

What Is Salvation?

Together in Truth

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We come today to answer the question what is salvation and last night we established the important need to answer that question. A great God created man to a lofty position but man has fallen from that in his rebellion against God and now he's in spiritual slavery, a son of Satan under the wrath of God and facing eternal judgment without the ability to do anything about it in his own power, totally helpless before greater spiritual forces than he can see or that he can wrestle with on his own. Salvation is impossible for man. I'm mindful of the fact that I'm speaking to people that are in that condition of spiritual darkness. Some of you know that you're in that darkness and still thrash about without any interest in the Gospel of Christ. Some of you are blind to it but know that you have no interest in Christ, and others of you are nominal Christians, you profess the name of Christ but you're like those that Jesus said there would be many of at the final day, those who call out to him, "Lord, Lord, did we not...?" And he'll say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you."

As we've gone through this series titled "Together in Truth" and seen the authority of Scripture, the revelation of God, the existence of Satan, the creation of man and his fall into sin, all of it has been building toward this particular climax here in dealing with the matter of what is salvation. The authority of the Bible establishes these things to be true and so it is just so imperative for you to take these things seriously. This is ultimately what matters. The disruption that we're facing and these phases and these months of our lives, this is going to pass; everything that we love or hate or are encouraged by or discouraged by in this life, it's all going to pass, it's all going to burn away and we're going to be left with the reality of where does our soul stand before Jesus Christ on the final day of judgment. And you know, if some of you are going to stubbornly go into hell because you just refuse to hear Christ, well, I just want you to know that you will walk toward hell with the word of God and with at least one pastor clinging to your ankles and trying to hold you back and pleading with God for your salvation as you stubbornly march on to that ultimate destination of judgment. These things are profoundly serious and I care for your soul, I don't want to see you face that fate, but far more importantly, infinitely more important is that God has come to you in his word and has made the Gospel known to you and calls you in a loving call to repentance saying repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that you might be saved from your sins.

You see, there is a universal love of God that goes out in the call of the Gospel, calling out to people just like you, those who are hard in your sin, you're called to come to Christ. Those of you that are slumbering on the brink of woe, you're called to come to Christ. Those of you that are nominal Christians, the Spirit of God is convicting you even today and saying, "Come to Christ really and truly and stop playing the games that you've been content with for so very long." In the times that we were able to gather in this room, you know, there were just so many that I looked on week after week after week with no confidence of where you're at spiritually and I just, and my heart just aches over that. I labor over that and labor for you in prayer and just saying, "God, do something in them. Do something to awaken them, O God." And we just trust the Lord to use his word to do that because there is no power in you that I can appeal to that would act to save you. I have no ability of my own to save your soul. It's impossible for us as men to get out of this spiritual calamity and that's why we opened with the words from Luke 18, what is impossible for us is possible for God and we see that possibility and his ability and his power to save revealed in the Gospel and we'll see it manifested in the things that we consider here this morning. So if it were up to us, if hope were up to us, we might as well go home because you and I cannot save ourselves, and yet what we saw in that passage that I read for our Scripture reading beginning in Ephesians 2:4, is that God has done something according to his power and according to his independent sovereign desire that delivered us, for those of us that are in Christ, it delivered us from that awful conditions that we found ourselves in our sin.

Look at Ephesians 2:4 with me again. Having said that we were dead in trespasses and sins and dominated by the devil, doomed to suffer the wrath of God, Ephesians 2:4 says this,

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

You see, it was in the midst of our spiritual lostness and in the death of sin that God acted upon us. We did not save ourselves, God did something that we could not do and he did it because he's a merciful God, he's a gracious God, he is a God of love, favorably disposed to sinners who calls them to himself. And so God saved us and God did a work that we in sin could not do on our own.

You see, the wonder of the Bible and the wonder of New Testament truth, the wonder of the Gospel is this, is that what we saw last night, man in sin, man in spiritual slavery and under the domination of Satan and all those other things that I've already mentioned and repeated three or four times here this morning, all of that horrible darkness is not the end of the story. God has done something in his favor and grace to mankind, God has acted in a way that does not abandon man to that spiritual condition. God has intervened and that and that alone is our hope. There is no hope in a message that tells you to simply love other humans and to do your best. You can't do your best, you can't do enough, there is nothing that you can do that can satisfy the wrath of God. Do you understand that? Are you paying attention this morning? Because you must understand, you must understand

that you are thoroughly and miserably lost and as a result of that, you must look outside yourself to hope, you must look to this Bible which alone is authoritative, where God alone has revealed his plan of salvation, and see what God has said about these things and look outside of yourselves and abandon your self-satisfaction, your smugness, and your sarcastic attitudes toward spiritual things, and take earnestly to heart these things that God has revealed, and what we find when we look at what Scripture says is that there is hope for man despite his desperate rebellion against God and it is found in the biblical doctrine, the biblical teaching, the biblical call to salvation.

