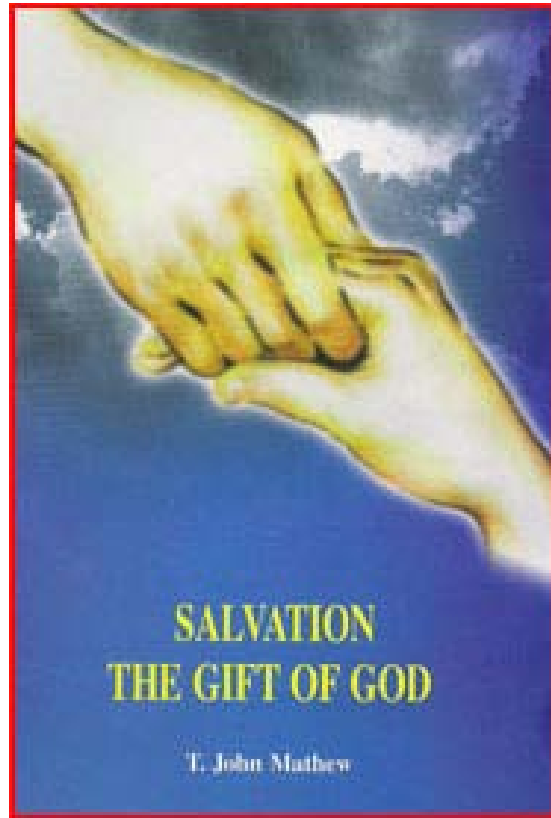


SALAVATION THE GIFT OF GOD



IMPORTANT TRUTH

There are many in the world who greedily tries to get money and things they do not deserve to possess. And there are a few who try their best to be content with what they deserve to have. Greed, no doubt, is very bad and contentment arising from a sense of justice and love for others is a noble virtue. Now it is worth examining whether it is possible for us to earn by our own effort everything we need. What can we say about the life-sustaining water that is poured on earth in the form of rains? If it were necessary for us to pay for this and the waters of brooks, rivers, lakes and the seas, would we be able to remain alive in this world? No, never. Let us think of another example: We pay money for the candles we buy. The light we get from them is valuable; but it is nothing in comparison with the light we get from the sun. If we should pay for the light of a candle, how much more should we pay for the light from the sun? If it were really necessary for us to pay for sunlight, no one would be able to live on earth, because its

price is inestimable. Let us examine the case of air also. We see that carbon dioxide the breathing of which does only harm to human beings and animals, is paid for when it is mixed with water to produce soda water. But oxygen, without which we cannot live even for a minute is never paid for even though we breathe it throughout our lives. If we had to pay for this gas, no one in the world would remain alive. All these show that even those who insist on never receiving anything from anybody without payment, do not pay for the invaluable necessities of life, because the only means of getting them is to receive them as gifts.

That there are invaluable things which can never be paid for and are to be received only as gifts, is a truth of great importance when we think about the salvation of one's soul. If the things essential for the sustenance of our physical life are so priceless that they can only be received as gifts, then what should be the case of things that are essential for our spiritual welfare? It is obvious that they too must be so invaluable as to be received only as gifts. In this connection it is worth noting that the one book which describes salvation of the human soul as the gift of God is the Bible. In the seventh chapter of the last book of this book of books, it is mentioned that all the saved ones owe their salvation to God¹. There are many verses in this sacred book which point out that there is nothing as valuable as salvation of the soul and that it is to be accepted as a gift from God and not as a reward for something that we do in our earthly life.

1: There are several verses in the New Testament which describe salvation as the gift of God. We read in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

UNIQUE BOOK

The principle that salvation is unobtainable by works, but is obtainable as God's gift makes the Bible a unique book. Because in no other book dealing with this subject do we come across this idea. The Bible is unique in some other respects also. In this book, made up of a total of 66 books, [39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament] the words, "says the Lord" occur more than 2000 times. The first chapter of the first book (Genesis) of this great book contains 31 verses and the word "God occurs in them 32 times (King James Version, 1611). While the first book deals with the creation of man and his fall into slavery to sin and all its dreadful consequences the last book (Revelation) describes the total eradication of sin and all its attendant evils from the universe. The first book describes how death entered this world and the last book describes how death is conquered by eternal life and perfect happiness. The intervening books described how God leads the human race from slavery to sin and death, to freedom from yoke of sin and to eternal life. A careful examination of the contents of the Bible reveals that its author is One who possesses infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom and infinite power and that He is perfectly just and at the same time, most merciful to man.

FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECIES

A study of the various prophecies in the Bible makes it clear that no man dependent only on his own wisdom would utter them. For example we find in Genesis the first prophetic description of Christ, the Saviour of mankind as the "Seed of woman". In the case of no other person do we come across this sort of description. In this book, the births of a large number of people are recorded; they all are described as the seeds of men born of, not the mother, but the father; none is described as the 'seed of woman'. This prophecy about Christ made by God in about 4000 B.C. was recorded by Moses in 1500 B.C. About 750 years later, Isaiah was inspired to write " Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel " (Isaiah 7:14. Immanuel = God is with us). These prophecies were accurately fulfilled when virgin Mary, by the Holy spirit miraculously conceived Jesus Christ and gave birth to Him in Bethlehem (Luke 1:26 – 2:14). If Moses and Isaiah had written in the light of the wisdom they had learnt, they would not have described a man (Christ, the Messiah) as the seed of a woman or as one born of a virgin. That they dared to prophesy so, and that it was accurately fulfilled later on is proof of the divine inspiration of their writings. There are many prophecies of this sort in the Old Testament. A good number of them have already been fulfilled. Some are being fulfilled and the rest are going to be fulfilled. The prophecies concerning Israel are examples of those which are being fulfilled now.

The dispersion of Israel from Palestine in the first century A.D. and their re-gathering into their homeland in the twentieth century constitute an incredible episode in the political history of the world and an undeniable evidence of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Nowhere else in the world and never before in the history of nations have we come across such a strange phenomenon – a nation destroyed completely and its people scattered into the different parts of the world 1900 years ago, now being re-established and its people being brought back to their ancient homeland from the four corners of the world. The secret of this strange phenomenon becomes clear when we turn our attention to the prophecies in the Bible. Several centuries before the Roman army led by Titus destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and massacred the Jews and made the survivors flee to the distant parts of the world, prophets like Moses and Ezekiel had written that the Jews would become wanderers in the world. Their re-gathering into Palestine in the 20th Century too has taken place fully in accordance with the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah who lived in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. The accurate fulfillment of Biblical prophecies is evidence of this sacred book being the inspired Word of God.

SIN AND ITS PUNISHMENT

We read in the book of genesis that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. After creating them God created on earth all sorts of plants, fishes, animals and finally, man. The name of the first man was Adam. God created Eve, the first woman by taking out a rib from Adam after causing him a deep sleep and making it grow into a mature woman with flesh and bones. God gave her to Adam and told them that they were husband and wife. They lived in the garden of Eden which God had made for them. It was a place of plenty; they had everything they needed. We learn that God had created man in His own image, that is, like God, man could think independently, choose what he wanted, was guided by reason and not by instincts like animals, he had the freedom to obey or disobey his creator and he had a sort of divine glory about him. But it so happened that Adam and his wife misused their freedom of thought and action by yielding to the temptation of Satan, the enemy of both God and Man. They disobeyed their creator and ate the fruit of the tree which they had been told not to eat. By disobeying God, the source of love, justice and truth, Adam showed obedience to Satan the source of all evil and wickedness. By the sin of Adam the father of the human race, the whole of mankind was brought under the yoke of sin.

