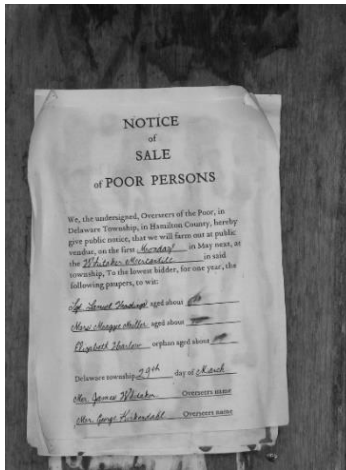


WHAT DOES JESUS SAVE US FROM?



Scripture:

Luke 4:1-13

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Romans 10:8b-13

⁸“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



“Hi, my name is Sara Mbogo, I’m saved.” “Hi, I’m Steven Waweru, I’m saved!”

It surprised me how all the Christians I met in Kenya introduced themselves that way. I always replied, “I’m Cindy and so am I!” But I got kind of a weird expression when I would answer back in that way. I’m quite sure their idea of being “saved” was

not the same as mine. The church in Kenya tends to be more fundamentalist in their beliefs than we do in the Presbyterian Church USA.

In order to qualify as “saved” in Kenya you must go through a “born again” experience where you pray the exact words of a Sinner’s Prayer or the Salvation Prayer as it is sometimes called. Then you are

guaranteed to go to heaven. Those who don't pray the prayer are destined for hell when they die.

THE SINNER'S PRAYER

Wikipedia describes the Sinner's Prayer as an evangelical Christian term referring to a prayer of repentance, prayed by people who feel convicted of the presence of sin in their lives and have the desire to form or renew a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This prayer has received praise and criticism in the United States. But no such prayer is found in the Bible. Some biblical scholars have even labeled the sinner's prayer an "apostasy."

The reason you won't find this prayer in the Bible is because it is a twentieth century prayer adapted from a prayer in the book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Later it was further adapted by Campus Crusade and Billy Graham.

The sinner's prayer is: "Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name. Amen."

It is not a terrible prayer is it? But this prayer has been used to do the opposite of what Jesus would want. It has been used to judge people and divide them into two camps, the "saved" the "unsaved."

THE MISUSE OF THIS PRAYER

Pastor David Platt has commented about the misuse of this prayer. He said, "I'm convinced that many people in our churches are simply missing the life of Christ, and a lot of it has to do with what we've sold them as the gospel, i.e. just pray this prayer, accept Jesus into your heart, invite Christ into your life. Should it not concern us that there is no such superstitious prayer in the New Testament? Should it not concern us that the Bible never uses the phrase, 'accept Jesus into your heart' or 'invite Christ into your life'? It's not the gospel we see being preached, it's modern evangelism built on sinking sand. And it runs the risk of disillusioning millions of souls." He emphasizes how it is easy to say the words, but it is all about living the life.

Reverend David Gushee agrees with Platt. He said, "Anyone can, and most Americans do, "believe" in Jesus rather than some alternative savior. Anyone can, and many Americans sometimes do, say a prayer asking Jesus to save them. But not many

embark on a life fully devoted to the love of God, the love of neighbor, the moral practice of God's will, and radical, costly discipleship."

Both David Gushee and David Platt criticize the sinner's prayer because they think it is too easy to just say it and not mean it. They believe a true conversion to Christianity has to be sacrificial and life changing. But to not be critical we have to start somewhere. What do you believe about salvation when we call Jesus our Savior? Do you consider yourself "saved?" Saved from what?

**In our Presbyterian Church USA
vows for baptism and membership
in the church we ask for a declaration
of faith in Jesus Christ.
We ask that you denounce evil and trust
in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.
But the difference is we don't claim that
this is the key to obtaining your one and
only entrance ticket to eternal life.
We trust that it is up to the Holy Spirit
to lead you to faith and it is between
you and God to shape and form
your faith relationship which can
look different for each one of us.**

Your journey of faith can be hot or cold and feel close or distant at various times of your life. That's true even for pastors. But we do believe that the Holy Spirit is like your conscience leading you to know right from wrong. We encourage you to let your conscience be your guide. (Does that remind you of Jiminy Cricket in Pinocchio?)

A video was played for the congregation.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOZzNOKcEgM>

WALT DISNEY

Walt Disney wove some of his faith beliefs into his movie scripts. (Did you know Walt was named after his family's minister in Missouri?)

Walt Disney said this in an essay he wrote for the book *Faith in a Star*: "In these days of world tensions, when faith is being tested as never before, I am personally thankful that my parents taught me at a very early age to have a strong personal belief and reliance in the power of prayer for Divine inspiration. My people were members of the Congregational Church in our home town of Marceline, Missouri. It

was there where I was first taught the efficacy of religion ... how it helps us immeasurably to meet the trials and stress of life and keeps us attuned to the Divine inspiration.”

So why do we consider Jesus as our Lord and “Savior” and not Jiminy Cricket?

SALVATION

The word Salvation comes from the Latin root *salvere* which means to save, to rescue. Other definitions of salvation include preservation or deliverance from harm. A Savior is defined as a person or thing that is the means of preserving one from harm.

In Christianity salvation means deliverance by redemption from the power of sin and from the penalties ensuing from it. The Bible clearly says in John 3:17: "Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.”