Well, what is salvation? Let me give you a summary definition and then we'll unpack it along five different lines of biblical testimony here this morning. What is salvation? Well, salvation is the divine deliverance of sinners. Salvation is the divine deliverance of sinners to a position of righteousness, life and blessing in this life and the life to come which is accomplished only through the person and work of Jesus Christ. I'll say it again. These words are the reason that I exist. This is what I live for, is to proclaim this very thing and so I'm happy to dwell on the definition. Salvation is the divine deliverance of sinners to a position of righteousness, life and blessing in this life and life to come which is accomplished only through the person and work of Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus Christ, he who is God in human flesh, he who was crucified on the cross and raised from the dead, Jesus Christ did something to save sinners just like you, Jesus Christ acted in his obedient life, he acted in his sacrificial death in order to take away the barrier of sin that separated you from God and to unleash the power of divine life on those sinners to whom the Holy Spirit would apply this work and bring this grace and this mercy and this love to their lives to forgive them of their sin and to impart new life to them. That was a mouthful, wasn't it, but what we find in salvation is that those of us who are dead in sin, God has provided life. Those of us who were slaves to sin, slaves to Satan, God has delivered us from that bondage and brought us into a new slavery to the Lord Jesus Christ, and after being in the kingdom of darkness, we find that God has delivered us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. And so everything that was arrayed against you, my Christian friend, everything that was arrayed against your spiritual well-being has been answered in the Lord Jesus Christ. You're a sinner who has broken the law of God and has no righteousness of your own, Christ has done a work that shares his righteousness with you. You were under the curse of God and deserving eternal damnation for your sin, Jesus Christ bore that curse on the cross and satisfied that curse and relieved you from it as a gift of grace that he did for you, thoroughly providing everything needed for righteousness, thoroughly doing everything necessary to remove the guilt and power of sin from your life and to break that power of sin that it has upon you. And the bondage of Satan, delivered from that because Jesus is greater than Satan, God is greater than Satan and therefore has superior power to break the power that he had on you, God delivered you from that power and brought you into his own kingdom. As we go down the line of all of the consequences of sin, we see that Jesus Christ has answered them for us and that to enter into that salvation is nothing less than leaving a realm of utter complete darkness and damnation and entering into the realm of light and life and eternal blessing.

So we have the greatest of biblical collisions coming here. We have the greatest of collisions of fate, fate speaking loosely of ultimate destination is what I mean by that, fate

of hell versus the fate of heaven colliding at this very intersection of which we are speaking here, the intersection of what is sin and the answer to the question what is salvation. And for those of you who have ears to hear, let me just say that we are looking at the things that are the most important matter of all of life. There are billions of people who need to hear these very things and thankfully God has raised up his servants over the course of centuries and across geography in multiple lands even today of people who are proclaiming this truth, that is the one message of salvation that is sufficient to save any sinner anywhere in the world but is an exclusive message in which alone can save, there is salvation in no one else, there is no other name by which you must be saved. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." So there is a universal collapse of man into sin, there is an exclusive message about an exclusive Savior who exclusively has the power to deliver you from that condition and that's all found when we answer the question what is salvation. Salvation is a divine deliverance. God has acted to save sinners who could not save themselves.

Now just to clarify and to, you know, to kind of get a running head start on our five points for this morning, many people think about salvation in a very narrow and restricted sense. They think about it in terms of the moment in which they believed in Christ and that that, you know, they think about salvation as when that moment in which they believed. There's a small measure of truth to that. When God caused us to be born again, when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, that that was the moment in one sense of our salvation but if we only think about it in that restricted sense, we're really missing the fullness of the biblical teaching entirely. We need to think about the fullness of what Scripture says about salvation so that we would have a sense of the majesty of it all and how thoroughly God has saved us and how completely he planned for it from before the beginning of time. Your salvation if you're in Christ today, your salvation was no accident, it was no incident, it wasn't something that you stumbled upon. This was the outworking of the eternal purpose of God for you from before the time of creation. And so we must see it in its fullness to understand how thoroughly we have been saved. By his love I have been completely saved, I have been completely delivered, and so that is the joyous topic that we want to consider here this morning. Salvation links us with God's purpose in eternity past to God's purpose in eternity future and everything in between. That's what we want to consider this morning.

