

BIG QUESTION UNDER INVESTIGATION

We're in... Unit 11: The God Who Saves

Unit 11 Big Question and Answer:

How Can We Be Saved?

It is God's Free Gift!

PFI NIV Songs 11, Tracks 3,4

Unit 11 Bible Verse: Romans 6:23, NIV 1984

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

PFI NIV Songs 11, Track 5

BIBLE TRUTH

We're learning... Bible Truth 4:

The Holy Spirit Changes Our Hearts So We Can Be Saved

Ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God, each of us have been born with a spirit dead with sin. That means that on our own, none of us can know God or choose to live for Him, just like a dead person can't bring his body back to life.

But God can do what we cannot do. He can bring dead hearts to life, so that we can know Him and want to live for Him. He does this by sending His Holy Spirit to work in our hearts. As we hear God's Word, the Holy Spirit can help us see our sins and help us want to turn away from them. He gives us faith in God. Faith to trust that Jesus died on the cross for sinners and rose from the dead in victory. He gives us a new heart that can know God and want to live for Him.

Jesus called this being "born again, born of God." He calls this being born again because this change in heart is so radical that God actual makes us into a new creation--a brand-new person on the inside! He calls this being born of God, because this change comes from God. And with it, He makes us a part of His family forever.

We can ask God's Holy Spirit to work in our hearts like this. God delights to answer this prayer. He loves for sinners to ask Him to change them and make them into His people.

BIBLE VERSE

How do I know this is true? The Bible tells me so!

Bible Truth 4 Bible Verse: Titus 3:4-7, NIV 1984

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

CASE STORY

Psalm 137:1-6; Ezekiel 36, 37:15-28; John 2:12-3:21

Our story is called:

The Case of the Stony Hearts.

As you listen to the story, see if you can figure out:

1. Who had stony hearts? What was stony about them?
2. What should their hearts be like? Who alone could change them? How?

This story begins in Old Testament times, about 600 years before Jesus lived here on earth.

Some Babylonians had gone down to the Euphrates River to enjoy the shade of the poplar trees that grew along its banks. As usual, they brought their slaves along to serve them. Babylonian slaves came from many nations--all of them captured in war and brought back to Babylon to serve as slaves. But these particular slaves were Israelites. And the Babylonians, looking for some new entertainment, asked them to sing some songs from their homeland.

"Enough songs of Babylon!" the Babylonians said. "Take out your harps and play us a tune, you Israelites. Sing us a new, joyful song from Jerusalem, of Zion, your home," they ordered.

"How can we sing to you of Zion when it lies in ruins, destroyed by your soldiers!" the Israelites said. They hung their harps upon the branches of the poplar trees, sat down by the Euphrates and wept.

How sad the Israelite slaves were! They knew that they had sinned against the LORD and not turned back to Him when He warned them to stop sinning. He had told them that the Babylonians would destroy them if they did not repent. They refused, and so, the great armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had swept into their land and destroyed it... and all of Jerusalem with it. Gone were their lands, their houses, their cities, their Temple. The Babylonians soldiers had bound the people in chains and made them their slaves.

If only their hearts had not been so dirty with sin and so hard as stone! If only they had loved and obeyed God as He desired! Then none of this would have happened! "What can we do to be rid of these sad times brought by our sin? What can we do to bring back the good days in the kingdom of Israel?" the Israelites wondered.

The LORD saw how sad His people were and He sent His prophet Ezekiel with a comforting promise for them: "You

will have to stay in Babylon for seventy years, as I told you before. But after that, I will bring you out of Babylon and take you back home so you can rebuild Jerusalem and the kingdom of Israel," the LORD told them.

"And that is not all. I am going to do something even better than give you back the kingdom of Israel as it was!" the LORD promised. "I am going to truly bring an end to your sad times brought on by your sin. Like water washes dirty things clean, I am going to clean your hearts of sin. I am going to change them so that they will no longer be hard and disobedient like stone. I will make your hearts alive again by putting my Spirit inside you! Then I, Myself, will move you to love Me and follow My ways," He told them. "And one day, I am going to send My Messiah to make the whole earth My perfect Kingdom forever. Then you will be My beloved people and I will be your beloved God."