It is a fact that all human beings from time immemorial have committed sins, small and great and none has been absolutely sinless and perfectly virtuous. This is proof of the Biblical statement, "...all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The reality of sin in the world is accepted by all right thinking people. That the ancient Rishis of India believed in the reality of sin and its consequences is evident from the vedas. The Rig Veda[2:28:5] refers to sin as a rope that keeps the human soul bound. we come across the words 'sin' and 'hell' in all the languages of the world and see references to torments in hell in almost all mythologies. The Bible states that the human soul is indestructible and that each man will spend his eternity either in heaven with his creator or in hell with Satan, his enemy. It states further that judgment of each soul is as certain and as unavoidable as death (Hebrews 9:27). Those who do not believe in the Word of God and accept the forgiveness of their sins by the means which God has offered, will be judged according to their deeds. They will be found guilty of various sins as they have been under slavery to sin; they will have to suffer eternal punishment in the lake of fire, which is described as second death (Revelation 20: 14). The Word of God makes it clear that the punishment for each one will be according to each one's sins; however, all the unredeemed will be in hell as all the redeemed will be in heaven. Since the sinful nature of the souls in hell will be with them throughout eternity, their punishment also will be for eternity. That there will not be any possibility or opportunity for salvation for those who are not saved during their earthly life is a truth of utmost seriousness. It makes the declaration in the word of God, "now

is THE ACCEPTED TIME, behold now is THE DAY OF SALVATION" (II Cori: 6:2) very very important.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND ETERNAL LIFE

As God is perfectly just and truthful He can forgive our sins only in a manner consistent with His justice and truthfulness. If a person borrows a very large amount of money from another person and if he has no means of paying it back, what is the means of his becoming free from the burden of that debt? If another person pays the money on his behalf and if he approves of that payment accepting it to be on his behalf, he will cease to be a debtor. The Bible reveals that it is an action of this sort that God has done for the redemption of mankind from the bondage to sin and its penalty. It was foretold by prophet Isaiah seven centuries before the crucifixion of Jesus that He would be "pierced through" for the "transgressions" of mankind and that he would be "crushed " for their "iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). It was further stated, "He would render Himself as a guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10) and would "justify the many" (Is: 53:11) and in spite of offering Himself as a sacrifice, would "prolong His days" (Is: 53:10), implying that he would gain victory over death and live forever. The 22nd Psalm, written by King David about a thousand years before the birth of Jesus gives a graphic description of His crucifixion and refers to His being worshipped (after His resurrection and ascension) by those who are made righteous by Him. It was necessary for Christ, the Son of God to come into this world, to take the form of Man, to be born of a virgin, to be crucified along with a wicked criminal on either side, to be buried in a tomb built by a rich man, to rise from the dead on the third day and ascend to heaven, in order that the hundreds of prophecies about Him might be fulfilled. That is why we believe that the description of Jesus as one born of a virgin is absolutely true and reasonable. No man born of Adam could be free from the reign of sin; only one coming into the human race from outside would be free from its yoke. In order to redeem mankind from sin, it was necessary for a sinless man to suffer death, the punishment of man's sin². In order that this might happen, God had made a plan for man's salvation even before he created the world³. According to this plan, God the Son or the second person in the Triune God⁴ (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit) became Man by being born of virgin Mary. The Jews thought that He was the eldest Child of Joseph and Mary. He led an ideal life respecting His parents and obeying the rules of the Jewish religion. He started His public ministry at the age of thirty; He performed many miracles including the raising of the dead and controlling the forces of nature such as the waves of the sea and fierce winds. He proved to the world by His actions and words that He was in fact 'Immanuel' i.e. God who had become Man. At the end of His public ministry He permitted Himself to be crucified by wicked men so that the divine plan for the redemption of mankind made before the creation of the world might be accomplished. He

rose from dead on the third day as He is God and death can have no authority over Him. He appeared to His disciples and many others and after about forty days ascended to heaven, giving His disciples the command:

"Go Ye therefore, and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew . 28:19 - 20).