So let's consider salvation, first of all, from this perspective: God's work in eternity past. God's work in eternity past. That's our first point for this morning. Everything that I'm about to say, every subpoint I'm about to make here is the topic of a separate message at some place in our sermon library. We're going to cover everything together here in one message so it will necessarily be brief and cursory. We're standing on a mountaintop looking out at a vista wanting to take in the whole view at once rather than looking at individual aspects in depth. That's what we're going to do this morning and so God's work in eternity past, let's simply look at Ephesians 1 and see that God chose those people who would be saved before time began. Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 3,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Chosen before the foundation of the world. Predestined to adoption as sons in Jesus Christ. You see, the clear teaching of Scripture is that God chose those who would be saved before the beginning of time, and so if you are in Christ this morning, one of the majestic realities that Scripture reveals to you is this, is that God had set his intentional love upon you before time began. God had planned for your salvation before he even spoke the worlds into existence. There was never a moment in time where a Christian had any danger of being anything other than completely saved based on the fact that God purposed his salvation before the beginning of time. That's the wonder of the doctrine of election. This is the doctrine of election. Before the foundation of the world, God chose certain individuals to receive salvation and his choice was based on his own will and nothing at all that was foreseen in man.

God, who is the Creator, had the complete absolute prerogative and the sovereign freedom to decide that he would have a people that he would give to his Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you are in Christ here this morning, the implication of that is this, is that God determined beforehand that he wanted you to share in the glory, for you to be the object of his own saving grace, for you to be included in the purpose of Christ when he sacrificed himself on the cross to deliver sinners from their bondage to sin and Satan and darkness. God planned all of that. God chose you for that. This was God's work in eternity past. We looked at this just last week actually when we considered the Triune nature of salvation so we don't need to spend anymore time on it here today other than to glory in and to be stunned in wonder with the majesty of what that means, that God chose you if you're in Christ, God chose you for salvation before the beginning of time and that has to mean, then, that your salvation is secure forever. If it was his eternal purpose and God always accomplishes his eternal purposes, then you can end up as nothing other than saved and in heaven with him forever and you must understand this, that God's electing choice means that your salvation depends on his power and his will, not on your ability to carry it out yourself. Yes, you and I stumble often in the course of our daily Christian lives; yes, we are unworthy of those things; yes, we are unworthy and did nothing to deserve that, that's why it is such wonderful amazing grace of which we sing that God did that for us when we were so undeserving; that while we were yet enemies Jesus Christ died for us; while we were opposed to him he was acting to reconcile us to himself. You see, my friends, salvation is great. Salvation is great. Salvation is glorious. It is an expression of unspeakable kindness from God upon his people that he chose us before eternity. What I mean by that is he chose us before time began, he chose us in eternity past and we have ever been the objects of his saving intentions and his saving love. That's marvelous. All we can say is, "God, praise be to Your name. God, I honor You." This does not make us special, it does not make us privileged, and it certainly does not make us arrogant to say these things, we are simply recognizing what God has done as he has revealed it to us in his word. God did a work in eternity past to secure our salvation.

Well, secondly as we continue on, is that we can consider God's work from 2,000 years ago. God's work from 2,000 years ago. God chose you for salvation but your sin did stand in the way, something had to be done about that. The justice of God against your sin had to be satisfied. God could not simply blindly ignore the fact that you had sinned, if you were to be saved God could not require you to pay for it because you don't have the resources to pay an eternal debt on his behalf, and so that's the great dilemma. The saving purpose of God and yet your sin making you unfit for his holy presence, how can this ever be reconciled? How can God save those who cannot save themselves and still be true to his own justice that his law requires? That's the great dilemma. Well, it's resolved in the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did 2,000 years ago. He was born into this world to the virgin Mary. He lived a perfect life. He satisfied everything that the law required and then he offered that life up as a sacrifice to God on your behalf, acting as your priest, offering the sacrifice of himself that God alone could accept as that which would satisfy and atone for all of your sins. This is why Jesus Christ came. You see, my friend, and just speaking on a very basic level, Jesus was more than a human teacher and Jesus did more than come to simply come and tell us how to live or to give us a great moral example to follow. It does no good to tell you how to live when you're lost in sin because you cannot keep it. It does no good to give you an example because you do not have the power to emulate that on your own when you are not a Christian.

