

What Is Salvation?

What Does the Bible Teach?

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Our music this morning has focused us on the salvation that we have in Christ and on the one who purchased that salvation for us, our Lord Jesus Christ and it sets the stage for our topic for this morning as we consider the question: exactly what is salvation? What is salvation? It's kind of the \$64,000 question of theology, you might say. Certainly in terms of how it impacts us as our individual lives are moving toward a destined date with the judgment of God. What is salvation? And as we've seen over the past couple of weeks, there is a great need for salvation because man has fallen from his lofty position. Although we were created to be the pinnacle of God's creation to reflect his image and to rule over his creation, we have fallen from that into sin and now we find ourselves collectively and individually as slaves to sin apart from Christ, a slave to Satan, a malevolent spirit who seeks to bring us into destruction with himself. We are under the wrath of God and unable to save ourselves and if hope were up to us in that miserable condition, we might as well close the service and go home because we cannot save ourselves. We cannot free ourselves from Satan. We cannot release ourselves from the sin that owns us and binds us. We cannot turn away the wrath of God with the works of our hands. We are in a desperate condition.

Turn to the book of Ephesians, if you would, just to see a summary passage of our condition and what it is that makes salvation so necessary. Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 1, summarizing the condition of man apart from Christ says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." There it is, beloved, a description of mankind apart from Christ: dead in sins; dominated by the devil; doomed to suffer the wrath of God. That's why we can say that if hope were up to us, if there was any prospect of being released from that and it depended on us, we might as well close our Bibles and go home because there's nothing that we can do to save ourselves. We are miserably and hopelessly lost in our own right.

But as you continue on in Ephesians 2, look at verse 4, "But God," there it is, beloved, "But God." Man in sin is not the end of the story. Man in his lostness, man under the domination of Satan is not the end of the story. Our slavery to sin, our slavery to a wicked devil is not the end of the story. Those two words in Ephesians 2:4 is why we can get up in the morning, it's why we can come to church on Sunday morning and look forward to judgment with a sense of confidence and peace because someone outside of us has done something on our behalf. Verse 4, "But God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Beloved, none of us came to Christ, none of us found salvation in him until we came to the end of ourselves and realized that we had to cry outside of us, we had to look to God, we had to look to Christ for mercy. And those two sweet precious words "But God" tell us that our slavery to sin and our slavery to Satan is not the end of the story. It tells us that God has intervened on our behalf and if you are here today and you are

in Christ and you are free from sin and you have a sure salvation that belongs to you, it is because God has done something on your behalf, it is not that you've done something for yourself. God has intervened.

Here is hope. What is that hope? What is this salvation? That's the question that we want to answer today: what is salvation? How did it happen? How did it come to pass that we were transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light? How was it that you and I as Christians went from a destiny that had only hell in its future to a destiny that now ends in glory and heavenly light? To answer that question is to answer: what is salvation? Let me give you a definition here. What is salvation? Here's an answer to that question that we'll take and expand on: salvation is the divine deliverance of sinners to a position of righteousness and blessing in this life and the life to come which is accomplished only through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let me say that again if you're taking notes, I'll say it again even if you're not taking notes, how's that? Salvation is the divine deliverance of sinners to a position of righteousness and blessing in this life and the life to come which is accomplished only through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Beloved, above all else: salvation is a deliverance. It is a rescue from that dark position in that dark realm of sin in which we dwelled and because there are supernatural forces, because there is a supernatural blindness that is at work in the lives of the human race and there was a supernatural darkness scales, as it were, that were over our eyes, a supernatural hardness of heart against the things of the gospel, because as men in sin, because as men under the domination of the devil, we were not able to do anything to deliver ourselves from that. We were hopelessly lost and so when we talk about salvation, we realize that it has to be divine, it has to come from God because a slave can't release himself from his own chains and to talk about being delivered from that state into a state of blessing is to realize that we have been delivered. We have been rescued. We have been saved. And so when we talk about salvation here things morning, we are saying that salvation is a divine deliverance of sinners. To state it in more colloquial language we're saying that God has acted to save us.

Now, many have been conditioned to define salvation as the moment in which they believed. They look back at a particular moment in time when they supposedly prayed to receive Christ for their salvation and there is a certain level of merit in seeing salvation from that but oh, beloved, that is a woefully incomplete way of thinking about salvation, to look back at a past moment in time. To understand biblical salvation is to realize that God's work in salvation is so vast, it is so comprehensive, there was such a divine genius of a plan put in place that it links eternity past with eternity future and all points in between. To talk about the divine deliverance that God has done for his people is to realize that there is a comprehensive plan that has been in place that thoroughly transcends any single moment in time that could ever be. I want to help you think about salvation from that perspective. There are a lot of different ways that we could handle this subject but I want to help you this morning to think about salvation in a somewhat chronological sense from the perspective of God. A chronological perspective on salvation to the extent that you can use the word "chronology," a statement of time, to talk about eternity. I think you'll see what I mean.

But we need to think about salvation from the perspective of God and we need to realize that from God's perspective, salvation is something that began, that is rooted in something that he did before time began and that it won't be finished until time ends and carries on into eternity future. Beloved, this is remarkably wonderfully ennobling as we contemplate what God has done for us. This takes us out of the realm of the here-and-now; this takes us out of the realm of what's happening in life today or tomorrow; or what's going to happen in my lifetime. A proper biblical view of salvation lifts our minds into a realm of divine glory, of divine purpose, of divine mercy, of divine love that glorifies God, that glorifies Christ and helps us recognize as Christians that we are on the receiving end of unspeakable, great, magnificent, inexpressible grace and glory and love. From the hand of the God who could have judged us, from the hand of the God who could have righteously delivered the blow of the executioner upon our soul came instead a hand to deliver us of love and grace and mercy that we could never have deserved and now that we've received it, will never be withdrawn from our lives.

