

The Place of a Vow

For the most part, I assume my listeners are familiar with the Gospel. It is not new for most of you. You have heard it preached many times in many formats. However that may be, I need to mention something you may have never considered in the Gospel call. The importance of it is quite ominous as we consider many “evangelical” tracts and sermons lack this element altogether. In short, it is the place of a vow in true biblical conversion. I will go so far as to say, true conversion will not take place without it. Granted, most true conversions will take place without the convert ever realizing he or she has just made a vow. Nonetheless, the actuality of the vow is clear in Scripture.

The Hebrew word for vow carries the meaning of “promising to voluntarily do or give anything”. That is important to note. It is not a matter of having the arm twisted behind one’s back, forcing one to say the words of the vow. Such an act as “vowing” must come from a personal decision. Of course, a vow is made because one earnestly desires something that may not or cannot be obtained in any other fashion.

I would like to start our look at this where I first noticed the vows connection with Christian conversion:

Key Messianic Psalm

I was reading Psalm 22. That is the psalm I believe Jesus was referring to when we read:

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matthew 27:46

Those words on the cross were the lead in lines of Psalm 22. In making that identification, He would draw our attention to the content of that

psalm, which detailed the suffering He was going through at that moment. It gives a detailed description of His crucifixion. As we go through the psalm, we see it change from the suffering to the blessing the cross has brought. We come upon the following words:

23 Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. 24 For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. 25 My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. Psalm 22:23-25

When I read these verses before, I read it as the words of David who walked in the Old Testament period. We read of vows in the books of Moses. Without realizing, we might read in that David was referring to his religious practices and leave it at that. This psalm is not written in that manner. It is written from the position and timing of Christ’s crucifixion with the verses quoted as coming from those who were to look upon the completed work. In other words, the statement of the vows in these verses would be coming from Christians. (Note that true believers are only those “that fear him”.)

So you may wonder, “What vows would he be talking about and how would that be fulfilled before fellow believers?”

For the answers, we need to look at what’s found in the “Great Commission.”

The Great Commission

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ

to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:46-47

The core of the Gospel lies in the death and resurrection of Jesus. These facts need to be acted upon through faith that is only living if it is attached with repentance. Notice the dependence of the one upon the other in these words of Jesus:

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Matthew 21:32

We need to connect this Great Commission call with the following:

46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? 47 Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: 48 He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. 49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

Luke 6:46-49

Upon considering these words of Jesus on His Lordship, and what must follow, we see a saving conversion

is one where repentance from independence of God, having lived a self-serving, sinful and rebellious life, takes place. That repentance and faith in the death and resurrection of Christ brings the person to the position of humility where all is given over in subservience to Jesus Christ as “Lord”. To call Him, “Lord” is to say, “You are my Master, I am your servant.” That is why Jesus used the exact words we find in Luke 6:46 of “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*”

To take this position of becoming the servant of God, **one is making a vow**. One is vowing to take Jesus Christ as Master of one’s life, resigning the position of self-lordship. **That is a vow!**

Also consider that to become a Christian is to become part of the Bride of Christ. When we are looking forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb, we must consider ourselves as presently “engaged”. Under Hebrew marriage rites, not only is the marriage a binding contract, so is the engagement. At the time of Christ, an engagement had to be broken by an official divorce. That meant a covenant had been made between the man and woman. The covenant is a mutual vow that holds certain responsibilities to both parties.

If you will remember, I posed the question, based on Psalm 22:25, of “how would the vow be fulfilled before fellow believers?”. The following passage in Hebrews gives a partial answer to that question:

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

In Christian assembly, we are to find help and encouragement to walk faithfully after Yahweh. Such fellowship is what will help us to fulfill our vow of keeping Him as Lord over our lives.

There is another aspect that hinges on this issue of gathering together in the worship of God. In looking up the word “vow” in scripture, we often see “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” critically tied to vows. It is in this worship gathering that we also fulfill that other

aspect of our vow with Him. It is in that unity, as the body of Christ, that we are part of the Bride of Christ.

The First Vow

In looking over a subject biblically, it is good to pay attention to the first mentioning of such in scripture. Though we find vows made, such as the Noahic covenant (remember the rainbow sign), we find the first use of the word “vow” in the following:

20 And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21 So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: 22 And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee. Genesis 28:20-22

Upon consideration of this vow, many ridicule Jacob. We see it is a very self-centered vow. I must warn though, be careful how much one laughs at Jacob, for we are likewise self-centered. Think about it for a moment. When a person hears of the eternal wrath of suffering in Hell, the sensible person will plead with God for salvation from such a place of torment. This conversion is based on self-preservation, not love for God. Nonetheless, God does respond to such prayers. That is why the true servants of God are those who “fear Him”. God takes a person in that simple, limited understanding and continues to work on him in making what He wants him to become.

