



Jesus the One and Only – Salvation

John 14:6, Romans 3:21-30

We Baptists love to sing the old hymn, *Saved, Saved, Saved*. The hymn writers say about this song that the melody came as almost a gift and the words came as easy. The chorus rings out:

*Saved by His power divine,
Saved to new life sublime!
Life now is sweet and my joy is complete,
For I'm saved, saved, saved!*

Saved! If you grew up in a Baptist church or other evangelical churches the term means something to you although you might say that you are not sure exactly what it means. There are many in our culture today who might ask logical questions like, “Saved from what or who?” What does it mean when we say saved? Saved is like other words we use inside the church like that of “lost” or “redeemed.”

Saved might be a word that we want to lose because it can be confusing to others; however, that would be sad because it is a biblical word, and when fully understood, it is a word that carries great joy, comfort, and hope.

Today we are continuing our series on “Starting with Why”. The idea that is behind our series this fall is for us to know some basic doctrines when it comes to our faith. We are using John 3:16 as the basis for our study, and if you know that verse let’s say it together:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would believe...whoever would believe. Let’s use that phrase to propel us to think about salvation.

When it comes to the term salvation we have some questions. Why do we need to be saved or why do we need salvation? What has God done to provide us salvation? What does it mean for us to receive salvation?

The first question is simple. Why do we need to be saved? Why do we need saving in the first place? Why salvation?

The Bible is very clear about our need for salvation. Jesus would say that he had come to seek and to save those who were lost. The very next verse after our focal verse, John 3:16, says:

For God did not send his son (Jesus) to condemn the world but to save the world through him. Jesus came to save us. The passage goes on to say:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

Now these are the words of Jesus. Jesus is speaking about himself says that God sent Jesus because we needed to be saved, and without Jesus we stand condemned. Whoever does not believe in him stands condemned. We need salvation.

In our passage from Romans Paul is arguing our need of salvation. In fact, Romans is about the fact that everyone, both Jew and Gentile, all people, need salvation through Jesus, and that it is only through Jesus that salvation has come. Paul writes these words:

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

So here is the answer to our first question, why do we need to be saved? We need to be saved because without Jesus we stand condemned. We stand condemned because we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

We need salvation because we are sinners.

Now sin is another word that has lost its meaning in our culture. The word is now used as a temptation to seduction or it is a word that we just don't embrace as true. What does it mean that we are sinners and all people are sinners? The word means to miss the mark. It is a word from archery. If someone shoots an arrow toward a target and misses, that is a sin. The idea is simple: no matter how much we try to hit the bull's eye or to be perfect we cannot. We are always missing the mark. We are always sinning and missing the mark.

Now here is the important part for us to know and embrace. We are sinners and it does not matter if we have the best intentions. It does not matter if we try harder than others. It does not matter if we were brought up in this family, or this culture, or this church...it is not our effort or knowledge that can save us from our sins. If that were possible then Jesus would not have needed to come to us. If that were possible, then the law of Judaism would have been enough. However, Paul writes plainly that the law was not enough. He writes that Jew and Gentile have sinned against God. So, here is the truth. We all have sinned. We all stand condemned because of our sin. The kindest person you have ever known and the most ruthless person you have ever known both stand in need of salvation.

The most important part of this understanding of salvation is that "I" need salvation. The main point here is not "those people" need salvation – they do. But I do. I have sinned. I have missed the mark. Even in my best days and in my best moments, I miss the mark. I need salvation. Why do we need salvation? We have sinned. We need saving.

The second question is what has God done in response to our sins? That answer is simple: God sent Jesus. Paul writes, "We are all justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came through Jesus." God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. God did this to demonstrate his justice in forbearance because of past sin and demonstrate his justice in the present.

Paul outlines a great doctrine of salvation - what God did in response to our need: God sent Jesus. Paul uses several terms that we need to examine. First, Paul says we are justified freely by grace. Paul uses a term that is a legal term. We are justified. The word means that one is treated as though they are someone else. A person might be guilty but the Judge treats them as though they were innocent. The Judge reckons them innocent.

Now remember we are guilty of sin. However, because God loved us through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, God reckons us not guilty but innocent. Not because of what we have done but because of what Jesus has done. Notice something else about this justification: it is free.

God justified us freely because of God's grace toward us.

I love how Barclay put this in his commentary:

Jesus came to tell us that although we are sinners we are dear to God. When we discover that and believe it our relationship with God changes. We are conscious of our sin but we are no longer in terror and no longer estranged. We are broken-hearted and come to God like a sorry child coming to his mother and we know that God we come to is love. So we are justified by our faith or belief in Jesus and what Jesus said about God. We are no longer terrorized strangers from and angry God. We are children, erring children, trusting their Father's love and forgiveness. And we could never have found that right relationship with God if Jesus had not come to live and die to tell us how wonderfully God love us.

So the short answer to what did God do is that God sent Jesus. Yet, what did Jesus do? He showed us the true nature of God by his living and by his dying. He revealed to us just how much God is love and then, as a final loving act, Jesus died. Paul describes it as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. Paul is referring to the act of offering a blood sacrifice by the Jewish people in response to their sins. The people would sin and then they would come to the temple and purchase or offer an animal for their sin. The animal would then be offered as a sacrifice for their sin. Paul uses this metaphor to explain what Jesus' death meant on the cross. Jesus' death becomes the atonement for sin. Paul explains that God demonstrated justice for past sin and for present sin through this act.