The Israelites took comfort in the LORD's promises and waited...for long seventy years. And sure enough, God kept His promise to them. On the very day after the seventy years were finished, they were freed.

How the Israelites rejoiced to be going back home to Jerusalem! Yet they wondered, "Would the LORD fulfill His other promises--when He would change their sad times brought by their sin; and send the Messiah to bring His Kingdom forever?"

Six hundred years passed and still the Israelites waited to see the LORD answer these promises. The Babylonians were long gone, but now a new enemy --the Romans--had come and taken over the kingdom of Israel and brought new sinful, sad times.

"Now would be a good time for the Messiah to bring God's Kingdom," the people of Israel thought. "He would get rid of the Romans and set up His kingdom forever," they hoped. "What can we do to be rid of these sinful, sad times? What can we do to bring the Kingdom of God?" they wondered.

"Perhaps there is a reason God hasn't sent the Messiah to rescue us," thought the Pharisees. "Perhaps our hearts and lives are too dirty because we don't keep His laws. Perhaps if we keep all of God's laws and are really good, then that would bring an end to these sinful, sad times and bring God's kingdom sooner," they hoped. But as hard as they tried, they couldn't keep the God's laws just right. No. They couldn't bring the Messiah by their own good deeds.

They had to wait for God to fulfill His promises.

And so He did. At the right time, Jesus came. He began to do amazing miracles and to tell everyone that the Kingdom of God was near. He even stormed into the Temple area and cleared it of men who were making money off of people come to worship the LORD. "This is God's house," Jesus said. "It's to be a house of prayer; not a thieves' den as you have made it!"

Everyone began talking about Jesus and the things He did. "Who has ever spoken like this or has done miracles like this? Who would dare clear the Temple, as if it was his? Could this be the Messiah?" some people wondered.

But the Pharisees and others said, "Who does Jesus think he is? He does amazing things and talks like he is something special, but he's no Messiah! When the Messiah comes, He will appear suddenly and destroy all our enemies. He will set up God's kingdom with great power. We are the teachers of the law and we know about these things," they said.

One Pharisee named Nicodemus wasn't so sure. He had spent hours reading the Bible and knew all the promises about the Messiah—even the ones the LORD had given the Israelites through Ezekiel so many years before. Nicodemus heard what Jesus said and saw what Jesus did. And he began to wonder just who Jesus was. There was something about Jesus that made Nicodemus want to know more. "Perhaps Jesus does know how to bring an end to these sinful, sad times," thought Nicodemus. "Perhaps He knows how to bring the Kingdom of God."

So late one night Nicodemus went through the streets of Jerusalem to talk with Jesus. "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could do the miracles you do if God weren't with him," Nicodemus said to Jesus.

"No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again, born of God," Jesus answered him.

"I thought the kingdom of God was for the people of Israel who kept God's laws. What could this mean to be born again?" Nicodemus thought. "How can a man be born when he is old?" he asked Jesus.

"No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit," Jesus replied. "But I'm not talking about your body being born like a baby again. I'm talking about your spirit, your heart. You can only enter God's Kingdom if God's Spirit has given new life to your spirit,"

He explained. "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" Jesus continued. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. No one can see the Holy Spirit, but it is He who works in the hearts of people as He pleases, changing them. He's the one who brings an end to sad, sinful times by working in their hearts. He makes them able to enter the Kingdom of God."

This was all so new to Nicodemus! "How can this be?" he asked Jesus.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and you don't understand these things? But I have even more to tell you. I am God's Son, the Messiah and I have come to bring God's Kingdom. But it won't be by powerfully overthrowing the Romans, as so many think. It will be by being lifted up on a cross and dying for God's people. For God so loved the world that He gave Me, His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Me shall not die, but have eternal life--life in God's Kingdom forever!" Jesus explained.

