

How and When God Saved a Baptist Preacher

L. R. Shelton, Sr.

(PART ONE)

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I was eleven years of age when I took an open stand for Christ on a profession of faith and joined Sardis Baptist Church on the first Sunday night of our regular annual protracted meeting in August, 1909. I made this profession of faith in Christ with all the sincerity and honesty of my heart: I know that my young heart was deeply impressed with the Gospel truth of God's Word. From that time until the spring of 1939 I never once questioned that I was saved.

At the age of sixteen I felt the burden of **what I thought was the call to preach** the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was based largely on visions and outward manifestations. Yet, I was firmly grounded on the Bible, the Word of God, and believed its doctrines as taught by the old-time Missionary Baptist church; namely, Salvation by Faith, Blood Redemption in Christ Jesus, Immersion as the Bible mode of Baptism, the Eternal Security of the Believer, Bible Repentance, the Deity of Christ and His Lordship, the Bodily Resurrection of both the believer and the unbeliever, the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth again, Heaven and Hell as living realities, and kindred doctrines. Immediately following my call and my surrender to the Gospel ministry I became very active in church life; praying in public, teaching Sunday School classes, leading prayer meetings, taking part in young people's work, and pastoring small country churches as well as holding summer revivals. I was generally referred to as "the boy preacher," and large crowds attended upon my ministry from the very beginning. I never wanted for some place to preach. I was sincere and honest in all that I did, as I never once doubted that I had received a divine call to the ministry.

Having been raised under the old puritan laws, I was hard on sin both on those in the church and on those out of the church. As a result of my preaching, I was therefore constantly bringing down upon me the wrath of unsaved church members who were living under the cloak of religion. Being fearless and unafraid of man, I would stand behind the truth I preached, and I have often said, "Mr. Shelton will back up on the street what the Rev. Shelton says from the pulpit." I was never afraid of my salary. If various members of the church did not like what I preached, I would tell them to pour it back into the jug and cork it and to take their money and go to Hell with it.

Many times I preached sermons which cost me hundreds of dollars as far as collections were concerned, but I have never regretted preaching them. I have always said that I was paid more than I deserved. One of the greatest troubles I have met with in holding meetings for other churches was to get the money that had been raised for me during the meeting, as some pastor or deacon would become jealous of the large offering and try to hold back part of it for themselves or for the church.

A Hunger That Was Never Satisfied

From the day that I surrendered to preach until the time that the Holy Spirit awakened me to the fact that I was a lost sinner (October, 1941), there was always a hunger in my heart for what I thought was a "DEEPER LIFE" with God, or a "CLOSER WALK WITH GOD", as it has been called. I did not realize that **I had missed Christ** and had **never been saved**, and I was therefore always in search of something I knew I did not have. I attended all religious gatherings as far as possible, and when an altar call was made for surrender or dedication, I was usually the first one to the altar. Having always had a tender, religious nature, I could easily be moved upon by an emotional message.

This trait was very noticeable during my school life at Louisiana College and at the Baptist Bible Institute of New Orleans. On missionary days, when we had special speakers and the spirit of the meeting ran high, being deeply interested in mission work, I would revel in the messages and would be among those dedicating anew their lives to mission work, earnestly praying, "Lord, give me the hardest place You have on earth as my portion." I was highly commended by many for my devotion to God's Word and my loyalty to my convictions against sin and was considered a great personal soul winner. During these years I do not remember hearing a message in or out of the schoolroom that ever pricked my heart and caused me to question my salvation in Christ. Every message that I heard only confirmed me in the belief that I was already saved. Not one time was I ever made to wonder by any preacher or teacher whether or not I was saved; but I do not blame them.

During those years, as I came in contact with the religious world and began to see the down grade of religious life, the falling away from Bible truth and the substitution of a religious program for the Gospel, I cried out against it. At night I would walk the floor of my home, the streets or the roadside praying and weeping and crying my heart out to God for an awakening. As I saw preachers, theological professors and church leaders living such lives under the cover of religion that betrayed their profession in Christ and manifested the shallowness of their religious profession, I was constantly facing the question – is there no way out? During all my school life I met only one professor who would sit down and talk with me, and no doubt my constant inquiry worried him because he finally told me, "Brother Lee Roy, there is nothing in the world we can do about it, so go on and preach the Gospel and trust the Lord."

In spite of this religious emptiness, I was loyal to the Baptist denominational mission program. This was the main outlet for mission work that I knew of. I raised all the money that I could and then gave all I could to the mission program. For instance, when the "75 Million Campaign" was put on, Mrs. Shelton and I pledged one thousand dollars above God's tithe to be paid within five years. We brought God's tithe to our church for local expenses, and then we dedicated a second tithe to pay this pledge. At that time we were in school at Louisiana Baptist College, and our income was only fifty dollars a month when we made our pledge. We paid this pledge amid suffering and tears while many forfeited theirs, but to us a religious pledge is a debt and a sacred thing. We fully believed that those handling our money and investing it in mission work for our Lord were honest. Therefore, it all but wrecked me at that time to discover how much of our mission money was wasted and stolen

by high church officials.