So the coming of Christ was more than teaching, the coming of Christ was more than being an example, the coming of Christ and the purpose of it is ultimately found in the fact that he came to offer his life as a ransom for many as Jesus himself said in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." You know, if we dwelled on that for a moment or two, we would see how magnificent and humbling it is. Here you and I are, you know, we're kind of collapsing time in what I'm about to say but that's okay, you'll get my point, here you and I are, rebels, sinful, hateful toward God, dead in our sin, nothing of anything that we can add to God or give to God that does anything for him, destroyed in sin, lost in sin, and hostile and an enemy of God. In that condition, Scripture says, it was while we were like that that Christ loved us; that Christ in love came to earth; that Christ in love came to seek and to save that which was lost. You know, the whole point about being lost is that you can't find your way out, right? It's not that we had a clue about what to do, we were utterly lost. We had been blindfolded and transported into the darkest and deepest of jungles thousands of miles from our home and dropped in with no instruments or anything to help orient us to where we were at. We were in a hostile environment, we were hostile to God, and we had nothing by which to find our way out of that situation. Lost, in other words. Lost. And while you and I were in that condition, Jesus Christ says in Luke 19:10, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came on his own self-initiated rescue mission sent from the Father, gladly submitting to the Father's will, voluntarily laying down his life and Jesus Christ came to seek and to save us when we had no capacity to find our way out of our dilemma.

That's how great the work of God is and as you continue reading in Ephesians 1, you see the testimony to this. Ephesians 1:7, it says,

7 In Him [that is, in Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Redemption is a word that was used in the slave market. Redemption was a word that meant that someone bought you out of slavery. Well, you were not a physical slave but you were a spiritual slave and Jesus Christ paid the spiritual price necessary to deliver you from your spiritual slavery and bring you into the realm of salvation by the work that he did in his obedient life and in the shed blood that he offered to God on the cross to be the atonement for your sin.

If you'll turn to the book of 1 Peter 2 and chapter 3, we see these things repeated there as well. 1 Peter 2:24 it says that,

24 ... He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

You were healed from your debt of sin. You were healed from the death sentence that sin had inflicted upon you and Christ gave himself on the cross for that kind of spiritual healing to be brought to you.

In chapter 3, verse 18 it says this,

18 ... Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God,

You know, one of the things that we said last night is that one of the consequences of sin is that you were hopelessly separated from God, Isaiah 59:2, hopelessly separated from God so that he does not hear you, so that you cannot find him. What Jesus Christ did in his work 2,000 years ago was that he came to earth to seek you and to find you, and having found you, so to speak, on the cross where he gave himself up for you, what Christ did was he brought you to God. Christ stepped across the divide, found you, picked you up, as it were, in his saving work and then brought you to God and reconciled you to God in a way that you never could have done. This is what salvation is, it is a complete answer to the problem that man has with sin, it is found in the electing purpose of God and the saving work of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago.

And how do we know this is true? How do we know that we can rest our eternal destiny in Christ? Well, God raised him from the dead. God did a miracle before all of the world and raised Christ from the dead which is the certificate of authenticity stamped upon the work of Christ that God has accepted that sacrifice in order to reconcile sinners to himself. Scripture says in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. Christ by being raised from the dead showed that he had paid what was required and death no longer has any claim on him, and going further in the purpose and plan of God, those who are in Christ find that that work of Christ in satisfying death is applied to them as well so that we are delivered from the penalty of death, the penalty of eternal death, the free gift of

God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, and while we will physically die, it will not be the end of us because we are joined with Christ in his resurrected life and to die in Christ is to enter immediately into the presence of Christ in heaven. So all of this secured for us by what Christ did for us 2,000 years ago.

