

What is Salvation and How is it Received?

The Plan of Redemption

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KEY SCRIPTURES *Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:9-10, Acts 16:31, Titus 3:5*

Introduction

Outside of the name of Jesus, what word is the most important? I would suggest it is 'salvation.' It is the centre-piece of the gospel message. It is the reason Jesus the Christ came. It was then sole purpose of the cross. It is the hope in the heart of every believer.

Luke 4:43 “..but He said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.””

John 12:27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour””. (ESV)

Because of this clear statement about salvation, there are many people, even some who have attended church for years, struggle to give a clear and confident answer to the question: what exactly is salvation and how does a person receive it? This study seeks to answer that question clearly and from Scripture, from the basics upwards. We will look at the question of why salvation is necessary We need to fully understand what it cost. What exactly does it achieve. Finally, how it is received? This is an important, if not the most important, teaching, if we are to explain salvation to the unbeliever and see people saved.

Why Salvation is Necessary — The Problem of Sin

The Bible is very clear about the human condition. Ever since Adam disobeyed God and was expelled from the garden of Eden, man had a problem. The human nature was corrupted and everyone is born into the world with this fallen nature. Paul was referring to this when he wrote:

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

There are no punches pulled here. The Psalmist is even more stark:

Psalm 58:3 “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from the womb, speaking lies”. (MKJV)

Even the man, king David, was brutally honest:

Psalm 51:7 “Behold, I was born in iniquity and in sin when my mother conceived me.”

This is the truth of Scripture. The human condition is one of sin, no matter how ‘good’ a person might feel. Unless this understanding is clear, any discussion on the subject of sin will be unprofitable. It teaches that every human being is born with a nature that is fundamentally turned away from God. This is why salvation and the cross is offensive to many. Let us be very clear from every part of Scripture the truth is plain. The Apostle Paul again:

Romans 9:30-33 “What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness—that is, a righteousness of faith. But Israel, who pursued a Torah of righteousness, did not reach the Torah. Why? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were from works. They stumbled over the stone of stumbling, just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and whoever believes in Him shall not be put to shame.”

Understand there are no exceptions. Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, all are under the same charge. It also includes the morally upright and the openly wicked, the religious and the irreligious, the educated and the unlearned. Every human being who has ever lived, with the sole exception of Jesus the Christ, are sinners. All have sinned against God, be it in action, words or the thoughts that fill our minds. We also need to be very clear about sin. To sin is not the making mistakes. It is not falling short of our own standards and regretting it. Sin is transgression against the holy law of a holy God. It is choosing our own way over His. It is saying my will not God’s will. When we place ourselves at the centre of our lives, we reject God’s sovereign authority in our lives. He alone is to be held in the highest honour and worshipped as the only true God. before anything or anyone, even ourselves!

Deuteronomy 6:5 “..and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”.

This is not my view or opinion. It is the truth spoken by Jesus as the greatest of all

commandments.

Matthew 22:37-38 "And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment".

Sin, is at its root, rebellion against our Creator. Sin has consequences. Paul declares:

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death".

Think about the word 'wages'. Its meaning brings light. You earn wages, you deserve them for what you have done. It is just, that you should be paid what you have earned. In the case of sin, that is death. Death has been discussed in another study that can be found here. Briefly, death includes physical death, spiritual death and is a separation from God in this life. If left undealt with it is also separation in eternity. That is eternal death. It is the final and permanent separation from God which the Bible calls the second death. There you have the human predicament. Every person stands as guilty before our holy God. We are unable to save ourselves. We deserve to be judged and paid the wages of sin. I appreciate this is an uncomfortable truth. It is the essential foundation upon which the gospel stands.

1 John 3:4 "Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness".

The Barrier Between God and Man

Isaiah the prophet understood the problem and with great clarity wrote:

Isaiah 59:2 "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, that he will not hear".