I believe in churches supporting their denominational missionary program, but I do not believe that the local church ought to degenerate into merely a money-collecting agency and turn all of her mission work over to the denomination. Christ's commission, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,*" was given to a local church and not to a mission board. May I say again, I believe in cooperative missions as much as anybody, but when a local church surrenders her responsibility of mission work and of soul winning to a mission board and becomes only a collecting agency, then the Spirit of the living God departs from that church, leaving a mere outward shell with no life or power, with profession without possession, and with religion without Christ.

Pastor of First Baptist Church Algiers

I became pastor of the First Baptist Church, Algiers, New Orleans, Louisiana, on the fourth Sunday in February, 1927, when it was looked upon as a small mission church in the midst of a vast mission field. There were only three white Baptist churches in eleven parishes of southeast Louisiana at that time, which had a population of nearly half a million people. For twelve years I gave myself unreservedly to opening up this vast mission field in southeast Louisiana to the Word of God as Baptists believe it. I spared nothing as far as time, money or effort were concerned to reach this half million people with the Word of God. Missions sprang up everywhere in spite of opposition from both Catholics and Baptists. I faced the wrath of man, preached when I was threatened to be killed, and baptized converts with the enemy ready to shoot me. It is only by the grace of God that I have lived to tell the story. I not only fought swarms of mosquitoes, but I met the betrayal of friends and endured the curses of the enemy. Ever since I have been preaching, I have met with opposition from our Baptist brethren; namely, the undercurrent opposition to any mission work carried on by a local church when it does not have its beginning with, or is controlled by, the leaders at the head of our Baptist denominational program. In all of our mission work I have repeatedly run into that opposition from our Baptist leaders. They were afraid that my purpose was to set up a mission movement independent from that which is supported by the denomination. Yet, I could not be still. If I was not given something to do by our denominational leaders, I easily found mission work to do, for by nature I am a trail blazer.

During those first twelve years of labor in this mission field, I was conscious of the fact **that there was something missing in my life**, but not one time did I doubt my salvation. I would talk with Bible teachers, preachers and laymen about my heart's desire, but would always be told, "Brother Shelton, you have all you will ever have; why not settle down and go on about your preaching and forget about it?"

But this **hunger planted deep in my heart** could not easily be put aside. In the spring of 1932 I began to read the life stories of men like George Muller, Hudson Taylor, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, David Brainerd, and others, and I saw that they lived and wrought by faith under the power of God's Holy Spirit. I came to this conclusion: if God could use them, why could He not use me? I then began to give myself to prayer and fasting and to the reading and studying of God's Word for one purpose, that God might use me in the salvation of lost souls. A few joined me in the prayer meetings, which were held mostly in my home.

In September of that same year, an open **rebellion broke out** against me in First Baptist Church, Algiers. Using these prayer meetings, they accused me of having turned Pentecostal in doctrine and practice as an excuse to try to put me out of the church as pastor. During this period the Holy Spirit taught me many things that I could not have learned either in the schoolroom under the professors who fought me or at the feet of the preachers who persecuted me, nor could I have learned them from the writings of any man. As I look back upon this period and the persecution I endured at being falsely accused, I would not now take a million worlds for the truths of God's Word, the powers of Satan, the depravity of human nature and the shallowness of religious profession that God taught me. This was the school of experience that God was putting me through to prepare me for the work He had ordained to do through me. Apart from Holy Spirit conviction and salvation in Christ, this was the greatest schooling of my life.

So Earnest, Yet So Wrong

In the light of these religious experiences, growing out of those prayer meetings, and in the light of salvation in Christ Jesus, God has taught me by His Holy Spirit through His Word the utter religious shallowness and empty religious profession that we have today. In the light of salvation in Christ Jesus, God has taught me how **Satan moves and works in the religious realm** to keep poor lost souls blinded to the Gospel of Christ. My preaching today could not be as pointed and as effectual as it is in opening the eyes of unsaved, religious church members to their lost condition had not God led me through these years of religious experiences. Satan's program today is to make the world religious without Christ; the missing note in present-day preaching is Bible repentance, and Holy Spirit conviction is an ancient mystery. To be true to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I must cry out against this religious shallowness and empty profession at any cost.

By the fall of 1935 I had begun to see more clearly the utter powerlessness of religious experiences to change the hearts and lives of men. I had also learned that **Satan can give any type of religious experience**, but he cannot give life in Christ. Therefore, after all the experiences I had gone through and those I had witnessed others undergo, I found myself still grappling with the same old problems of human life with no power over them. But I could not give up! I went to Bible conferences and other religious gatherings in search of that something which always seemed to be just beyond reach, but which constantly tugged at my heart and urged me on, even though I did not realize what it was I was searching for.