An examination of the accounts of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven and His teachings described in the New Testament reveals that any person, no matter how great a sinner, can get all his sins forgiven in a moment by accepting Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. It also points out that no man however virtuous, will be found sinless when his actions and thoughts are examined by God and therefore it is impossible for any man to justify himself before God on the basis of his own works. In the Gospel according to Luke we find the description of a very wicked criminal getting saved in an instant. In fact two most wicked criminals were crucified along with Jesus on either side of Him. This was done, implying that Jesus was the most wicked man on earth and he deserved to be crucified as the greatest among all evildoers. God permitted it to happen so, in order that the only sinless Man in the human race might be treated as the most sinful man when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Of the two wicked men who were thus crucified on either side of Jesus, one listened to Jesus' prayer to the Father that His tormentors be forgiven as they did not know what they were doing. He was surprised to note that Jesus was different from all other ones who had been crucified earlier. [The victims of crucifixion usually abused and cursed their tormentors until they lost their ability to speak]. He thought for a moment about Jesus' strange behaviour; it dawned on him that the man hanging on the cross beside him was none but the Messiah of Whom the Old Testament prophets had spoken - the One who should die for the sins of mankind and rise from the dead, gaining victory over Death. When he learnt this truth, he realized that the few most painful moments of life he had before him on the cross would be his last opportunity for salvation. If that was lost, he would be damned for ever. He decided to seize that opportunity. He repented of his sins, admitted that he was a sinner and believed that Jesus the Messiah was making atonement on the cross for the sins of humanity. He also believed that Jesus would gain victory over death and ascend to heaven. So he prayed to Jesus to remember him when He came again into the world as King and Lord of all. Jesus accepted his prayer and replied to him: "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke. 23:43). This account of a great sinner being saved solely on the basis of his repentance, his faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for his sins and his personal acceptance of Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, reveals all the essential teachings of the Bible regarding salvation.

2. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. [The term 'death' means primarily, separation from God, the Creator and source of life; cessation of physical life is its secondary

meaning]

3. "He (God the Father) chose us in Him (Jesus Christ) before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love". (Ephesians 1:4)

4. "The Bible clearly states that there is only one God; but it is also made clear that there are three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit in this one God. Hence the term 'Triune God'.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CRIMINAL'S SALVATION

All religions⁵ in the world teach that salvation is the reward for good works. But the Bible points out that the so-called good works of man can never be good enough to earn him salvation. So God, out of His mercy has given man a means of salvation which is available to all sorts of men no matter how wicked or immoral or how 'good' they are. It is available to the poor, the rich, the ignorant, the learned, the weak, the healthy and in short, to every one belonging to the human race. That is why Jesus Christ, before He was crucified, gave this exhortation: "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest...You shall find rest for your souls"(Matthew. 11:28-29).

This is the most important message that Jesus has given to the world. It means that He offers to humanity what the religions of the world have been unable to offer. Religions exhort people to do this, do that, do not do this and do not do that. They urge people to go to holy places and temples and to practice vows. They create the impression that salvation of the soul is to be obtained by hard work and self-discipline. But the word of God states that no man who is under the yoke of sin can make himself sinless and perfectly virtuous, however hard he tries. So, every man in the world leads a life tainted with sin; even those who try to be perfectly virtuous, entertain sinful thoughts at times, speak words hurting others and do actions which are not perfectly right. Thus every one, by his position and by his actions, proves himself (herself) to be a sinner.

Religions of the world by their exhortations of dos and don'ts fail to redeem man from his bondage to sin and save him from the penalty of his sinful actions. It is in this context that the message of Jesus Christ is most significant. He gives to man, free of cost, as a gift, that which is most valuable – Salvation of the soul. It is given not on the basis of one's actions, but on the basis of one's willingness to accept that which is offered as a gift. The reason for God's giving it as a gift is twofold: First, God loves his creation Man so much⁶; secondly, salvation is so valuable that man cannot buy it as a reward for his works and the only means of God's giving it to him is

to give it as a gift. Thus we see that the most essential thing man needs for his spiritual welfare – forgiveness of sins and eternal life – is made available to him as God's gift, assunlight, water and oxygen, essential for man's physical life, are made available to him as God's gifts. We cannot but note that there is a fundamental difference between what the Bible says about salvation and what religions say about it. The story of the wicked criminal on the cross points out that salvation is available to all, even to the most wicked ones and the only means of obtaining it is to receive it by faith, as a gift. It also points out that Jesus Christ, by His sacrificial death on the cross and by His resurrection has brought within the reach of man what religions by their dos and don'ts have failed to bring.

