

HOME MISSIONS

Acts 16:31-34

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

This message is about the mission that the church of Jesus Christ has to reach families with the saving message of the Gospel. The family, the first institution that God ordained upon the earth, is in jeopardy. Satan, anti-God activists and society’s promotion and tolerance of promiscuous sexual behavior are attacking the family unit.

The American family unit is also under tremendous pressures from many levels of government, from political sources, from the economy as well as from American culture. Just as fast as new family units are formed, others are crumbling and are disappearing, leaving broken lives and broken dreams in the aftermath.

Wherein lies hope for the family in this environment? God, Who instituted the family, has the answer, given to us throughout His written Word. In Acts chapter 16 is the account of the salvation of an entire family. Let us learn some lessons from this passage of scripture that we can apply to our own family or to others in need of help.

Did you notice, in the verses in Acts chapter 16, that the word “household” or “family” occurs several times? This passage teaches, among other things, that God is interested in families. Since the Garden of Eden, when the devil got a foothold in the first family, every family has been the focal point of satanic attack. The devil wants families disrupted, divided and doomed.

When we set out to establish a family, we ought to know what a family should be. If we were starting to build a building we would have a blueprint and some concept of what it should look like. Likewise with the family. God is the designer of the family. We should look at His blueprint for “except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1).

A London, England publication asked its subscribers to define a home. Out of the nearly 1,000 replies, the following were among the best definitions of a home:

- Home is a world of strife shut out, a world of love shut in;
- Home is the place where the small are great and the great or small;
- Home is the place where we grumbled the most and are treated the best;
- Home is the center of our affections around which our hearts best wishes are entwined;
- Home is the place where our stomachs get three square meals a day and our hearts get a thousand!

Yes, a home is all of this and more. The whole concept of a family and a home is a divine one. If God were not so ignored in the home life of our nation, we would not have to endure

the shame and tragedy of low moral standards, the breakdown in marriages and juvenile and parental delinquency.

Marriage is a divine institution. Marriage should be a holy wedlock instead of an unholy deadlock! It should be a duet not a duel! One lady said, "When I first got married I thought married life was ideal, then it became an ordeal and now I'm looking for a new deal! There are many men as well as women who probably feel the same way. However, to make marriage a holy wedlock and the family everything that God intended it to be, families must discover and apply the biblical principles that make for a happy home.

In Acts chapter 16 we have the account of a family coming to the Lord, not only the father. Usually we quote only part of verse 31, stopping with the word "saved". We make the verse read as follows: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." But the entire verse reads, "And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, *and your family.*" It is not only the father but the entire family in focus in this verse.

Please notice three things in this passage relative to the home:

I. GOD WANTS FAMILIES IN HEAVEN. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, and your family."

This verse is not teaching that if the father believes his family is automatically saved. Many other scriptures make it amply clear that each individual is responsible before God. What the verse does teach is that the individual members of the family will be saved on the same condition of faith as the father. That is, "You believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and your family, if they believe, will be saved."

A. Consider the Proposition as Presented. "... believe.... you shall be saved, and your family."

God is interested in the salvation of individuals, to be sure. But God is also interested in the salvation of families. He is "Long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He is not willing that any individual or any family perish.

B. Consider The Proposition In Practice.

In Luke's Gospel, chapter 19, we have the account of a short man up a tall tree. Verse nine reads, "And Jesus said unto him, this day is salvation come to this house (household)." When Jesus called to Zacchaeus in the tree, he said, "Make haste, and come down; for today I must abide in your house." (Luke 19:5). I believe that Jesus had the salvation, not only of this father, but of his family in mind. We should seek to lead individuals to Christ but may God give us a burden for units of individuals such as entire families!