From 1935 to the fall of 1938 I visited one Baptist group after another and, as a result, discovered some pertinent facts: I found that CONVENTION BAPTISTS were drifting to a worship of a program; that ORTHODOX BAPTISTS were given over to the worship of the doctrines of the Bible; that the FUNDAMENTALIST BAPTISTS were being led to the worship of the Bible itself; that the MISSIONARY or LANDMARK BAPTISTS were putting the emphasis on the church; and that the PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS had drifted to Hypercalvinism, and most of them had become fatalistic in their attitude. Therefore, I **did not find what my heart was longing for**. I may say that these spiritual conditions are now growing worse as we are plunging into world-wide apostasy, which is preparing the world for the soon coming of the

Antichrist, the world's so-called "economic saviour."

During this time I was offered the superintendency of a large mission movement, which covered several southern and western states. I turned it down because I could not agree with all their doctrines, and also because they had nothing to offer me but a large salary. I was also approached by a group of interdenominationalists to lead in the opening of a mission program in the South. I also turned them down for the same reasons: I cannot believe in a "mother-hubbard" affair – (a mother-hubbard covers everything and touches nothing). In discussing this matter with me, Mrs. Shelton remarked, "Well, dear, your convictions of the truth of God's Word are too strong for you to conscientiously line up with anyone or a group who does not share such views." My reply was, "I cannot stifle my conscience, or compromise the Word of God for anyone." There has been a love of the truth in my heart as far back as I can remember, and that is the thing that God used to hold me and to keep me from being led astray on false doctrines.

It was at a Bible conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, in October, 1935, that I met **Dr. A. Reilly Copeland**, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, who **exalted Christ in every message** that I heard him bring. When he discussed the church he exalted Christ; when he gave a message on the Holy Spirit he magnified the Son of God, crucified, buried and risen; when he brought a study on the great fundamental doctrines of the Word Christ was the center; when he preached on the second coming of Christ it was not an event, nor a cold doctrinal fact, but the coming of Christ Himself. I could sit for hours and listen to him explain the Word of God and talk about the crucified, buried and risen Lord and His soon coming to reign. I admired his message and was drawn to him because of his frankness and the authority with which he spoke.

By the fall of 1938 I had literally come to the end of my way and was about ready to give up. I had come to see the utter shallow, empty religious life of my church, of the lives of the workers associated with me as well as that of my own life. At this time a peculiar thing began to happen within our church life. Certain members of the church began to come to me questioning their salvation, stating frankly they believed that they had missed Christ. The most singular thing about it all was that among these were the best and most spiritual members of the church.

Like the average preacher of today, I did not know what to do with them. They greatly embarrassed me! Being spiritually blinded to my own soul's need of salvation, I did not see that the thing they needed was Christ. The only thing that I could do was to try to comfort them by telling them that they were already saved and that no doubt the only thing they needed was a more complete surrender of their lives to the Lord. I know now that any preacher, or Bible teacher, who will try to comfort an awakened sinner by trying to persuade him that he is already saved, and that the only thing he needs is a surrendered life, does not know Christ himself.

"The Spirit of God Moved upon the Face of the Waters"

Meditating and praying over this turn of affairs in the church, I was definitely moved to request the church to invite Pastor Copeland to hold a meeting for us in the spring of 1939. He accepted the invitation and proved to be God's man for the hour. For six weeks he preached, mostly on the New Birth – *"Ye must be born again"*, laying *"precept upon precept,*

precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little," as he faced the church night after night with the one question – "Have you been born again?" (John 3:3, 5, 7). Member after member of the church, including missionaries, deacons, officers and outsiders, began to realize and admit that they had missed Christ, and many could not sleep on account of their troubled souls. One member said (referring to Dr. Copeland's preaching), "If he doesn't stop preaching like that we'll all be lost and will go to Hell!" I rejoiced that God was working as He was and that the truth of God's Word was being preached. I also rejoiced in seeing others come to the place of a lost sinner. Not one time did I say one word against the way God was working.

As the number of awakened individuals grew, different ones would say to me, "Pastor, have you been born again? Do you know Christ?" or "When are you going to break up?" But, I was not disturbed in the least, nor had I any doubts about my soul's salvation until one day during the last week of the meeting. The question then came to me like a pointed arrow – "**Have you been born again? Do you know Christ?**" It was an inward call that I could not throw off. I was so glad when the last night of the meeting came and Brother Copeland left for home. I made some kind of excuse for not going with him to the depot: I wanted to get away from him as quickly as I could. It was all right for others to break up, but not for me.