5: "True Christianity is not a religion; Jesus Christ did not claim to be the founder of a new religion; what He claimed was that He was the way of salvation for all mankind. [Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me". John 14:6].

6: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" : John 3:6.

THREE GREAT DECLARATIONS

" if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved". Romans 10:9

"Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ". Romans 5:1

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus". Romans 8 :1

WHAT SHOULD ONE DO?

The Bible tells us not only about the salvation of a very wicked criminal, but also about the salvation of a very pious, just and kind-hearted man named Cornelius who prayed to God continually. In the tenth chapter of the book of Acts we read that in answer to this man's prayers God sent His apostle Peter to him and he learnt that it was necessary for him to believe in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ if he was to be saved. He believed accordingly, accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour and was baptized⁷ in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. In spite of being very virtuous this man found it necessary to believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. What does this mean? All people, no matter how

good or virtuous, have to admit that they fall short of the divine standard of perfection. As this man admitted that he was a sinner in spite of his goodness, any person who wants to be saved from the penalty of his sins – eternal damnation – must admit before God that he is a sinner and he needs the forgiveness of all his sins. So one who wants to be saved by believing in Jesus Christ has to pray more or less in this manner: "Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner; I believe that You came into this world, died on the cross paying the penalty of my sins and rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. I accept You as my Lord and Saviour and I thank You for saving me"⁸. A sincere prayer expressing these ideas in these or other similar words brings a person into a new relationship with God. He (She) becomes a child of God according to the verse, "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His (Jesus Christ's) name" (John 1:12). The Bible declares that those who, in this manner have become children of God, will not be judged on the day of the great judgment when all who have not received forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ will be judged and punished for all eternity. It is very important that we act wisely now and are saved from eternal damnation. Jesus said, "...what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul"? (Mark. 8: 36-37). The value of one's soul is inestimable; if one does not get one's sins forgiven and is not saved during one's earthly life, one will repent of one's foolishness throughout eternity. God wants everyone to be saved. That is why Jesus has commanded his disciples to go to all countries and to all places and proclaim the gospel of salvation to all peoples. It is the duty of everyone to be wise enough to understand the gospel of salvation and to act accordingly and become a child of God, a new creation⁹ in Christ.

7. Christian baptism is an outward visible manifestation of an inward invisible spiritual experience . When a person believes in Jesus and accepts Him as his Lord and Saviour, he dies to his sins through Christ, makes atonement for his sins through Christ, and gains victory over death and the power of sin through Christ's resurrection. This invisible inward transformation is made visible outwardly when the believer is baptized. When he is immersed in water his body goes under the surface of the water; it symbolizes his death and burial through Christ. His coming up from the water symbolizes his resurrection through Christ. This ritual gives the believer the assurance about the spiritual change he has undergone and enables him to lead a victorious life, obeying the will of God and overcoming the temptations of Satan. It is to be noted that this rite of baptism, a sort of declaration of one's victory over Satan, is to be administered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost , by one who has already been baptized in this manner.

8. In the Old Testament we read that soon after the human race was brought under bondage to sin, God gave man a temporary means of salvation--sacrificing an animal such as a lamb which was free from all defects. This animal which was perfect in every respect symbolically represented Jesus Christ, the Sinless Perfect Man who was to offer Himself afterwards as the real and perfect sacrifice for all the sins of mankind. Those who performed animal sacrifices according to the prescribed rules before the crucifixion of Christ, are also considered to have believed in Him and got their sins forgiven. Thus man had means of salvation in a sense through Jesus Christ, even before His crucifixion and resurrection. He is the real lamb that took away all the sins of the world (John 1:29).

9. *"...if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away, behold new things have come." II Corinthians. 5. 17.*

NEW LIFE

It is made clear in the word of God that those who become the children of God feel the urge to lead a life obeying the spirit of God who dwells in them. Since they have been saved by God's grace, they are grateful to God and they feel the desire to worship him; they lead a life obeying the word of their father and consequently they are found just, kind, merciful, truthful and virtuous. The proof of the salvation of a person according to the word of God is his sincere love for the other children of God and his obedience to the commandments of his Lord Jesus. The presence of the Holy Spirit in his heart makes him love all human beings in the world and creates in his mind a desire to do good to all he comes into contact with. Evil desires and emotions no more control him; with God's help he overcomes them and leads a life obeying the will of his heavenly father.