Having dealt with the self-centered issue of Jacob’s vow, I wanted to point out some very interesting aspects. Jacob’s vow is on the physical realm, but it is also VERY SPIRITUAL!

- He is asking for God’s hand of salvation in his journey of life.
- He asks for “bread to eat”.

Remember Jesus came to be our Bread from Heaven!

- Jacob asks for “raiment to put on”. Remember the saints will be clothed with the righteousness of Christ!

- Jacob asks for this to the end of coming “again to my father’s house in peace”. That is exactly what Jesus

Christ came to accomplish in restoring us to our heavenly Father! It is also only through God’s doing this, that we shall know Yahweh as our Elohiim (more literal translation of the Hebrew).

Praise be to God, Jacob’s prayer wasn’t so far amiss, was it? This is what we all truly need. We may ask with our degrees of ignorance, such as Jacob’s prayer shows, but God sees deeper and will act upon our limited understanding to His ultimate glory! Jacob’s prayer is a salvation prayer that was a “vow”.

The Jonah Vow

Most will be familiar with the popular account of Jonah and the whale. The book of Jonah is really only a small book, three chapters. Not only that, Jesus specifically said that the sign of Jonah, as he was three days and nights in the belly of the whale was to be a sign to the generation of His day. It showed the type of his time from the death on the cross to the resurrection.

Something about Jonah was very special in reference to salvation.

That being the case. How many know what the entire middle of the book of Jonah is about? It is something we should pay attention to. Let’s read it:

1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly, 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. 7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. 8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice

of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. 10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. Jonah 2

There is much that could be said from this chapter. In keeping it brief, just a quick look at some items.

The “*the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me*” is a match of what we find in Psalm 42:7. That is also a psalm on seeing God’s salvation.

In verse 5 we found, “*the weeds were wrapped about my head*”. The Hebrew for “weeds” is Suph. That is the same as that translated “Red” Sea in which the Egyptian armies were drowned when they pursued Israel in the Exodus. Such a death in the Suph is that appointed to the enemies of God. Remember Christ took our place in the cross. He referred to Jonah as a type of what He was to do. He took our death in the “Suph”. We should also note the prophetic words of Jonah use what would seem an extreme word of, “*the earth with her bars was about me for ever*”, so Christ took upon Himself our place of eternal suffering.

Jonah takes the turn of hope at the middle of verse 6. He spiritually saw the salvation of Yahweh. Verse 8 ties the vow into this salvation type in Christ. Jonah, in repentance, notes his vow but also that the vow is not what saved him. Look at the words Jonah used, “*I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD*”. We can also see the close connection of the “*thanksgiving*” to the vow. This thanksgiving and the vow shows the gratitude for the unmerited grace of the Most High. We, like Jonah, must come to the point of seeing we deserve the judgment of Hell, and crying to God in repentance to find His mercy. (Oh how Jonah had wished he made that journey to Nineveh in the first place!) From there we will naturally want to please God and give Him the offering of thanksgiving.

The Passover Song

One last piece I wanted to look at is a psalm sung every Passover. Jesus would have sung this psalm with His disciples that final Passover with them. We will again see the important place of the vow in the Gospel:

1 I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. 2 Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. 3 The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. 4 Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. 5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. 6 The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. 7 Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. 8 For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. 10 I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: 11 I said in my haste, All men are liars. 12 What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? 13 I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. 14 I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. 16 O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. 17 I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. 18 I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD. Psalm 116

You may have noticed those first five verses were VERY reminiscent of Jonah’s prayer.

In verse six we see the position of humility. Not some feigned humility, this is a proper breaking before God. It was at this point of being brought low that God helped him.

At verse seven, he had found rest for his troubled soul. Yahweh had heard his cry and dealt with him “*bountifully*”.

Verse eight is a clear declaration of the salvation of his soul. He knew he had not only been saved, the grief of his heart was reversed and his walk was set right.

Verse nine shows the now consecrated walk he would traverse in this life. From here, through verse 11, the psalmist relates back to the despair he had that brought about his final breaking. It was at this breaking that he took the cup of salvation. Remember this is a Passover psalm. The cups drunk during the Passover meal each represented different things. One was the Cup of Redemption, which Jesus used to show us the covenant of His blood. That cup now drunk in the communion drink. To take that cup in truth, one must call upon the name of Yahweh. As Christians, we know that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. He is Yahweh!