Sin creates a barrier. It is a moral and spiritual gulf that is created, between the Creator and His creation. Man has no power to cross by his own effort. Learning from history is difficult for human beings. Hegel, the philosopher, wrote, "What experience and history teach is this — that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it". Experience tells me that, that notion, applies to the greater majority of people. We human beings have tried to bridge this gulf by human means. Religion, strict morality, good works, ritual, philosophy: every culture that existed has produced its own system for trying to reach God or trying to have inner peace. The Bible is

consistent in its verdict: none of these can deal with the fundamental problem of sin and guilt before a holy God. Paul makes it plain:

Titus 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us".

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

If we learn anything from this study, it has to be that salvation cannot be earned, achieved, or deserved. It can only be received from a gracious God and Father.

God's Answer — The Plan of Redemption

I was once told by a dear friend and international teacher of the faith: God cannot help Himself - was one of the implications of the Hebrew word *Hesed*: Often translated as 'lovingkindness'. He loves us so much He will never leave us to perish. Indeed, is not the Gospel story - an amazing wondrous exciting story that was ever told? The God against whom we have sinned. The One we have rejected and rebelled against, did not leave us in our pathetic lost condition. He could not simply change His standard to a lower bar or just forget about our guilt. That would neither be righteous or just. He did something infinitely more costly and more wonderful: He Himself stepped into human history to pay the price of the wages of sin that were due to us and that justice demanded. This is what the incarnation means. The eternal Son of God, Jesus the Christ took on human flesh, being born of a virgin as prophesied by Isaiah, lived a perfect sinless life, something no other human being could ever do. He voluntarily chose to go to the cross. There He died and bore the penalty of sin in the place of us guilty sinners. This is what called substitutionary atonement: The Christ dying in our place, bearing our guilt, taking into Himself, the wrath of God that our sin deserved. Isaiah foretold it seven centuries before it happened:

Isaiah 53:5-6 "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul it with great clarity:

2 Corinthians 5:21 "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him".

The Christ Jesus took our sin. In exchange He gave us His righteousness. This is sometimes called the Great Exchange. That is what it is. An act of gracious love from a merciful Father, who gave us His Son for this purpose. It is the very heart of the gospel. As Jesus declared from His wooden throne on Calvary:

John 19:30 "...it is finished.."

The Resurrection — Proof That it Worked

The cross is essential in understanding the Gospel. Whilst it dealt with the problem of sin, it alone is not the *complete* gospel. If the Christ had simply died like any other man and remained in the tomb, then His death would have been no different from any other man. It would not have any meaning in terms of salvation. However, on the third day He rose bodily from the dead through the direct Divine power of God's Holy Spirit: that resurrection changed everything. For Paul it sealed His understanding of the work of redemption:

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Romans 1:4 "...and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.."

For Paul, the resurrection is God the Father's declaration that the sacrifice of His son was accepted, He had paid the debt, and death itself had been conquered. Again Paul:

Romans 4:25 "[The Christ] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

The empty tomb is the final receipt that the price has been paid in full. This is what gave the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, the courage to preach. They were not proclaiming an earthly philosophy or a man-made moral system. They were announcing a historical event, something that happened in history: a dead man had risen by the power of God — and now, though His people, was inviting the world to respond to it.

What Salvation Achieves

When a person receives salvation, the Bible describes a transformation so profound that Jesus called it being born again (**John 3:3**). Certain things happen simultaneously at the moment when faith comes to a person at salvation. Firstly, a person is 'quicken' or made alive, by the Spirit of God:

Ephesians 2:5 "Even when we were dead in sins, has made us alive together with Christ, by grace you are saved".

Repentance: When the Spirit comes, He convicts of sin, righteous and judgement. (**John 16:8**). If the response to the Gospel is repentance, it leads to life, as is seen in Acts:

Acts 11:18 "When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life".

Regeneration: It then follows that repentance and belief in the work of the Christ, the believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit:

Ephesians 1:13 "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation: having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of the promise..".