Go back to Ephesians 1 for just a moment. Ephesians 1:18 where it describes this power of Christ that is at work in us. Ephesians 1:18, Paul says,

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

God raised Christ from the dead, installed him as head over all of the church, and those who are in the church by which we means those who have truly been born again and are truly united to Christ in that great invisible church that includes all of the redeemed, those who share in that life of Christ and have been united to Christ by faith like that share in all of the benefits of his resurrection and that resurrection means that death will not be the end of us, there is life beyond the grave for those of us that are in Christ. They are wonderful truths and so we see reaching back into eternally past, we see God's electing choice that we might be saved. Coming forward 2,000 years ago before you and I were ever born and our great great great grandparents had not even been born yet, we see that Christ had already done the work that was necessary to accomplish our salvation. The electing purpose of God the Father guaranteed the outcome. The atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross guaranteed the outcome so that we could never have ended up as anything other than being saved. Jesus Christ did the work for your salvation before you were even born. These are wonderful magnificent truths, aren't they, and we speak of them in reference to tones here this morning, recognizing having just seen our spiritual slavery and death and hell lapping at our feet, as it were, as an ocean wave just coming up around our ankles and coming and pulling back, as the consequences of sin and the intentions of the devil and the threat of God's judgment were lapping at our feet like that with the current wanting to take us out into the eternal abyss, God had acted so that the force of those spiritual hostilities would not come down upon your head. These are wonderful truths and this is the fullness of the answer of what is salvation as we unfold it here this morning.

So we see God's work in eternity past, God's work 2,000 years ago, thirdly, let's talk about this, God's work in your conversion. God's work in your conversion. While it is true that it was certain that you would be saved due to the electing purpose of God and

due to the atoning work of Jesus Christ, it still had to be applied to you. Redemption had been accomplished by Jesus Christ but in the scope of time and in the course of your life, you were still a sinner that was still really and actually under the wrath of God in your pre-conversion days. You were actually under the wrath of God. You were a child of wrath as it says in Ephesians 2:3, we read that earlier. By nature you were a child of wrath, you were not justified, you were not sanctified, and you were in a perilous condition if you had died like that. Well, the Holy Spirit did a work in you so that this salvation that Christ accomplished would be applied to your heart and the Bible describes many things that happened to us in conversion, and again we just have to treat these oh so briefly for the sake of getting the fullness of it out. What happened at the moment of your conversion? Well, first of all there was the reality of regeneration. Regeneration. The Holy Spirit imparted new life to you. Though you were dead, the Spirit of God somehow breathed spiritual life into you from without and did something to you that you did not participate in, the Spirit of God acted upon you in order to bring this life to you. And look at Ephesians 2:5 here where it says this in the plainest most concise language perhaps in all of Scripture, in Ephesians 2:5,

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ

You were dead. You could not raise yourself to new life. What God did was he made you alive in Christ. This is the doctrine of regeneration. God, the subject of the sentence, made alive, the verb of the sentence, you, the direct object. You did not do this to yourself. It is something that God did to you. God speaking in the language of Ezekiel 36, God took away your stony heart and replaced it with a heart of flesh. God took out that cold, lifeless control center in your life and replaced it with one that was bubbling with the life of God and pulsating with new spiritual life and spiritual purposes and intentions. That's what God did for you in your conversion at that moment in time when you were saved, God acted upon you who were dead, God acted upon you to make you alive. That's the doctrine of regeneration.

Well, what came from that, what flowed from that, and these are things that all happened at the same moment of time, we have to separate them out logically but we see the impact and talk about them separately. Well, there was the whole matter of faith and repentance. As God gave new life to you, he made you willing to repent and believe and that is the manner in which you appropriated the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation. In Ephesians 2:8 and 9 you see it said this way,

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

In 2 Timothy, we won't turn there but in 2 Timothy it speaks about how God grants repentance from sin to those who are under the bondage of Satan.

So in this gift of salvation, in this work of the Holy Spirit, God gave new life to you and as that new life activated, you exercised repentance and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. You turned from sin, you rejected it as a principle and by faith you received Jesus Christ. What is faith? Faith is to receive Jesus Christ, to accept him, to welcome him, to embrace him, to own him, as it were, recognizing him to be the only Savior and calling upon him for mercy on you in your condition of sin. That's the reception aspect of faith and there's also this other dimension to faith that you rest in him, and what we mean by that spiritual rest of Christ, to put it as simply as I know how, you stop trying to earn your own righteousness before God and you rest in the fact that Jesus Christ has accomplished righteousness for you; that Jesus Christ has fulfilled everything that God requires on your behalf; that in his righteous life he fulfilled everything that the law requires, in his atoning death he paid for all of your sins. So you receive the person of Christ and as you receive and submit to that person of Christ, all the benefits that he did in his earthly life accrue to your benefit, God credits them to your account. And so God makes you alive in Christ, you repent and receive Christ by faith, and this is the manner in which all of those benefits are brought to you.