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, salvation is the act of saving someone from sin or evil. A savior saves someone from danger or a difficult situation. This connects with what Walt Disney said about “his faith helping him to meet the trials and stress of life with Divine inspiration.”

And the Christian Science understanding of salvation is that it is “the realization that life, truth, and love are supreme, and that salvation destroys such illusions as sin and death.”

There is a healing component to salvation, too. The word *salve* is part of the root in the word *salvation*. It refers to an ointment used to promote healing or as protection.

So, putting this all together, we realize, Jesus is our savior, our rescuer, and redeemer. Jesus preserves us from harm and helps us understand the power of promoting life, truth, and love. The ways of Jesus, if we choose to follow them, help us avoid or persevere through many trials and difficulties in life.

But there is nothing in these definitions that would mean you can or cannot have eternal life. Salvation is about healing and wholeness, a way of wellbeing that preserves life and promotes love.

RETURN TO JESUS WITH ALL YOUR HEART

The theme of our Lenten Season is Return to Jesus with all your heart. This isn't about returning to a faith that you felt compelled to believe to avoid hell someday. This is about understanding that the way to live your best life is described in the Bible and

demonstrated by Jesus in his ministry of love, healing and forgiveness.

Returning to Jesus means returning to his way of being in the world by looking at all your neighbors with love and compassion in your heart. That is how Christ saw the world, even from the cross. When he said about his slayers, “Forgive them for they know not what they do,” he was showing us the way of ultimate forgiveness in the midst of evil and chaos.

When he healed the outcasts, befriended the tax collectors, and turned over the tables in the temple where people were being cheated, Jesus was showing all of us how we are to live our lives.

Jesus was not a fire and brimstone kind of guy, but he did get angry when the temple leaders were oppressing those they were called to help. Rather than saying, “Believe in me or go to hell,” he said things like, “I am the way, the truth and the life,” because his way of being in the world is the true way we were created to be, which leads to a better life.

1st Timothy 2 says: “God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

Chapter 52 of Isaiah says: “All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of God.”

Theologian Rob Bell, in his book *Love Wins* says, “There is an insistence in the Bible that God will be united and reconciled with all people. It is a theme the writers and the prophets turn to again and again.”

And Paul reassures us in Philippians 2 that “It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

A HELL OF OUR OWN MAKING

So, what does Jesus saves us from? He saves us from a hell of our own making. One definition of hell is a sense of being separated from God. When do we feel separated from God? When we are doing the opposite of what God would want us to do. When we are being rude, gossipy, judgmental, impatient and neglectful towards others.

Or when we are choosing the evil ways such as trying to sell the poor like slaves rather than invite them into our homes for shelter and food.

The image on page one was a real sale notice posted in Ohio in the mid-nineteenth century.

Can you imagine selling a poor person? What deep sadness the “paupers” must have felt. And the youngest one is only ten years old.

We are living the way that saves us when we feel inspired to share Christ’s love and help the refugee and the homeless, when we visit a prison or a hospital, when we write letters to the lonely, and when we show gratitude to God for our many blessings and especially when we pray.

But sometimes we get lost in the ways of the world. God gives us free will and freedom to be as evil and selfish as we want. We are free to resist and rebel against God’s ways. We can create our own hell on earth.

We all know people who choose to live in their own man-made hell. Those who can’t see the good in others. Those who look for reasons to complain rather than focusing on the many blessings surrounding them.

We need saving when we isolate ourselves from one another and when we harden our hearts in defiance of progress and change.

UNJUST THINGS

And God knows there are many unjust things that happen to people on earth that can put up obstacles in the way of faith and belief in Jesus Christ. One woman said her father would say the Lord’s prayer while he abused her and sing Christian songs while he beat up her mother. No wonder she couldn’t step foot into a Christian worship service for fear of having to say the Lord’s prayer or hear the singing of one of those songs.

I believe our God feels deep sorrow over obstacles that keep people from freely having faith and believing in the love of Jesus. The abuse of thousands of children in the Catholic Church has had a huge impact on their ability to feel comfortable in churches and believe in the truth of God’s love.

I believe God can find a way to heal them outside the church institutions. I have a friend who is a member of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. He won’t step foot in any church, but the goal of SNAP is to help the churches and parishes be a safer place for all children. The organization in general is not rejecting the church but promoting justice for victims of priests and the patriarchal system responsible for their abuse. That to me is a sign of salvation. The healing will take

time, but God won’t give up on loving them. We should include all the victims of church abuse in our prayers.

PRAYER

Walt Disney went on to say in his essay about prayer: “Whatever success I have had in bringing clean, informative entertainment to people of all ages, I attribute in great part to my Congregational upbringing and my lifelong habit of prayer.

“To me, today, at age sixty-one, all prayer ... has one thing in common: supplication for strength and inspiration to carry on the best human impulses which should bind us together for a better world. Without such inspiration, we would rapidly deteriorate and finally perish....”

The salvation of Jesus is the inspiration we need to show unconditional love in action rather than judgment and separation from others. This Lenten season, I encourage you to ponder how your faith in Jesus saves you. And what it saves you from.

The next time I go to Kenya I think I’ll introduce myself and say, “Hi I’m Cindy. And thanks to the love of Jesus, I’m saved, and so are you.” Amen

Benediction:

In 1st Peter 3:15 it reads: The Lord’s patience means salvation. ... Thank God for Jesus having patience with us imperfect humans!

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen



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