The strange thing to me today is that the very thing I had needed all this time in my religious life was Christ, and now that God was wanting to show me that I had missed Him, I wouldn't have it. By nature every sinner hates God (Rom. 8:7); by nature every sinner (religious or otherwise) does not want God to rule over him (Matt. 21:33-46). He does not know this until his will is brought in contact with the will of God by the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11). No sinner would ever get saved if he could help it.

This meeting resulted in the transformation of the whole church life, and among the many professions no doubt a few got saved. But one of the main results was that the Holy Spirit **took hold of my heart for salvation** in Christ. During the next few months my whole ministry underwent a complete change, and I began to preach the great old doctrines of God's Word with greater power, which only brought folks under Law Conviction. This was the first time that I had ever questioned my salvation. I could not get away from the fact that I might not be saved.

At times, when I would preach Christ as the only Substitute for sinners, my heart would be so **cut to pieces by my own message** until I would be tempted to walk out and accept my own invitation not knowing then that just to accept an invitation and to make a decision for Christ is not salvation. However, I would always be held back by some restraining power, which I know now was the Holy Spirit. I would throw off this uneasiness for a while and settle down to my work in quietness, but again there would come such a disturbance in my heart about my salvation that I could not sleep. At times I lived under great fear that I might not be saved.

How Could I Have and Do All This and Not be Saved?

A year went by, and the church invited Brother Copeland back for another meeting. During this meeting I was not much disturbed about my soul's condition, but rather became more or less confirmed in the belief that I was saved. I kept reasoning to my own satisfaction that surely a man who had preached for twenty-five years could not be a lost sinner. I had preached to multitudes all over the South from San Antonio, Texas, to Cross City, Florida – surely I must be saved! I had also led the church in a great missionary program here in southeast Louisiana, leading thousands to a decision for Christ as Saviour, building chapels, raising tens of thousands of dollars for mission work and giving away all that I had for the cause of Christ. How could I do this and not be saved?! Yes, in the face of all these facts, I wondered how I could be a lost sinner.

Then there was another point I would rest the assurance of my salvation upon, and that was my clear understanding of the plan of salvation and the doctrines of God's Word. I believed the Bible, I believed Christ died for sinners, and I believed Christ died for me. Again I would say, "Surely I am saved!" In the face of all of this and the religious experiences I had had and the answered prayers, I could not see or make myself believe that I was a lost sinner. Also, many had confirmed me in this conclusion by saying, "If anyone in all the world is saved, I know Brother Shelton is."

This one fact I did not know – that salvation is Christ, and the assurance of salvation is Christ, based upon His Word. The blood secures; the Word assures. **I believed and preached salvation by grace, wholly of the Lord, but I had never experienced it in my own heart as a living reality.** I knew about Christ and His Word, but I did not know Christ experimentally. This was because I had missed Holy Spirit conviction and Bible repentance and had built my religious superstructure upon an intellectual faith in God's Word without having known anything about heartfelt repentance.

Yet, I was always afraid that I had not been born again and that someone would ask me the direct question, "Brother Shelton, have you been born again?" If someone would walk up to me suddenly and say, "Brother Shelton, may I ask you a question?" I would tremble all over because I was afraid they were going to ask me, "Have you been born again?" Thus I went through another year *"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"* that I was a lost sinner without Christ.

How and When God Saved a Baptist Preacher

L. R. Shelton, Sr.

(Part Two)

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"Where and when have you ever taken your place...as a lost sinner?"

In September, 1941, the late Brother Joe Granier was invited to hold revival services for us. He was a missionary of the First Baptist Church, Algiers, and worked among the French people at Houma, Louisiana. In the 1939 revival he had been brought under Holy Spirit conviction but was not saved until the spring of 1941. The attendance at the meeting was good from the very beginning. I sat and listened and backed him with my "amens" as he preached the truth and was true to the souls of men. Although small in stature, he would lean over the side of the pulpit and point that index finger as if to say, "You are the guilty one."

He preached for four weeks, and I remember very little of what he said; but his words pierced my heart like a barbed arrow. Night after night as he stood there bringing God's message, no matter what else he might say, he would drive home this statement in his own peculiar way, **"It's needer dis, it's needer dat; Christ died for sinners – are you a sinner?"** (He had only finished the eighth grade in public school and spoke very broken English.) The next night it would be the same thing: somewhere in his message he would clinch it with the statement, **"It's needer dis, it's needer dat; Christ died for sinners – are you a sinner?"** Then he would continue, "Where and when have you ever taken your place before God as a lost sinner?" And again he would say, **"It's needer dis, it's needer dat; Christ died for sinners – are you a sinner?"**

This continued for three weeks, and I began to lie awake for hours at night going over my entire religious life, **trying to find the time and the place** when and where I had ever realized, or had come to the knowledge of the fact **that I was a lost sinner**, and where I had taken my place as such before God and found pardon. Late in the night I would give up in despair and drop off to sleep, waking the next morning with the same question still before me. All day I would reason, "Maybe he is wrong; he has been saved only a few months and is just a young Christian. Here I am his pastor; I finished high school, college, and have had several years of Bible study in the seminary, and have preached for twenty-five years; surely I ought to know more about these things than he does." I argued, "He must be wrong; but if perchance he is not wrong, then surely I am an exception." By the time services came again, I would be all patched up and in my place to hear him, thinking, "Well, maybe he will use some other expression tonight."