Nicodemus may have left that night with more questions than he came. Jesus' answers surprised him. If only he would remember the promises God gave the people of Israel through Ezekiel long ago! That night Jesus was telling him that at last God was fulfilling those promises. Jesus would die for God's peoples' sins. By His Holy Spirit, He would wash away their sins and change our hearts by filling them with His Spirit. This was how God would bring an end to the sinful, sad times and bring in the Kingdom of God--in the hearts of His people.

Our Bible Truth is:

The Holy Spirit Brings Us to God

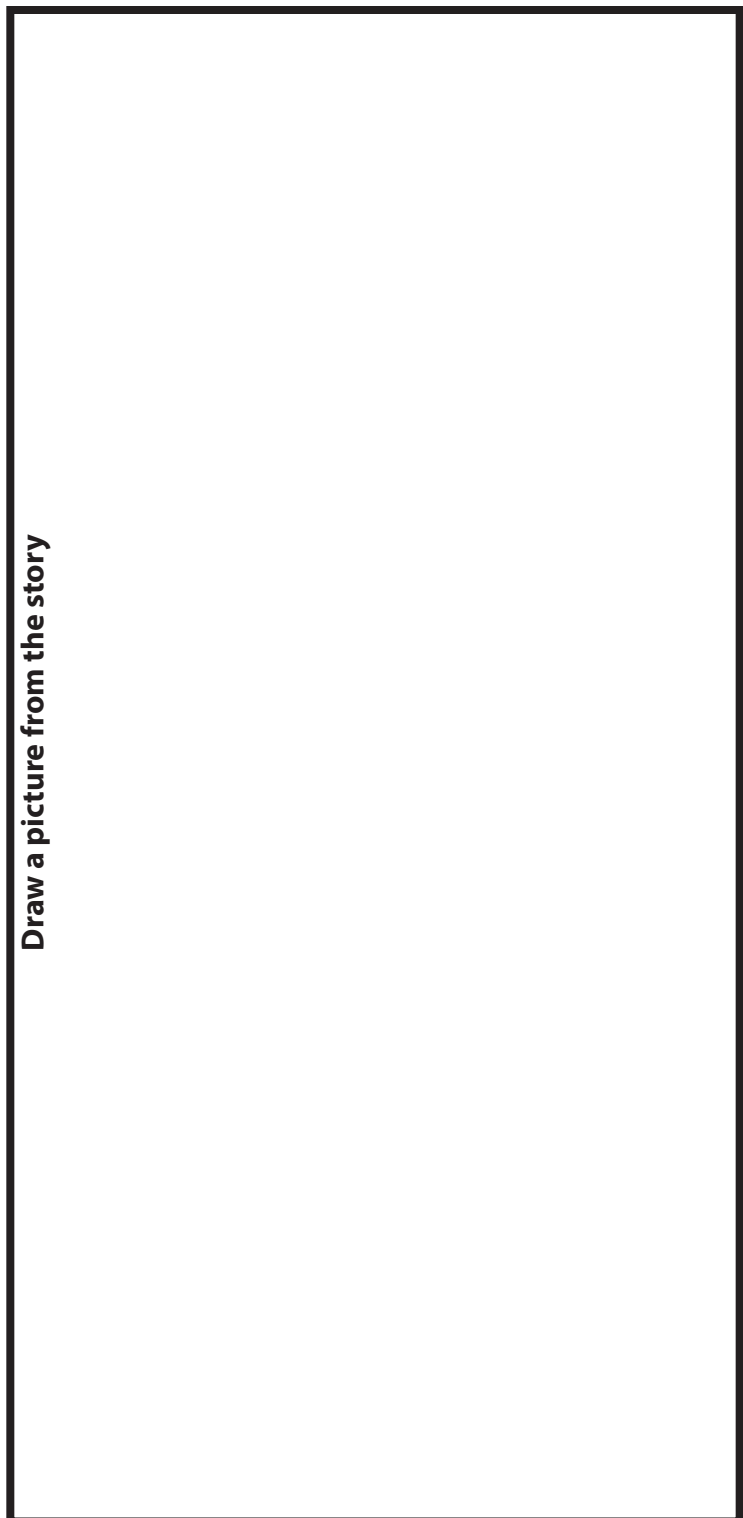
Our Bible Verse is: Titus 3:4-7

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

What happened to Nicodemus? Did he ever experience the spiritual birth of the Holy Spirit in his heart and was saved? We don't know for sure. We do know, though, that it was Nicodemus who stood up for Jesus against the other

Pharisees and priests when they wanted to have Him arrested and killed without even a trial. And it was Nicodemus who bought the seventy pounds of spices and helped to bury Jesus after He was crucified. Some say that after Jesus rose from the dead, Nicodemus did become a Christian and was baptized by Peter and John.