In this then the person a new nature is given by the Holy Spirit. This is the fulfilment of the prophetic word:

Ezekiel 36:26 "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you..."

Paul makes the case for the believer's change;

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in the Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come".

This is only the start as the Holy Spirit begins to live within the believer, beginning the lifelong process of transformation into the likeness of The Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are

being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”.

Justification: New believers are declared righteous before God. This is not of themselves but is an act of grace from God, who gives the free gift of righteousness:

Romans 5:17 “If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus the Christ”.

Because the righteousness of the Christ is credited to a believer's account, they are justified:

Romans 5:1 “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Along with the sin being cleared out the associated guilt is also removed. There is no more condemnation (***Rom 8:1***). The gulf between God and man is removed.

Redemption: We start with the truth of what Scripture tells us.

Romans 6:20 “When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness”.

The unbeliever is in the bondage of sin. To be made righteous there needs to be a payment, a ransom, made. In other words, the person has to be bought back from slavery to sin. The word redemption comes from the slave market and it means to purchase freedom for a slave. The Christ's blood is the price that was paid to set us free from sin's bondage and its penalty. Peter is very clear on this point:

1 Peter 1:18-19 “..knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your futile way of life handed down from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb blameless and spotless..”.

It is often discussed to whom was the ransom paid? I cannot accept the argument that the ransom was paid to God the Father. That to me is unthinkable that the Father of the unique Son of God would demand such a ransom. Then there is the argument that it was paid to

Satan. Again, an argument that cannot be held. We were in the power of sin not Satan. It is my belief that the ransom was paid to justice. The Scripture says:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 “Christ died for all, and His death brings life to those who receive Him”.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 “God desires all people to be saved and gave Christ as a ransom for all”.

How does salvation come about? Through Justice being satisfied. The Canons of Dort, stated this:

God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. His justice requires (as he has revealed himself in the Word) that the sins we have committed against his infinite majesty be punished with both temporal and eternal punishments, of soul as well as body. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is given to God's justice (2.1)

I believe it was one of the things discussed they got right. When Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 5:21 “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”.

Here was God giving His Son as the price for justice. That merciful and gracious act satisfied justice. It says in Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:24 “..and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel”.

See also ***Hebrews 11:4***. Abel's sacrifice satisfied God (***Gen 4:4***), Cain's did not (***Gen 4:5***). Abel's blood cried out for vengeance, the blood of Jesus was better. It brought salvation and peace.

Adoption: This is a great joy of salvation. The new believer becomes a child of God and

joins the family of God – the Church. Not a denomination or cult, but the universal Church, the household of God.

John 1:12 "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God".

This is the wondrous amazing truth. The dead have been raised spiritually and given a home in the Father's family. The rebellious becomes a beloved child. The fatherless are brought to a loving Father's home.

Eternal life: Here is the most joyous of joys: the person is given the gift of eternal life! This is a fullness of life (***John 10:10***) alongside an endless existence with God. A quality of life defined and made sweeter by knowing God. Jesus Himself declared:

John 17:3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent".

How Salvation is Received

We turn to the very important question of the entire study. Salvation is necessary – salvation is available – how does a person receive it? This question can only be answered with one word – Grace! The person who is dead is incapable of doing anything. It is the sovereign act of God that happens when a person hears the Gospel and is convicted of the need to be saved. In this the Bible is consistent. Salvation is received by grace alone, through faith alone, in the Christ alone. Paul gives the most clear statement on the matter:

Romans 10:9-10 "...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

We learn from these verses two things: believing and confessing.

Believing — Faith in the Christ

It is important to understand, that faith is not merely an intellectual agreement with Biblical facts about Jesus. The Bible is clear that even the demons believe that God exists and tremble (**James 2:19**). Biblical faith is a wholehearted trust and reliance upon Christ alone for salvation, and nothing else. It is a turning from confidence in oneself and placing full confidence in Him. The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas the most important question a person can ask:

Acts 16:30-31 "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The answer was direct and simple: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved".