Horatius Bonar, a great Scottish theologian and pastor in the 19th century said this and it's been incorporated into a modern contemporary Christian song, but he says this that expresses our reliance on Christ. He said this, he said, "On a life I did not live, on a death I did not die, another's life, another's death, I stake all my eternity." That's the essence of our reliance on Christ. There's nothing that we rely on of ourselves. We look outside ourselves, we look up Christ, we understand that he lived a perfect life, we understand that he sacrificed that life on the cross to atone for our sins, and we trust in that to be that which recommends us to God, that which reconciles us to God, that which God alone will accept. It's not what I have done by the works of my hands, it's not any prayers that I've offered or any religious rituals I've done or any good deeds that I've done or anything that I've given to the church, we forsake all of that as giving any merit to us by which we recommend ourselves to God. We forsake it all and in repentance and faith we embrace Jesus Christ and, as it were, we adopt the attitude before God, "God, I am depending on Christ alone for myself salvation. Nothing of myself."

I should pause here and just ask hopefully a penetrating question with the help of the Spirit of God: are you trusting in Christ like that? Do you see your own righteousness as just rags before God, dirty filthy rags that have no merit before God, that are not any kind of recommendation of you to God? You know, or do you hide in your heart a secret boasting place where you think you're somewhat better than someone else, or that somehow God will accept you because of, "Look at who I am or look at what I have done?" Or resting on the fact that you were born into a Christian family and therefore you must be a Christian also? You see, friends, when we answer the question what is salvation, what we're doing is we're forsaking all of that. We are repenting of all of that and we're saying, "God, there is no righteousness in me. I'm a vile rebel in myself. I am a guilty sinner separated from You. I am dead apart from Christ and so, God, I rely on Christ, I receive Him, I receive what Christ has done." Stated differently, "Christ has commanded me to come to Him for salvation. O Lamb of God, I come. I come." That's the essence of saving faith.

Well, what happens in that, what happens in that moment of conversion? God justifies us. There is justification that is brought to us. Justification is a legal term meaning this, is that God accepts you in Christ. At the moment of your conversion, God completely justified you meaning that God pardoned all of your sins past, present and future, God pardoned all of your sins for the sake of Christ and he accepts you as righteous in his sight for the sake of his beloved Son, because Christ pleads a God with his life and atoning work, and you come to Christ by faith. God accepts you on the merits of Christ and on the merits of what Christ is done so that he forgives all of your sins and will never threaten judgment against you for your sins ever again because Christ paid for them on the cross and God accepts you as righteous in Christ. God, as it were, in Christ gives you the title deed to heaven. Christ earned that for you. Christ accomplished that for you. And so God in justification pardons all of your sin, declares you perfectly righteous in his sight and says, "I accept you," and he adopts you into his family, not to mix the terms, but the law no longer condemns us because Christ satisfied its demands and we are justified in Christ.

Books are written about what I just said in two minutes, but in the moment of your conversion you were regenerated, you received Christ in repentant faith, God justified you, and at that same moment finally here for all that we're saying here tonight, the Holy Spirit came to indwell you, the Spirit of God came to indwell you. We talked about this last time. When I say last time, last Sunday is what I mean by that. Ephesians 1:13 and 14, the Spirit of God is given to us as a pledge of our inheritance. The Spirit of God indwells us, changes us and makes us a promise that because the Spirit is with us now, it's a promise from God that he will carry out the fullness of our salvation. That's the briefest of summaries and leaving out many other things, but that's the briefest of summaries of what God did for you in your conversion. You were spiritually dead, God brought you to life in regeneration. You were separated from God and unfit for his presence, God granted to you faith and repentance in order to receive Jesus Christ. As you received Jesus Christ, God justified you, pardoned all of your sin, declared you and accepted you as righteous for the sake of his Son, and at that same moment, indwelt you with the Holy Spirit who would become the agent of God's sanctifying influence as we'll see in just a moment. All of those things in a twinkling of an eye at the moment of your conversion, as somehow God opened your eyes to the truth of the Gospel and brought Christ to you.

