you that God's way is still the only way. Man's ideas must never cloud or replace God's plan of salvation. New times do not demand a new plan. Man is still a sinner and Christ is still the only Way back to God. The Bible plan is still the best AND only plan. What then would God call us to do to find His plan for salvation?

II God's Plan of Salvation WITHOUT COMPROMISE

A. Salvation is BY GRACE

1. No man will be saved by works or keeping the Law
 - Titus 3:5 "*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*"
2. Only God's grace will bring salvation

- a. Ephesians 2:8,9 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*
- b. mercy is not getting what we do deserve (punishment); grace is getting what we do not deserve (reward). None of us deserve salvation... can earn salvation... buy salvation.
- c. Roman 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

B. Salvation is THROUGH FAITH

1. Faith in Christ and what He has done makes the difference
 - a. Hebrews 11:6 *“And without faith it is impossible to please Him...”*
 - b. Ephesians 2:8 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith...”*
 - c. Romans 3:28 *“Man is justified by faith...”* (not by faith alone, but through means of faith)
2. Grace is God’s acceptance of me. Faith is the means of my acceptance of God’s gift of grace!

C. Salvation is AT BAPTISM

1. The Bible says baptism (immersion) is the *time* and *place* where forgiveness (salvation) takes place. Water does not wash away sin, God does. Baptism is not the work of man but the work of God (Colossians 2:12). The Bible also gives us the right definition for what Biblical baptism is: the immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit of a repentant, confessing believer resulting in the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
2. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – This is what Jesus Himself commanded in Matthew 28:18-20 – making disciples = immersing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
3. Of a repentant believer
 - a. Bible baptism always performed only on believer (not infants or toddlers) to do so to anyone else means no more than simply getting them wet.
 - b. repentance a necessary prelude to immersion – Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9
 - c. why repentance is necessary – you have to get a man lost before you can save him!
4. Having confessed Jesus – confession also an intricate means of receiving the grace of God.
 - a. Matthew 10:32 *“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father Who is in heaven.”*
 - b. Romans 10:9-10 *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*
 - c. confession is universally accepted as part of coming to Christ. But, Jesus also said, “Not everyone who says unto Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom.”
5. For the Remission of Sin and the Gift of Holy Spirit
 - a. here is where the real problem arises with immersion today – its purpose.
 - b. Acts 2:38, John 3:5, Titus 3:5 all make plain that immersion is time (event) the place where the blood of Christ is applied, sins are remitted, the gift of God’s Spirit is given and where one is *born again!*
 - c. those who have changed God’s plan must also change what the Bible says; therefore, most are saying, “Baptism is the first act of obedience of a Christian” or i.e. “I was saved and then baptized.” Note how deceptive and unbiblical such statements are.
 - d. Illus. – there was a debate on the purpose of immersion between a preacher from a denominational church and a Church of Christ/Christian Ch. Preacher. For some reason the preacher from the Christian Ch. didn’t show. For three hours the denom. Preacher spoke on why immersion was not necessary for salvation that faith alone was all that one must have etc. etc. etc. When he was done it was stated that someone should say something for the Biblical position. So finally an elder from a local Ch. of Chr. stood up and opened his Bible to 1 Peter 3:21 and read, *“And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience.”* “Yup,” said the elder, “It’s still there!”

Conclusion: Men are still lost. God still wants to save men/women/young people. God’s plan is the best plan and the only plan. What we need to be preaching/practicing is God’s plan of salvation without compromise!