What Paul means is that sin cannot go unpunished. That would not be justice. There are consequences to sin and evil in this world. What kind of God would God be if there were no consequence to evil and sin. There has to be justice. So God chose for that justice to come through Jesus' death. Thus in Jesus sin is atoned that is covered, blotted out, once and for all. Notice Paul says that it applies to sin of the past that had gone unpunished. He is saying people who lived and died before Jesus, Jesus' sacrifice covers their sin. Jesus' atonement is for us as well. In this present moment.

So the punishment that is part of sin, which is justice, is addressed in the death of Jesus.

One last thought to this question of what did God do in response to our sin, Jesus is necessary. Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the father except by me. Jesus is necessary for salvation. Jesus' death is the atonement for all sin. It covers the sin before Jesus and the sin that occurs after Jesus. Jesus' atonement is for all people and for all time. I know that

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about our need for salvation.*

in our culture that sounds judgmental, unloving, and exclusionary. However, it is just the opposite. God, in Jesus, includes everyone in God's love and says because of Jesus, I no longer consider you judged under your sin but as one that I love.

The final question is what does salvation mean for us? The term salvation means three things for us. I have already said that salvation brings joy, comfort, and hope. Hershel Hobbs in his book, *Fundamentals of Our Faith*, suggests we should think of salvation as instantaneous, continuous, and ultimate. Salvation has three characteristics in our lives.

First, there is the instantaneous joy. We call that moment regeneration. The first step of salvation is regeneration. That is the moment that we accept what God has done through Jesus and we place our faith in Jesus. In that moment we enter salvation through Jesus. We are going to talk next week about our response to salvation; but for salvation to work in our lives, we have to come to a place in life where we admit that we are sinners and believe that Jesus is the one who can save us. In that moment we experience regeneration.

Many of us call that moment, or moments leading up to that decision, the time we were saved. For some of us that is a certain moment we prayed a prayer, or we had an experience with God that we have a hard time describing, but we know we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior and we said yes to Jesus. We want to follow Jesus with our lives. In that moment we are saved. That is, we become children of God. We become new creatures in Christ. Our old sin is gone and we have a new life in Jesus. Now here is the good news. If we have asked Jesus into our lives, then we enter a relationship with God that even our future sin cannot shake. We will certainly continue to miss the mark, but because of salvation our relationship with God in Christ is unchanging. We are in a fixed condition.

The second aspect of salvation is comfort, continuous or what we call sanctification. This is the part of salvation where the Holy Spirit begins the life-long journey of helping to form us into the image of Christ. From the moment we accept and believe, God is at work forming us into the image of Jesus. So everyday the Holy Spirit is changing us, nudging us, and transforming us. This is the sanctification process.

Now some Christians look back to the instantaneous moment or the joyful moment and that is all they have. They remember a time at a revival, or at camp, or a time in life when they were sure about Jesus, but since that moment they have little to show in Christian growth. If that describes you, then you are missing out on what

God wants to do in your life. I am not calling into question your regeneration moment. I am not calling into question your desire to be saved and that moment in your life. However, I am encouraging you to know that salvation is not a one-time experience but an experience that begins a life-long walk with Christ.

This past week we lost a great Christian leader in Eugene Peterson. Eugene Peterson was a scholar and great Christian writer. He spent much of the later part of his life translating the Bible into a modern language translation we call *The Message*. One of Peterson's most memorable books is a book about the Psalms that is called *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. The book is based on what is referred to as the Psalms of Ascent. They are the songs that pilgrims would sing on their way to Jerusalem for Holy Days. They were songs that spoke of God's presence each day in the journey. They call one to a long obedience in the same direction.

That is what salvation is. Salvation begins in regeneration, but it continues in sanctification and that, my friends, is simply a long obedience in the same direction. Each day God's spirit is at work making us like Christ.

The last part of salvation is glorification, or ultimate salvation as Hobbs describes it. I call it hope. Where our salvation is going is heaven. Where our salvation becomes complete is when our death is defeated through Jesus' resurrection and we pass from death to life eternal. In that moment we will finally be free from sin and its consequences, which most importantly is death itself. We, as Jesus says, will not perish but have everlasting life.

Glorification is that place of arrival. When we would travel to Knoxville for holidays and our children were young we would make that long drive. We knew the familiar spots we would travel. The cities we would pass through, the mountain passes we would pass through. We would begin to see familiar exits and then we would

take the exit off the interstate that was only a mile from my mom's house. As we took that exit there was a Texaco station with a large Texaco sign. When we took that exit our children would yell from the back seat...Nana's T. They knew Nana's house was close. They knew we were almost home.

That is glorification. That is the hope of glorification. We are saved, and it can happen in an instant. We are saved; we are being made in the image of Christ. We are saved; we are longing for home. We are longing for, as the song says, a place we have never been before. There we will be complete. There we will be saved. ▲

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