One thing I do remember definitely, at the beginning of the fourth week of the meeting I quit saying, "Amen," making the excuse to the people that I had noticed others saying, "Amen," whom I believed were not saved, and I had stopped saying it so they would quit. Old liar! This shows how dishonest I was. I was unwilling to face the fact of my soul's true condition. So, by the time I began to think that Brother Granier would let me off for the night, there he would go again, **"Brethren, it's needer dis, it's needer dat; Christ died for sinners – are you a sinner?"** And there I would go hunting again the place where I had become a lost sinner before God and had been pardoned. **I would go round and round** but I would always wind up by

coming back to the place where I started.

I have found this to be a fact, when God first awakens sinners to their lost condition, and before they admit to themselves that they are lost, they find themselves going around in a circle, trying to convince themselves that they are saved, but they always come back to the same place from which they started, each time more confused than before. A sinner, before he is awakened to this fact, is going in the opposite direction from God – lost, but doesn't know it – and the first stage of Holy Spirit conviction finds the sinner all confused and going in circles.

One day near the close of the meeting, in desperation I said to Brother Granier in the presence of several others at a home where we were taking dinner, "Well, if I was ever saved, it was when I was eleven years of age, and that settles it." But I thank God a thousand times that this didn't settle it. After God saved me, Brother Granier said to me, "Brother Shelton, when you made that statement, it almost killed me. I was thoroughly convinced then that you had missed Christ. I had been wondering for some time if you were saved, but that statement settled it in my own mind that you had missed Christ. And you were my pastor!" He also said, "Then I began praying for God to strip you on down and bring you to the place of a lost sinner."

Tested by the Word of God

Brother Joe Granier preached his last sermon on Friday night and returned home. The associate pastor was to continue the meeting, which he did, and on the following Thursday night preached on the subject, "Salvation tested by the Word of God." As he had announced his subject on Wednesday night, I had come to the service with one thought in mind, "Now is the time for me to find out if I am saved." **I stood the test until he reached his last point – "LOVE CASTETH OUT FEAR."** The Holy Spirit through him drove the truth home to my heart that a person who has missed Christ is always fearful lest he has not been born again.

Bless his sweet memory! Never will I cease to praise God for him, because he did not compromise with my soul. This one fact I have learned – if an individual cannot go back to the time when he was awakened as a lost sinner and took his place before God as a lost, guilty sinner, condemned to die and that justly, and cried for mercy, he is not saved.

It seemed that he spoke to my heart alone, because I had gone about with that fear in my heart. As I have said, I was **always afraid** that someone would ask me the direct, pointed question, "Have you been born again?" Service closed, and I left the auditorium immediately and went to my room without saying a word to anyone. I went to bed to roll and toss as I faced the fact that, from all evidences I had never been saved. I found myself crying unto God, "Oh God, if I'm not saved, save me." I soon learned another truth, that God does not deal in "if's". A sinner is either saved or lost. Christ came to save only lost sinners. Greater fear than ever gripped my heart, because I realized that if I had missed Christ, then I was lost and on the road to Hell. The next afternoon I walked into the kitchen, where Mrs. Shelton was preparing supper, and said, "Dear, if what these brethren are preaching is true, then **I am a lost sinner and headed for Hell.**"

That Friday night after service I took the train to Shreveport to fill an engagement I had accepted two months before to preach in the church of which my brother was a deacon. He met

me at the train Saturday morning and took me to his home. As he had to work that day, I was left alone to face the fact of my spiritual condition before God. I realized that I was facing the crisis of my life, and I knew that the matter had to be settled. For a while I walked the streets, and then went to State Baptist headquarters for a visit. No one seemed friendly; this was not their fault, but was due to my condition.

Although I had not yet admitted to myself that I was a lost sinner, I had come to see very clearly that everything out of Christ is under judgment and going to Hell. Slowly I was beginning to see that I was under judgment and going to Hell; I was beginning to feel as a prisoner before the bar of justice condemned to die. As I left Baptist headquarters, Satan said, "You cannot afford to come out openly and admit that you are lost, for you have been preaching for twenty-five years. You are to preach tomorrow. What will Baptist preachers and your Baptist brethren think of you? Why, you have preached and held meetings from San Antonio, Texas, to Cross City, Florida; you have led in mission work in southeast Louisiana. What will folks think of you? Don't you see that you will be an outcast forever? Don't you see that they will finally dissociate themselves from you and leave you standing alone?"