It is following this picture of the communion in verse 13, we find the first of two mentions of a vow. Verse 14 and 18 repeat the fact of the vow and the fulfilling of it in the presence of ALL His people. This is like we saw back in Psalm 22. It also follows upon a clear description of entering into the salvation of his soul and partaking of the Cup of Redemption. It links the vow as part of that experience and the union as a part of the body of God’s people, that being the Church, the living body of Christ.

In verse 15 we find what might seem a misplaced thought. It is certainly not that! You see, it is only through our dying to ourselves that we are saved. When we are broken, humbled before God, that is precious in His sight. They are the one’s who will see his mercy.

That word translated “*saints*” shows they are right before God, because of His **mercy**. There is another Hebrew word for saints that means they walk righteously. That is not the word used here. Both join together for the servants of God, but salvation is solely based on His mercy!

At this juncture, we find the important point brought forth of his being God’s servant. Such a statement shows us he has taken the place of subservience to God. He has taken the place of servant under His Lordship. He has taken this place in the vow that comes from repentance. He ties his position to simply being the “*son of thy handmaid*”. No great claim to nobility, just simple mercy. Notice that even though he takes the place of a servant, he has been “*loosed of his bonds*”. How interesting. We will all serve some master. Sin and the world, or God.

To become a servant of God, is to be set free from the bondage of sin and the world (see Romans 6 through 8). To refuse to be a servant of God, is to remain bound to sin and the world.

At verse 17, we see that offering of thanksgiving leading into the second verse on the vow. We see that this vow of salvation comes with the natural response of gratitude. Gratitude for His mercy.

The Litmus Test of ‘Sinner’s Prayers’

We have covered a lot of material in consideration on vows. Some may be thinking, “An interesting aspect I hadn’t really considered before.” I believe the aspect of understanding the vow’s part in biblical conversion goes much further than interest on some principal of theology. When I saw this, I picked up a “gospel tract” someone had given me. I thought, “I’m curious as to what kind of a conversion prayer this tract will have in light of the “vow” issue. What I saw should be enough to make your stomach sick! I will read it to you word for word:

Just pray: “Oh, God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus was my substitute when He died on the Cross. I believe His shed blood, death, burial, and resurrection were for me. I now receive Him as my Savior. I thank You for the forgiveness of my sins, the gift of salvation and everlasting life, because of Your merciful grace. Amen.”

This was from a very popular tract given out by all kinds of conservative evangelicals. This came from a tract first created in 1933 and still in use today! My great disgust is that this prayer contains no words that could be construed as a vow. There is no repentance, there is no coming before the Almighty humbling oneself to bow and serve Him as LORD! In short, any one who has become a “Christian” based on such a tract has taken refuge in a false hope. He has received a dose of inoculation against ever truly being converted. He has been told he has only to say this formula prayer and he is saved. He has been told in the tract to never accept anyone’s word who would question his conversion, not even his own nagging conscience!

The *litmus test* of checking for the marks of the vow, can help you to discern really quickly when you are reading the writings, or listening to the preaching, of a false preacher. Some false preachers do call for repentance, but none who are preachers of the truth will lack this call for repentance.

Such “sinner’s prayers” that lack the vow of repentance are lies. Prayers such as the sample I printed don’t save. Look again at what it says:

Just pray: “Oh, God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus was my substitute when He died on the Cross. I believe His shed blood, death, burial, and resurrection were for me. I now receive Him as my Savior. I thank You for the forgiveness of my sins, the gift of salvation and everlasting life,

because of Your merciful grace. Amen.”

Like I’ve heard before, “The Devil himself knows he is a sinner.” So what of it? An unrepentant sinner can also utter the words of acknowledgment that he does believe Jesus died to be a substitute to save him. Such an unrepentant sinner can truly believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as a historical fact. What’s this “*receive Him as my Savior*”? The unrepentant sinner, who has been told a false gospel will say to himself, “Hey, here’s some pretty good fire insurance. You’ll pay the fine for me. Sure, go ahead. Hey, that’s neat. Thanks, that’s really gracious of you!”

What I have just said would be sacrilegious if such a sample prayer were born out of the true fear of God. The truth of the matter, is that it was not born out of a true fear of God. I have the whole tract, and it redefines “*repentance*” with a false definition. That prayer is a wicked device of deception. Such tracts and their purveyors should be put to shame for such sacrilegious prayers. If you have fallen for the deceptions of such tracts or crusade “counselors”, wake up now and get to business with God. Remember the words of Jesus, not the false preachers. Jesus said:

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them . . .”



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The English version used is that from the King James Bible.

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