Now let's pause for a moment here. That's like trying to get a drink from a fire hydrant that's going full blast with everything that we just said. Let's just pause for a moment and ask a simple question: is it really possible that so much changed in a single moment of time, that in the blink of an eye you went from death to life, you went from hell to heaven, as it were, you went from condemnation to justification? Is it possible that all of that happened in the snap of a finger in less time than it takes to snap a finger, God did all of that for you? Well, yes, that's the testimony of Scripture.

There's an earthly parallel that we can make to help us understand that. If you think about attending a wedding and you get through the ceremony and sometimes they're really long and sometimes they're mercifully a little bit briefer, at the climax or just before the climax

of the ceremony when the husband and wife kiss after they've been pronounced man and wife, understand this, that the officiating minister, the person who is officiating that wedding, everything builds up to this point where he says, "By the power vested in me, I now declare you husband and wife," and in that moment of time, in that moment of time they go from being two separate individual lives to being one, in a Christian marriage, becoming one in Christ. In that moment of time, they are recognized completely differently by the legal system. Their taxes are changed and their names are changed and all of that takes place in a moment of time. Well, that's a very weak analogy but it gives us a sense that many things with many aspects can happen in a moment of time even from an earthly perspective. Well, we step from the wonder and joy of a wedding into a far greater joy, a far greater wedding that takes place when Christ comes for his bride, so to speak, and when you are saved there are multiple aspects of it that launched you in the realm of time, launched you into a completely different trajectory that rather than going down into the depths of the pit with Satan and his angels, you are now on a trajectory that takes you up into heaven and it can be no other way and it's due to the saving work of Jesus Christ.

So we see God's work in eternity past, God's work 2,000 years ago, God's work in our conversion, fourthly, and I just need to get through this and not weary you with so much but, fourthly, we see God's work in the present, God's work right now in us that are in Christ. When God saves you, it begins a process of change known as sanctification and the Spirit of God dwelling within you works in you to change your thought patterns, to change your attitudes toward sin, and to conform you to the image of Christ. Sanctification is the work of God in which he brings a believer into conformity with the image of Christ. It's imperfect in this life. Justification is perfect, final and complete forever. You will never be more justified in the future than you are right now than you were at the moment of your conversion. Justification was instantaneous and complete and forever. Sanctification in this life is distinct from that. It is a process, not a one time event. It is imperfect in this life and it is ongoing in a way that distinguishes it from justification, but they are linked together.

You see, when God saved you he imparted new life to you. He gave a new nature to you and as a result of that, your life changes. That's why for a true Christian there is some manner of new life that comes, something that is conforming itself to Christ and receptive to the word of God and this is an aspect of sanctification. Nothing is ever the same again. The Bible says if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, the old things have passed away, behold new things have come, that's 2 Corinthians 5:17. In Philippians 2 it says that to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. We obey God, we exercise effort, we read his word, we exert ourselves in prayer, we fellowship with his people, we love and we obey, and all of that is the human aspect of sanctification but underneath it all is the power of God working in you to sanctify you and to conform you to the image of Christ. So God doesn't simply save us in a moment of time and then leave us unchanged. No, salvation in that moment of time has radically changed you and that change works itself out in ever increasing areas of your life to greater degrees from then until the moment that you die and go into heaven. That's the process of sanctification, God does a work and

yet we are commanded to seek it. 2 Peter 3:18 says grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God does not command us to be born again, God does not command us to bring new life to ourselves, but as Christians he does command us to seek our own spiritual growth and as we do that, the Spirit of God is silently working to ensure the outcome and that we are increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. That's the fourth aspect of God's work.

Eternity past, 2,000 years ago, at some point in the past in your conversion and now today working out your salvation, and then fifthly and finally for today is that we have the wonderful anticipation of God's work in the future. God's work in the future. The culmination, the climax of salvation is still yet to come for us. The fullness of salvation, the final destination comes after this life and for this I just want to turn you to 1 Peter 1 for just a moment, 1 Peter 1 beginning in verse 3. 1 Peter 1 in verse 3. It's interesting that Peter starts out with the same phrase of praise that Paul does in Ephesians 1. Ephesians 1, 1 Peter 1, they're both in verse 3. Chapter 1, verse 3, starting out this way,

1 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord is Christ, [Peter's emphasis is different, related but different,] who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again

Do you see it? God caused us to be born again. We didn't do that to ourselves. He's caused us to be born again,

to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

That's everything that we've been talking about, the first four points are covered in that first verse. Now in verse 4, the outcome,

4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

It's reserved meaning that you haven't received it yet but it's reserved so that it is certain that you will enter into it. Verse 5,

5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

God has saved you and now he is protecting you. In his love and his kindness and his mercy, God is protecting you to guarantee that you will end up in that final destination that he appointed for you before the beginning of time. It's reserved in heaven.