As I saw all of this, I knew I was **fighting out the destiny of my life**, and I could not afford to make a mistake now. I hurried back to my brother's home. After supper I retired to his den, as he called it, glad to be alone while he and his wife were preparing their Bible lesson for the next day. Opening my Bible I turned to I John 2:15-17 and read it over and over:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

I knew that the word, "world," means "world orders" or "world systems," and I knew also that the Bible says that Satan is the god of these "world orders" or "world systems."

I dwelt for some time upon that 17th verse, the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the WILL OF GOD ABIDETH FOREVER." "Yes," I said to myself, "All the religious systems of the world, including the Baptist religious system, will pass away, and every unsaved preacher will go down to Hell with it under the judgment of God. If I am lost, I will go to Hell with all other unsaved preachers and church members. Then what difference will it make what preachers or others think about me?" **"If I am lost..."** I would keep saying. I was still afraid to admit to myself that I was lost. But the burden of guilt and of judgment rested so heavily upon me that I finally threw up my hands and cried out in my soul, **"Oh God, I am lost!"** I knew that this, then, put me definitely on the outside with the damned, under the judgment of a sin-avenging God, lost and without Christ. I had been there all the while, but I did not know it!

"Set About Trying to Find My Way Out"

After I admitted to myself that I was lost, I set about trying to find my way out. First, I read I John 2:17, *"He that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* Then I asked myself the question,

"What is the will of God?" and John 6:40 came to my mind. I turned and read, *"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which SEETH the Son, and BELIEVETH on him, may have EVERLASTING LIFE: and I will RAISE HIM UP at the last day."* Over and again I read I John 2:17 and John 6:40. I saw that it was Christ or Hell.

There I was a lost sinner – away from home and scheduled to preach the next day – and I knew of no one I could go to for help! As I continued rolling these two scriptures over in my heart and mind – *"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever"* and *"This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day"* – I came to this conclusion: it did not matter what anyone thought of me – reputation or no reputation. That was settled. I saw that the world (satanic religious system) would pass away, and I saw that only the individual who does the will of God will abide forever and God would raise him up at the last day. I saw that everything out of Christ is under the curse and judgment of God. Let preachers say what they pleased, I was lost, and it was Christ or Hell with me. I was ready to go before the church the next morning and, instead of preaching, tell them that I was a lost sinner, let come what may.

That point being settled, and God having won the first battle with Satan, I turned again to John 6:40, *"He that SEETH the Son, and BELIEVETH on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."* I reasoned to myself, "Here I am a lost sinner going to Hell" – "seeth the Son" – "believeth on him" – "may have everlasting life" – "raise him up at the last day." I sat there conscious of my condition, caring not what others might say or think. I knew that I wanted to be saved. It was then that Satan pulled one of his diabolical tricks on me, just as he pulls on many lost sinners when they first admit that they are lost. He showed me a vision of Christ lifted up and said, "There is the Son – believe Him; He died for you." I did believe that He died for me, and as I read again John 6:40, *"He that SEETH the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life,"* there came a quietness and a peace over my soul, which I rejoiced in. I felt so at ease, so light as it were floating through the air. I felt so wonderful. Of course, I did not know at that time that it was a trick of Satan. Let me point out this one fact – any kind of feeling, or any type of vision (whether of Christ, or a cross, or a light) is not salvation. Salvation is the revelation of Christ to the heart through the Word by the Holy Spirit (II Thess. 2:13; Gal. 1:15,16; I Pet. 1:2; John 1:11-13). If you rest the assurance of your salvation on anything else but Christ, you're on sinking sand.

I soon retired without saying a word to my brother about what had happened. That night I rested better than I had in many a night, and I arose the next morning with a joy and peace still in my heart. Believing that the Lord had saved me, I went on and preached at both services. As I returned to New Orleans on the Sunday night train, that peace and quietness began to leave, and I became shaky about being saved. By the time I arrived home everything had caved out from under me, and when I read the Word of God it would not assure me that I was saved. Therefore, I knew that I had not made it to Christ.

I cannot emphasize this fact too strongly – a vision is not salvation or the assurance of salvation. Neither is salvation resting upon the Word of God, nor upon the truth of God's Word, nor upon a promise of God's Word. Salvation is not even resting upon the finished

work of Christ. But salvation is Christ – the Christ crucified, buried and risen as lifted up in the Word, revealed to the sinner by the Holy Spirit and received into his heart by faith. Then the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ secures the believer, and the Word of God assures the believer that the blood has been applied. If you are not saved, the Word of God cannot and will not assure you, because you do not have anything for the Word to assure you about, for the Word testifies of Christ.