C. Consider The Proposition In Parable.

The well-known parable of the prodigal son teaches many lessons, among them, that God wants complete families in heaven. In Luke chapter 15 we have the parable of the lost son. Three members of this family were "in the fold." But one member was in the "far country." The

story has a sad beginning but it has a glad ending. The wayward son came home and the father said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found; and they began to be merry" (Luke 15:24). The family was altogether now in the father's house. What a beautiful picture! The devil wants families together, in hell; God wants families together, in heaven. How do families get to heaven? Look at it this way:

- How do fathers get to heaven? Dad, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."
- How do mothers get to heaven? Mom, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."
- How do daughters get to heaven? Young lady, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."
- How do sons get to heaven? Young man, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

The first public ministry of Jesus was performed at a wedding feast, the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Did you ever wonder why Jesus was present at that wedding? He was invited, of course. This godly couple wanted to establish a godly home and therefore they invited Jesus. He graced, gladdened and glorified that marriage and that home by His presence.

Have you ever invited Jesus into your life, your home? His presence means salvation, safety and sanctity! A heart and a home without Jesus can be a hell on earth; but a heart and a home in which Jesus is present and honored is heaven on earth. I urge you to invite this wonderful Savior into your heart and your home.

A man condemned to 15 years in prison for his crimes, said in court when sentenced, "I pardoned the judge, his sentence is just; I pardoned the police, it is their job to arrest criminals; but there are two people in this court that I will never forgive—they are my parents, who brought me up without God and without hope."

A house at night looks gloomy and foreboding, but put a key in the lock and turn on the lights, light the fire and the gloom vanishes and the house comes alive. Just so, when Jesus comes in, He brings light, life and love into every heart.

The jailer of Philippi was himself a prisoner—a prisoner of sin—until the Lord Jesus came into his life. His family, although not incarcerated in the jail, were nevertheless also prisoners of sin who were set free when Jesus came into their hearts and their home. The family's individual lives were changed and their home became a heaven on earth!

II. GOD WANTS HEAVEN IN FAMILIES. "He brought them into his house.... and rejoiced, believing in God with all his family" (Acts 16:34).

The family of the jailer in Philippi got heaven in their hearts and heaven was in their home. We are told that, "they rejoiced." A holy and happy home is but an early heaven. Your home can be a hell on earth or a heaven on earth. The home is the seed-bed of society. People do not begin in churches, schools and factories. They begin in homes and they go from these homes into schools, factories and churches as representatives of that home. What

are you sending out into the world? Products of a little heaven on earth or a little hell on earth? As the homes go so goes the nation.

But not everyone values the home. One of the tragedies of life today is the decay of the family. Homes have turned into hotels, where people with the same last name sleep and eat when they don't have anything else to do. Knowing, as everyone does, how a woman loves her own home, it is hard to believe the following story which I read: "A real estate salesman tried to sell a woman a house. She said, 'Why buy a house? I was born in a hospital, raised in a boarding school, educated in a university, courted in a car, married in a church, live in a rented apartment, go to the health club in the mornings, play bridge in the afternoons, dance or take in a movie at night. When I die, I'll be buried from a mortuary. All I need the remainder of time is a bed to sleep in and a garage for the car, so why buy a house?'"

A realtor can sell you a house, but only you can make the house a Christian home. It was Edgar Guest who wrote, "It takes a heap o' livin' to make a house a home." The three stages of modern American family life have been described as: matrimony, acrimony and alimony! A home should be one's castle – it shouldn't be a hassle! If heaven is in your home it will not be a hassle.

How can we have heaven in our homes? There are at the very least, three necessary ingredients:

A. The Honored Presence of Christ.

When Jesus came to the home of Lazarus, his sister Martha said, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). If Jesus were present in our homes, much would not happen that does happen.

I have been in numerous homes and have often seen a little wall plaque that reads, "Christ is the head of this home; the silent listener to every conversation; the unseen guest at every meal." In some of those homes, apart from that notice on the wall, one would never know that the family had even a slight acquaintance with Jesus Christ. However, the recognized and respected presence of the Lord Jesus will make your home and family life heavenly.