It will not be until heaven, in the Kingdom of God, when all of God's people are gathered to worship the Lord Jesus around His throne that we will know for sure



Draw a picture from the story

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU
<p>1. A Question about the Bible Truth, True or False: Ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God, each of us has been born with a spirit dead with sin. None of us can know God or choose to live for Him on our own....but God by His Holy Spirit can bring our hearts to life! He can do what we cannot do on our own. Answer: True! He delights to do this when we ask Him!</p> <p>2. Crack the Case Questions a. Who had stony hearts? What was stony about them? Answer: The people of Israel. Stones are hard and lifeless. The hearts of the people of Israel were hard and lifeless to God and His good laws. b. What should their hearts be like? Who alone could change them? How? Answer: Their hearts were meant to be full of love for God and His good laws. God alone could change them. He promised to change them by His Holy Spirit.</p> <p>3. Fill in the missing words from the Bible Verse: Titus 3:4-7 "But when the kindness and love of God our ___ appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his ___. He saved us through the washing of ___ and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of ___" Answers: Savior; mercy; rebirth; eternal life.</p>

BIBLE TRUTH HYMN
<p>Amazing Grace <i>PFI NIV Songs 11, Tracks 12,13</i></p> <p>Verse 1 Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see.</p> <p>Verse 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed!</p> <p>Words: John Newton Music: Virginia Harmony: arr. Edwin O. Excell</p> <p>We would all be lost in our sins and rebellion forever, if it were not for God sending His Son Jesus. Jesus kept God's laws perfectly and offered up Himself as the perfect sacrifice needed for sin. Then He gives to all who repent of their sins and trust in Him the amazingly gracious gift of salvation. He first gives them "sight" to make them aware of their sinfulness and to fear His judgment, then as they turn to Him, He relieves their fears by taking away their guilt the hour they believe.</p>

AN ACTS PRAYER FROM OUR STORY
<p><i>A=Adoration, C=Confession, T=Thanksgiving, S=Supplication</i></p> <p>A God, we praise You for being the Great Builder of the Church, Your people.</p> <p>C God, we confess that like all people, we have chosen to rebel against You. Our hearts, like everyone else, are ugly and broken with sin. We cannot worship You, the one, true God as You created us to, unless You work in our hearts. We need a Savior! We need the Holy Spirit to work inside of us!</p> <p>T God, we thank You for choosing to make Your people into the beautiful Church. Thank You for sending Jesus to save Your people and for sending Your Holy Spirit to live inside them, encouraging them.</p> <p>S God, work in our hearts! Help us to turn away from our sins, trust Jesus as our own Savior, and be Your people. Send the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts that we might know and love You. Keep strengthening Your people to go out and tell all peoples about You that many more might be saved.</p>

BIBLE VERSE SONG
<p>He Saved Us <i>PFI NIV Songs 11, Track 14</i></p> <p>He saved us, he saved us, Through the washing of re-birth And renewal by the Spirit. He saved us, he saved us, Through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit whom he poured out, On us generously, Through Jesus Christ our Lord, The Holy Spirit whom he poured out, On us through Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Words adapted from Titus 3:4-7 Constance Dever © 2011</p> <p>We could never please God with our own good works. Only through Jesus' perfect life offered up in the place of sinners can we be saved. And what a salvation it is! God, Himself, sends His Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of His people. He gives them the gift of faith. He helps them turn away from their sins. He makes them clean of their sins and all new on the inside. This is how we become God's people--His heirs, that is, His children who will receive eternal life with Him forever.</p>