

“Jesus, Savior”

We are looking at some of the prominent names and titles of Jesus. Last week we examined what is meant by the title Son of God. Today, let's think about what we mean when we call Jesus “Savior”.

The title “Savior” is connected to the name “Jesus”. Jesus was a person's first name (like John or Jane or Jim). Jesus was “Jesus of Nazareth” or “Jesus, son of Joseph”. Jesus was named Jesus not because Joseph and Mary thought it was a cute name, or because they named Him after a famous movie star or baseball or basketball player they liked! God picked the name because it would reveal His mission in life.

Remember, an angel appears to Joseph and says, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20b-21). The name “Jesus” comes from the Hebrew word “Joshua”, which means “God saves” or “God is salvation”. Jesus is One who saves! Savior!

That's why Jesus came into the world. Jesus said, “The Son of man came to seek and *to save* the lost” (Luke 19:10). John 3:17 says, “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” The title “Savior” is so associated with the name Jesus that when we say “the Savior” or refer to “our Savior” or pray “in our Savior's name” we know we mean Jesus!

What does it mean to have Jesus as our Savior? What happens when He saves us? We might “It means our soul is saved, and were saved from going to hell.” This is true, but this is a rather narrow view of salvation. We may be surprised to know that the phrase “salvation of the soul” hardly ever appears in the Bible!

If we look at the words in the Old Testament and the New Testament for “save” or “salvation”, we can see more clearly what it means to be saved. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew words for save carried the idea of being *delivered* from trouble or a desperate situation. For example, you could be saved from one's *enemies* in battle, from *danger*, from *sickness*, from *death*. In the New Testament, a common word for save meant to be “made whole”. For instance, Jesus could say to a person healed, “Your faith has *saved* you.” So, to put it in broad terms, to be “saved” means to be delivered or made whole.

In the New Testament, the concept of salvation was enlarged to mean deliverance in the *age to come* – an ultimate deliverance from God's righteous judgment, and to be given life in the kingdom of God. In fact, about one-fifth of the New Testament references to being “saved” refer to the end of time.

So, in Scripture, salvation is both a present reality, and a future hope. Ultimately, salvation is out there – a future deliverance that is yet to come. 1 Peter 1:5 says Jesus' followers are kept by God's power “for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” In that sense, we are not yet saved. Salvation is a hope, a promise. Being delivered from God's final judgment on sinners,

finding complete wholeness and fulfillment in God's kingdom – has not yet happened.

But the Bible says that those who place their faith in Jesus already begin to experience a taste or preview of the salvation coming to us at end of time. For example, the Bible can speak of our being saved from sin (Matthew 1:21), from moral filth (James 1:21), from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4), from hopelessness (Ephesians 2:12), from sickness (James 1:5). So you see, if I'm saved it means I can possess a new power to curb my sinful nature: to overcome things like greed, prejudice, jealousy, lust, pride, self-centeredness. It means I can be more whole person: more caring and loving towards others, more able to trust God to see me through difficult times, or be less stressed out about future.

So, salvation is out there, yet to come, at the end of time, but also something we can experience every day in practical, tangible, life-changing ways. The noted Bible scholar and writer William Barclay summed it up: "Salvation is God's rescuing power in this life, and in the life to come."

Let me add this: ***Salvation is both personal and cosmic.*** *It is personal:* You can be saved. I can be saved. We can testify: "Jesus is *my* Savior; He has saved *me*." But often, I think, we focus too much on just the salvation of individuals, and ignore the broader scope of salvation.

Salvation is also cosmic, in that God is acting to heal and restore His whole creation. When sin entered the world, it affected not only *people*, but creation – the natural world. Ultimately, God will restore creation to the original goodness described in Genesis 1 and 2. Paradise lost when sin entered the world will be Paradise regained. This is highlighted in Paul's letter to the Romans: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Romans 8:19-22). The image here is of God's whole creation expectantly waiting for the End to come, when God will restore all creation to its original goodness.

Something else Scripture is firm on: Jesus is God's instrument of salvation! Acts 4:12 says, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Jesus is not *a savior among other saviors*. *He is the Savior of the world!*

Maybe in this sermon today we need to ask a simple question: ***Do we need a Savior?*** After all, there are many people who don't bother much with Jesus, or aren't interested in church or the Christian message, and some of them, at least, seem to be doing OK. There aren't too many people today asking flat out, "What must I do to be saved?" The majority of people we know are not biting their nails, afraid of going to hell.