When Peter preached at Pentecost, he also was asked, **"Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)** His response was **"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit".**

Faith boils down to three things: knowledge of the facts of the gospel. accepting those facts are true and having a personal trust and commitment to and in the Lord Jesus. That last part transforms mere belief into saving faith. The personal entrusting of oneself to the Christ: that is true saving faith.

Repentance — Turning from Sin

Repentance is the essential accompaniment to faith. Throughout the New Testament, the two are consistently linked. They cannot be separated. Repentance does not simply mean feeling sorry for sins: a person can feel sorry but never turn away from sin. It involves a complete change of mind about sin and its offence to a holy God. Whilst teaching a class of seven-year-olds, a young lad when the class was asked at their level about repentance said, "It means not doing bad things again". From the mouth of babes.... Repentance is all about seeing the beauty of the Christ Jesus and the overwhelming desperate need a sinner must have, that results in a change of direction.

Acts 3:19 "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out..".

True repentance is not a work by which we earn salvation — it is the natural response of a heart that genuinely understands the grace of God and the seriousness of sin.

Romans 11:6 “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace”.

Confessing — Declaring Faith Openly

As we seen *Romans 10:9* links salvation to confession of the mouth that Jesus is Lord. This is not a magical formula spoken by rote. It is the outward expression of an inward reality. A faith that cannot be declared openly is questioned in the New Testament. Jesus said:

Matthew 10:32 "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven".

Confession is the natural overflow of genuine saving faith that acknowledges the saving grace of God: it cannot be permanently suppressed.

The Assurance of Salvation

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine....” So goes the old hymn. It is one of the most precious gifts God offers the believer: assurance That is the confidence that they are truly saved and eternally secure. It is not arrogance. It is a humble acceptance of the truth that a sinner has been shown grace that God will never withdraw. As Paul expressed it:

Romans 8:38-39 “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

This is faith in the faithfulness of God. John wrote his first letter precisely for this purpose:

1 John 5:13 "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that you have eternal life".

Salvation can be known. It is not presumptuous to be certain of it: it is the appropriate response to the truth of the promises of God. Jesus Himself gave this assurance:

John 10:28-29: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater

than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Such a statement from the lips of the Saviour must bring deep encouragement of security. We are in the double clasp of the hands of the Son and His Father. No power in heaven, earth or hell can remove them from that grip.

Salvation is For Everyone

No one is excluded from the possibility of salvation. The most glorious truth about salvation is its openness to all. It is not reserved just for the morally respectable, the religiously educated, or those who feel worthy of it. It is offered to all, without exception. The well-known verse should never become so common we forget its power:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

This verse is the greatest invitation the world will ever receive. It is an open door that neither the powers of hell or the world can close. It is for the filthiest sinner. It is for the young and the old. It is for men and women. It is for the one who has been seeking over a long time. It is for the newest seeker. It is for those bowed down with striving religiously and failing. It includes those who think their sin is too great to be forgiven. It includes you!

Revelation 22:17 "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Conclusion

Surely, salvation is the greatest need of every human being, whether they realise it or not. It is certainly the greatest gift God has ever given through His beloved Son. It was planned in eternity, purchased at Calvary, proclaimed in the gospel, and is received by faith. You cannot earn it. You cannot buy it. You cannot ever lose it, if you truly possessed it. The question that matters above all others is not theological but very personal. This is not merely an intellectual exercise. Understanding salvation and all about it is one thing: but have you received it? Not just know how it is obtained: have you obtained it? If you have never placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, there is no better moment than this one. The promise is as clear today as it was the day it was written:

Romans 10:13 "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved".

Will you do that now?

If you have received Him, then live in the joy and the assurance of what He has done. You are justified. You are redeemed. You are adopted. You are His — and nothing shall ever change that.

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord".