JESUS CHRIST COMES AGAIN

The Word of God tells us that Jesus will come back just as He went up into heaven. When this happens all the dead in Christ shall rise from their graves (burial places), putting on heavenly bodies; those believers who are alive, also will put on the same kind of immortal bodies and all will be caught up together in the clouds to meet their Lord. According to the prophecies, after this event the world will be ruled for a period of seven years by Anti-Christ, a man of great cunning and tact. He will be accepted as the leader of the whole world; at first he will be considered by all as a man of great abilities and noble virtues. But in fact he will be the very incarnation of Satan; he will, after some time start persecuting the Jews; he will massacre them and try to wipe out the nation of Israel from the face of the earth. When the persecution of Jews reaches its highest degree of cruelty and wickedness, Jesus Christ from heaven will descend on earth in all His glory as King of kings and Lord of Lords. The Anti-Christ will be immediately punished by being thrown directly into the lake of fire and all his armies will be destroyed. This will be followed by the rule of Jesus Christ on earth for a thousand years. During this period Satan will be kept in prison (bottomless pit) and he will not be able to influence men to do evil. However, at the end of this period, Satan, on being released from the abyss will urge all human beings on earth to rise in rebellion against Jesus Christ and His people. It will result in the greatest and the final battle to be fought on this earth. When it is fought, fire from heaven will come down upon the armies of Satan and they all will be destroyed. It will lead to the

purification of the whole earth and the burning and dissolution of everything in the world. When it happens, the prophecy, "the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up"(II Peter 3:10), will be fulfilled. Immediately after the purification of the present earth by fire, all who failed to receive salvation through Jesus Christ will be resurrected and tried before the great white throne of God and they will be awarded eternal punishment in the lake of fire according to their evil deeds. Thus the reign of sin and all its evil consequences will be eradicated from the universe forever. Then the new Heavens and the New Earth will emerge; it will be occupied by the people of God. They will worship Him; there will not be death or any misery or sorrow or hunger or any unhappiness in this new world.

Does it sound incredible that all these are going to happen? It may; but, weren't those prophecies which have already been fulfilled incredible ones? Certainly they were; yet they were accurately fulfilled. Then, it is certain that these prophecies also will be fulfilled. Now the question arises: what shall we do in the light of the great truths we have learnt from the word of God? Shall we not be wise enough to take them seriously, to believe them and act accordingly?

WILL YOU?

We, your brethren in Christ Jesus, who have published this booklet hope that you have learnt the fundamental truths concerning every man's past, present and future as revealed in the Word of God. We urge you to believe (if you have not already believed) in Jesus Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for your sins and in His resurrection, and to accept Him as your Lord and Saviour. We expect you to write to us about your spiritual needs such as your interest in studying the Word of God with the aid of books or correspondence courses and your need to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23). We will extend to you whatever help we are able to. Now, don't you think that this booklet will be useful to those who do not have a clear understanding of the message of salvation? You can help many such people whom you know, by informing them about this website or by sending to them the message of this booklet by any means you find suitable.

We like to conclude the message of this small book with a quotation from the last chapter of the last book of the word of God, ". . . And let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Revelation 22:17). Now, Dear Reader, if you have not yet tasted the water of eternal life

– if you have not yet believed in Jesus Christ and confessed your faith in Him – do it now and let God save you from eternal damnation. See that you obey the word of God in your everyday life and that you make every effort to convey the message of salvation through Jesus Christ to all people in all parts of the world. Thus enjoy the greatest blessing you can have in your own life and do to others, the greatest service you are able to. May God bless you.

REQUEST FOR PRAYER

The Christian Brethren at Bible Study Centre, Mannuthy, Thrissur, Kerala, India request their fellow believers - all the saved ones near and far - to pray that the gospel of Jesus Christ may be imparted to every unsaved soul in the world immediately and that the Lord may come soon. "He who testifies to these things says, 'yes, I am coming quickly'. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20")