George Hunter, in his book *Bridges to the World*, wrote that while a lot of people aren't asking the more traditional salvation questions, people outside the church are asking significant life

questions, and the Christian faith does have something to say to these. He says people are asking: “How can I accept myself? How can I best relate to other people? How can I cope with loneliness, with boredom, with suffering? How can I choose my job? How can I raise my children to the greatest possible happiness? How can I find meaning and purpose for my life? How can I face the death of my loved ones? How can I face my own death? How can we face the future with security and hope? How can we bring about a just world and a world of peace and a world of equality?”

Years ago, Sam Shoemaker, an Episcopal priest and author, wrote some words about salvation that are very wise. He wrote: “Christianity is not an optimistic view of life which tells us everything is all right. Rather does it tell us that so much has gone wrong in this universe that man needs nothing less than a redemption of which God is Himself the Author and Agent.

“A friend, spiritual-minded but not yet a believing Christian, writes me that he ‘finds this a good life, and takes it a day at a time.’ In the same letter he tells of the failure of a deep love affair to work out, and gives every evidence of being a brave person dealing with very adverse circumstances. I had to write him that, for myself, I do not consider this ‘a good life altogether’. I find it tragic for the most part, with people in all kinds of inward and outward need and difficulty. There are lovely interludes of pleasure, like one’s garden in spring, the friends one loves, the books one reads, the family one enjoys; but underneath, life is a very tough deal for most people at some points, and what one feels more and more the need of is not a nice philosophy for successful people, but a rescue for lost and anguished ones. I don’t wonder old-fashioned people called it being ‘saved’...the glory and wonder of the Christian religion is not that it throws a pink haze of satisfaction over everything, but that it throws out a life line that can be fastened about lost and lonely and hopeless men and women and bring them to safety in Christ...happy thoughts and bootstraps won’t do. We need rescuing.”

Would you say people today, our world, our generation, needs to be saved? I would! It’s hard to read the newspaper or watch the evening news and still hold fast to the belief that we humans can solve our own problems. In spite of all the advances in the modern world, we seem to have made very little progress in the moral and spiritual realms of life.

Think of what is going on in our country and the world that points out our need of salvation and restoration: prominent men falling under sexual harassment accusations; harsh enmity between Republicans and Democrats which renders them unable to work together for the good of our country; terrorist attacks killing innocent people; the epidemic of heroin abuse; North Korea’s threat of a nuclear warhead. I could preach this sermon 6 months from now, 5 years from now, and the scenario would be the same, unless we turn to Christ. The details of our human weakness and wrongdoing would just be different.

And on a more personal level, think of the heartache and despair that often colors our lives. Underneath the exterior we present to people that makes it appear like everything’s ok, most people are carrying some sort of burden, some issue, that’s painful and debilitating.

Can we really save ourselves? Are we humans the hope of the world's salvation? The Bible says salvation is from God. God sent Jesus on the greatest rescue mission the world has ever known!

William Sloan Coffin was a famous pastor of Riverside Church in New York. He told the story of an old man in India who sat down in the shade of an ancient banyan tree. Its roots stretched into a nearby swamp. The man noticed splashing and movement where the roots entered the water. Concentrating his attention on what was happening, he saw that a scorpion had become helplessly entangled in the roots. Getting up, the old man made his way carefully along the tops of the roots until he came to the place where the scorpion was trapped. He reached down to free it, and each time he touched the scorpion, it would lash his hand with its tail, stinging him painfully. Finally his hand became so swollen that he could no longer close his fingers, so he went back to the shade of the tree to wait for the swelling to go down.

As he got there, he saw a young man standing above him on the road laughing at him. "You're a fool," he said to the old man, "wasting your time trying to help a scorpion that can only do you harm." The old man replied, "Simply because it is in the nature of the scorpion to sting, should I give up my nature, which is to save?" *It is the very nature of God to reach out to us, to save us.*

How can we be saved? Maybe you're not sure the Savior of the world is *your* Savior, that He has delivered *you* from your sins and guilt and forgiven you, and included you in His forever family. Maybe you aren't experiencing the daily power of Christ in your life to deliver you from destructive habits and attitudes and to give you a future with hope. The Bible says God's salvation comes to us as a gift. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. We can only gratefully accept it by believing in Jesus and committing our life to Him.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says this, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast." We are saved by grace, through faith. Grace is God's part: He offers Christ for our salvation though we don't deserve it. Faith is our part: trusting Christ to come into our life and make us new.

"Jesus." The meaning of the name says it all. "God saves. God is salvation." "And you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from this their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

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