B. The Holy Power of the Bible.

The apostle Paul remarked to Timothy, "From a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Would we be wrong in assuming that there was Bible reading in Timothy's home? Is there regular Bible reading in your home? Remember, sin will keep you from the Bible and obedience to the Bible will keep you from sin. One of my fondest childhood memories is that of the family altar where the Bible was read and prayers were said. In our own home we raised our two sons in an atmosphere of Bible reading and prayer and now that they are grown and have their own families my wife and I continue to have our daily time of Bible reading and prayer. We have been blessed beyond measure and throughout our lives have reaped the benefits of a Bible centered home.

We instruct our families about the school book, the cook book, the telephone book and check book, but unless they are instructed in God's book we have failed! Regular Bible reading will help put heaven in the home.

C. The Habitual Practice of Prayer.

All of us have probably heard the saying, "The family that prays together stays together." It may be a little timeworn with usage but is still a good recipe for building a heavenly home. Got family problems? The family altar has altered many a family. To make daily prayer a vital part of your home life is to have a protective covering to shield you from the evil forces of a hostile world. While God may not always spare you from physical harm, he does give a deep sense of security in the knowledge that He is watching over you and will never leave you. Yes, a family that communicates with heaven lives under the shelter of divine omnipotence.

Yes, God wants families in heaven and He also desires that there be heaven in families. But neither is experienced automatically. Both require focus and faith; desire and dedication. Like building a house with wood and stone, it takes work to build a family upon the foundation of biblical principles. The edifice will be worth the effort!

III. GOD WANTS FAMILIES IN CHURCH. "...and was baptized, he and all his family...." (Acts 16:33).

Do not overlook the words, "...and was baptized, he and all his family...". The family of the jailer of Philippi became a part of the church in Philippi. The church at Philippi was one of Paul's favorites. He wrote a letter to them and they sent him offerings more than once.

The church is a partner with the family, not a competitor. Parents often say, "I do not want to force religion on my children. I will let them go to church if they want." However, children are taught to walk, talk, read, eat, swim, drive the automobile, etc., then when it comes to the most important area of life we ignore all responsibility and let the children flounder around.

Jesus' earthly parents did not do that. We read in Luke chapter 4, "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." (Verse 16). Mary and Joseph had taken him to the synagogue repeatedly so that it became his "custom."

We are responsible to God who gave us the children in the first place, to "Train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6). Families worshiping and serving the Lord together is a beautiful sight in the eyes of both God and man.

One of the greatest biblical examples in parental leadership in this area of family life is seen the person of Joshua. He said, "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Joshua recognized his responsibility and he intended to see that his family followed his example. Look more closely at Joshua's statement:

A. It Was a Personal Statement. "As for me....(I) will serve the Lord."

Christian fathers and mothers, have you personally determined that you are going to serve

the Lord? Put him first in your life and lead your family to do the same as Joshua did. It is not possible to serve the Lord with His blessing and ignore His church. Get involved in a local, Christ exalting, Bible believing, gospel preaching church and lead your family by example.

B. It Was a Paternal Statement. “as for.... my family, we will serve the Lord.”

This godly father made the declaration for the entire family. The father is the God-ordained leader, spokesman and head of the family unit. May God help Christian fathers to lead out and teach their families to love and serve the Lord.

C. It Was a Public Statement. “and Joshua said unto all the people....” (Joshua 24:2).

Joshua’s decision was known by all the people. He took a public stand because he wanted everyone to know on whose side he and his family stood. Where does your family stand? Salvation in Jesus Christ is not to be treated like membership in a secret club. Follow Joshua’s example and declare publicly for Christ!

Judge Camille Kelly spent more than 20 years in salvaging children from society’s scrap heap. Out of her experiences with more than 45,000 children who were brought before her court, she observed, “The child’s richest heritage is a well ordered home. If every child had such an opportunity, delinquency would fade from court records. There would be no need for juvenile courts or juvenile judges.” Then she added sadly, “But all children do not live in houses and all houses are not homes.” That is the painful truth which “Home Missions” can help correct!

The Philippian jailer got three new homes in one night: He got a home in heaven, a new home on the earth and a church home for his family! Invite Jesus Christ into your heart and your home and He will grace, gladden and glorify both. A house without a roof and a home without God are both unprotected!

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