When I arrived home, I called the family together and told them that I was lost and going to Hell. That night I went before the church, made the statement that I was a lost sinner, and offered my resignation. They voted not to accept it and to pay my salary right on and give God a chance to save me, saying to me, "You have been patient with us; why should we not be patient with you? As a lost sinner, you have just as much right to salvation as anyone else." What grace! what mercy of a sovereign, loving God! I walked out of the pulpit and took my place as a lost condemned sinner. After service I went to the associate pastor and, placing my hand on his shoulder, said, "I am a lost sinner going to Hell; please be true to my soul. Do not pull your punches, and do not comfort me. It is Christ or Hell, and I want to get saved."

Services continued and the Holy Spirit began to show me who I was by nature, what I was by nature and the judgment I was under by revealing my heart to myself. I began to see that I was totally depraved, utterly wicked, having no righteousness of my own, but that all my righteousness was but filthy rags in the sight of God and that I was unclean and had no natural goodness or merit of any kind.

Satan did his best to sidetrack me with visions and feelings to hinder me being brought to Christ. One of the first things I came to see was that I was utterly demon possessed (II Tim.2:26). As I was unsaved, this had come about largely by seeking a "deeper walk" with God (so-called). I have discovered this fact: when any unsaved religionist seeks a Spirit-filled life, or the baptism of the Holy Ghost, he will always receive a demon spirit instead of the Holy Spirit. This is the only logical conclusion that can be drawn. The Bible plainly teaches that when God saves an individual for Christ's sake, the Holy Spirit comes in to dwell and the body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. These demon spirits will give the individual any type of experience he may want to keep him blinded to his real spiritual condition.

I have found that the vast majority of the religious world today thinks and believes that all religious experiences come from God, but this is not so. I would be safe in saying that almost one hundred per cent of so-called religious experiences today (namely, visions, dreams, trances, etc.) come from Satan and his demon spirits, and not from the Holy Spirit. The vast majority of all the so-called "faith healing" and fleshly religious emotions is not of God, but is of Satan. When the Holy Spirit definitely revealed to me that I was demon possessed, this added to the terror of my soul (II Cor.5:11). Seeing my helplessness and totally depraved condition, without a righteousness that God will accept, demon possessed and held prisoner by the power of Satan, I knew that the only thing I could do was to cry out against it and call upon the Lord for help (Psa. 107:10-14).

There I was lost, condemned to die (and that justly) and also demon possessed. I became

afraid to cross the street lest a car hit me and I wake up in Hell. I did not want to go to sleep for fear I should die in my sleep and wake up in torment. When night came, I would it were morning; and when morning came, I would it were night! (Deut. 28:67). The more I cried unto God for mercy, the more He stripped me of my self-righteous rags. The more I cried for pardon, the more he showed me that I was guilty and deserved to die. As I read the Word of God, judgment blazed forth from every verse – I saw judgment written over everything. The world completely lost its beauty and charm and became just a desert – lonely and desolate (Psa. 107:4-7). Slowly God stripped me of everything and left me alone as a naked sinner before Him (Rev. 3:17). He showed me that all my religious nature was no better than the nature of a drunkard or of a harlot (Isa.64:6). Alongside me a harlot looked clean and a drunkard in all his filth and vomit was a gentleman (Rom.3:9-19). I came to see myself as the chief of sinners (Luke 18:13).

I now became afraid that the Holy Spirit would leave me (Psa.51:11). I knew that if He did there was no hope. I knew that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit I could never get saved (John 6:44; John 16:7-11). I was also afraid that the Lord would come back before God saved me. My mind was made up that if He should come before God saved me, I would never bow my knee to the Antichrist during the Tribulation Period. But I did not want to go into the Tribulation Period; I wanted Christ, and I wanted Him alone.

Reading the story of Christ dying for sinners as given in God's Word, I would try my best to believe and appropriate Him as my own personal Saviour, but I found that I could not. Another fact that I learned here is that Christ is revealed to the heart of the sinner and the sinner cannot make God do it (Matt. 16:17; Gal. 1:12, 15, 16; II Cor.3:15,16). At the same time, the Holy Spirit was slowly but surely opening my heart to let me see how wicked, how vile and how corrupt I was by nature. I came to see myself more and more as the chief of sinners, until I could not see how God could love such a wretch as I. Here I was demon possessed, with a heart so stony that I could not believe that God loved me, and Satan kept saying again and again, "God doesn't love a sinner like you – you are too wicked, too vile, and too corrupt for God to save you. Surely He doesn't love a sinner like you!" All hope of ever getting saved began to flee away, and for days I remained in that condition, believing that God did not love me. There it was the last of November, and still I was not saved.

About that time I began corresponding with a thirteen year old boy, whose name is Omer Ritchie, then of Mobile, Alabama. He would write me such simple, plain, childlike letters, telling me what the Lord meant to him and how real Christ was to his soul, and he showed such childlike faith in Christ. I would take those letters, spread them out upon my desk, and read and reread them, bathing them with my tears. I would say, "Now, there is a child who can trust Christ with such a simple, childlike faith, and here I am a high school, college and seminary graduate who has been preaching for twenty-five years, who knows the Bible historically and who believes the plan of salvation completely – and yet, I cannot trust Christ for salvation!