The power of God is at work in you and so we find that the believer has a dwelling place in heaven reserved for us as the Spirit of God sanctifies us and prepares us for it in this life, the final outcome is guaranteed, it is secure. God will one day perfect us at our death, our souls will go immediately into the presence of Christ, at a subsequent time there will be a resurrection and our physical bodies will be joined with that glorified so and in

glorified body, glorified soul, we will enjoy Christ forever and ever without end and we will spend eternity seeing the display of the glory of God. And I believe with other theologians in the past that somehow there will be an aspect of eternity, as eternity is infinite and God is infinite, there will be somehow an ever increasing growing knowledge of God and experience of the joy of our salvation that simply deepens and grows throughout all of eternity in a way that I can't begin to understand or to even express to you, but we can say this for sure, is that heaven will be far greater than anything that we could ask or dream in this life. We get glimpses of it as we think about the golden streets and the other things that are revealed in the book of Revelation as we anticipate seeing the glorified Christ with eyes that are able to comprehend that and take it in, when we are made like him we will see him as he is, we will see the face of Incarnate God face to face, we will see him with our eyes and when we do we will be made like him for we will see him as he is, 1 John 3. The cares of this world will be forgotten. Sin will be banished from our presence and there will be nothing left for us to do but to have a central focus on Christ and to enjoy that great vision of his glory surrounding the throne with our praises with saints through all of the ages, all brought together as we acknowledge and we recognize in infinitely greater fullness than what we do here the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, the patience of God, the kindness of God that has been poured out on us. This is the outcome of salvation.

What is salvation? It's a divine deliverance from sin. All of the consequences that we saw last night reversed and replaced instead by all of these wonderful positive dimensions of salvation that we have been discussing here today. Oh, my Christian friend, is your heart not full of joy and anticipation and gratitude? Do you see why Paul and Peter both could only begin their discussion of these things by saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to His holy and matchless name." Do you see why this bursts out of a believing heart and expressed with such unreserved gratitude and praise when we contemplate the glorious salvation that has been given to us?

Going back to those of you that I was addressing at the start, the cold, the hostile, the nominal Christian, how can you turn away from this? Christ calls you in your deadness, Christ calls you to life. Christ invites you to come. Christ promises you that he will receive you. He says, "The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." There is this full, complete, unreserved willingness of Jesus Christ to share all of the magnificent glories of salvation that I have spent the past 75 minutes describing to you and Christ says, "This can be yours if you will come to Me." And if you won't, all of the awfulness and darkness of sin and Satan and judgment that we described is your inheritance. My friend, my friend, won't you come to Christ? Why would you not? Why would you not? Christ says that he is not willing for you to perish. He finds no delight in the death of the wicked but rather that they should repent and live, that's in the book of Ezekiel. That's what's presented to you here today, the free Gospel offer not just an offer of a lifetime, this is the offer of eternity given to you. Will you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let's pray together.

Father, we can't improve on the words of the inspired apostles so we won't even try. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ just as you chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Father, thank You for Your electing love. Lord Jesus, thank You for Your redeeming love. Holy Spirit, thank You for Your love which imparted new life and sanctifies us. And O Triune God, we anticipate the greatness of salvation to be consummated in glory. How unworthy we are of the riches of Your grace, Father. How Your wonders are displayed in Your Son and in the Gospel. Father, we forsake, we repent, we confess of any thoughts that we have of questioning Your love or questioning Your purposes or doubting You or being dissatisfied with You. We see all that You've done and with the hymn writer we say, "I'm satisfied in Christ." With the hymn writer we say, "Glory, honor and praise to the Lord Jesus." Father, we commit these things to You and we commit these dear, wandering, eternal souls that doubt You, that still rebel against You. O God, have mercy on them unto eternal life. May everyone under the sound of my voice, Father, be on the receiving end of that great work of the Spirit of God that would bring them to Christ for salvation and may they respond in a willing repentance and a glad-hearted faith that embraces Christ as their all in all. In Jesus' name we earnestly and even desperately pray for them, Father. Amen.

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