In the midst of these struggles of trying to believe, the Holy Spirit impressed upon my heart Matthew 18:3, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." I began to cry unto Him to make me as a little child. There I was,

having gone through high school, college and the seminary, and having preached for twenty-five years, with a library that would grace any preacher's study, helpless and hopeless and could not believe! I would walk the floor of my study, or lie flat on my face on the floor, with one cry in my soul, "Lord, make me as a little child." As someone said, I knew too much; I kept telling God how to do it. I knew a little child knows nothing, a little child is nothing, a little child has nothing, and a little child trusts with simple faith. Every sinner learns only two things before he gets saved; one is that he is a sinner, lost and Hell-deserving, and the other one is that Christ died for him.

Then I was led to lay hold of Phil. 1:6 and plead this promise before the throne of God's grace: "He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of redemption." I knew that He had begun a work of grace in my heart, and I also knew that God cannot lie and that His Word cannot be broken. Also by His grace I was now able to lay hold of Isa. 55:7, "I will abundantly pardon." Yes, I was guilty – so guilty – and I wanted a pardon. God had said, "I will." These promises I kept daily before Him. Then it dawned upon me that God loved me, and I said, "if God loves me and if Christ died for me, then He wills to save me." That was a great moment in my life when the light of God's love broke in upon my poor, wretched soul, and I saw that Christ died for such a wretched, Hell-deserving sinner as I, and that He wanted to save me (Rom. 2:4). This completely broke me at His feet crying for mercy.

It was Monday morning at the break of day, as I was riding on the train between Tallulah and Delhi, Louisiana, that the burden and guilt of sin weighed heavily upon my soul. I was lost and going to Hell, and I knew it. I walked from one end of the coach to the other end and fell down upon an empty seat, crying from the depths of my soul with all hope gone, "Lord, I am lost; save me, or I perish!" I had come to the end of my way, and God had given me strength to cast myself completely upon Him, trusting all into His hands to save me or to damn me. Here I was a wicked, condemned, lost sinner who had forsaken his way; here I was resting at the feet of a sovereign God helpless, hopeless, hapless, begging for mercy; here I was an unrighteous sinner who had given up all pretensions to any righteousness of my own, abhorring my corrupt nature, realizing I was lost and ought to go to Hell, and also realizing that God ought to send me to Hell, but I had one plea – that Christ had died for me. On that basis I cried for mercy, "Lord, save me, or I perish!"

The battle was over; the Holy Spirit had at last brought me to the feet of a sovereign, eternal, merciful, pardoning God and made me to realize that He could save me or damn me. There I rested, knowing only two things – first, that I was a lost sinner condemned to die, a sinner whom God ought to send to Hell, a sinner who did not deserve to be saved, a sinner who, if God chose to send me to Hell, would say, "Amen," to his own condemnation, and second, that God could pardon me because Christ died for me. A quietness came over my soul, and a peace settled down upon me. There was no more struggle. My one hope was that Christ died for such a sinner, and I believed it. God's Word could not be broken.

We reached our destination – Herringville Baptist Church, six miles east of Epps, Louisiana – where we were to hold a week's meeting. Friday night came with everything frozen, the temperature just ten degrees above zero. Twelve of us gathered for the last service around the old wood heater in the large one room church building. We sat there freezing on one side and

burning on the other. The preacher had not been preaching very long when, to my utter surprise and gladness of heart, the Holy Spirit revealed Christ definitely to my heart as my Saviour and Lord.

What a moment when God chose to reveal His Son in me! I sat there in amazement and wonder. I would say to myself, "Is this salvation?" I had made sure that, if and when God saved me, no doubt I would shout all over God's creation; but there I sat not saying a word. It was so different from what I had expected. It was the quiet revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ to my heart and life as my Saviour and Lord. The Holy Spirit had brought me to rest upon Christ and to commit everything into His hands, and now He had revealed Him to my heart as the One who had died for me – my Substitute, my risen Lord.

Salvation is the revelation of Christ to the sinner's heart as his Saviour and Lord. Salvation takes place when the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to a sinner's heart as his own personal Saviour and Lord after He had brought him to realize that he is condemned, admitting in his heart that he ought to go to Hell and saying, "Amen," to his own condemnation if God should choose to send him to Hell (Matt. 16:17; Gal. 1:11,12; Gal. 1:15,16; I Cor.15:3,4; Eph.2:8,9; I Cor.1:26-29).

Salvation is not resting upon the Word of God or believing the promises of God – salvation is not resting upon one's faith. Salvation is the revelation of Christ to the sinner's heart. Reader, do you know Him? Every saved person can say, "I know WHOM I have believed."