I want to give you five aspects of salvation to consider as we talk about the work of God to save sinners and if you're here today, beloved, what we're talking about, what you're getting a front row seat on is the work of God to save your soul and what should happen in your heart as you're listening to these points from

Scripture which we'll cover all too briefly, what should happen in your heart, the way that you should be processing what we're about to see is a sense that this is so magnificent and it should be so humbling to realize what God has done to secure the eternal well-being of your soul. You cannot look at these things as a Christian without being lost in wonder, love and praise. You can't look at these things as a Christian without magnifying the God of your salvation and saying with the more contemporary song, who am I that the God of all the earth should look upon my soul like this, with this level of favor?

Five aspects beginning in eternity past and going forward to eternity future. There hasn't been a time, there hasn't been a moment in the divine unfolding of history where God was not working out all of providence, all of history, to secure your salvation by name. That is how great the grace is that's been bestowed upon us as believers. It's my privilege to be able to share that with you from Scripture this morning. When we teach the Bible either in a formal setting like this or just as individuals sharing Christ with those around us, don't you see that it's a privilege to have received this kind of grace? But then to be further privileged to be able to speak it, to declare it, to be bearers of good news to a lost world around us? Lost in wonder, glory and praise, our Father. Lost in the magnitude of what has been given to us.

First of all, first point, 1. What is salvation? To understand it we've got to understand point 1. God's work in eternity past. God's work in eternity past and we're going to cover these points all too quickly. I want to acknowledge up front that every point that we'll spend 5-10 minutes on would more properly be the subject of at least a full message on their own if not a series of messages and so we're just trying to look at the broad sweep. I want you to see, as it were, standing on a mountaintop and looking out at an entire mountain range and just trying to look at the sweep of it rather than focusing in on one particular detail as right and worthy as that would be. I want you to walk away this morning with just a sense of the divine sweep of salvation, the magnitude of the plan of God, the work of God. That's what we're going to do.

First of all, God's work in eternity past. The Bible clearly teaches that God sovereignly chose those people whom he would save before he even created the world. Before time began, God has already settled in the counsels of the Godhead, he had settled the certainty of your salvation. Look at Ephesians 1. You're in Ephesians. We'll stay mostly in the book of Ephesians here this morning. Ephesians 1:3. The Apostle Paul as he starts this letter, starts it on a note of praise. He says in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Stop right there. Right there, beloved, frames the entire way that you should be thinking about everything that we're going to talk about here today. As we are explaining and unfolding from Scripture the reality of God's work for your salvation, your mindset should be one of praise and glory and honor to God ascribing gratitude and thanks and worth and worship to him. "Blessed be God." That is the entirety of the spirit in which we look at these things together here today. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Everything that Paul says in Ephesians is framed by an attitude of praise. We are not embarking on a purely academic exercise here this morning. We're not simply trying to gather information. We are looking at what a holy and righteous and loving and merciful God has done on behalf of his people and we, as his people, look at this and respond, "O God, blessed be your holy name."

God's work in eternity past. Verse 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, just as He chose us in Him," when? "Before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He settled the certainty of your salvation before Genesis 1:1. There was never a moment in the unfolding of human time where there was any doubt about the certainty of your salvation if you're in Christ. It was guaranteed to be accomplished because God out of his free sovereign grace, determined that he would save you before time began. Everything after that, in a sense, was just an outworking of the inevitable. It was inevitable. When I was born, it was already inevitable. If you're a Christian, before you were born, it was inevitable. It was predetermined that God was going to so work in your life and heart that he would bring you to the salvation that he determined to happen before the foundation of the world. This is the scriptural doctrine of election. God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals by name to receive salvation.

When we contemplate salvation, beloved, we understand that Scripture teaches us that salvation is ultimately rooted in the free choice of God apart from any merit of man. Before you were born, before you had done anything good or bad, God had chosen you for salvation which tells you that salvation is about

the purposes of God, not about the merit of man. God had his purposes before time began and even though you and I were unworthy, as Christians now we can look back and say he chose us to be a part of his eternal redemptive plan and it couldn't have been about my merit. I didn't bring any merit to the table. It couldn't have been about my merit because it was before time began. This is all about the work of God, the choice of God. This is what God wanted to happen. Fellow believer in Christ, God before time began determined he wanted to have ultimate mercy on you.

And throughout the whole sweep of his governance of the universe, throughout the whole sweep of human time, in his omnipotent, omniscient mind which sees the end from the beginning, there was never a moment in time where he lost sight of you because he had already chosen you by name. We are on the receiving end of eternal grace of such a great magnitude that words can't properly describe it and we'll spend all of eternity returning praise to God for that original choice that he made and eternity won't be long enough to say thank you. Eternity won't be long enough to give the proper thanks that he deserves. God did a work in his own electing choice in eternity past and that was the originating source of your salvation.

Secondly, we're just going to kind of step through time here this morning. We stepped back before eternity began and now we step forward into time and we're going to look at it this way: God's work 2,000 years ago. That's point 2. God's work 2,000 years ago. God had chosen us for salvation but sin stood in the way. The fact is, as the race had fallen and judgment was required and how could God bestow that grace upon people who had to be judged? Sin had to be addressed. How could that ever happen? How can that tension of God's purposes be reconciled with the condemnation that our sin deserved? How could that dilemma be resolved? Beloved, God had to take the initiative. It had to be something that God could work to resolve because we couldn't do it on our own. God had to take the initiative and do you know what? He did. Praise be to his marvelous name, he did.

Luke 19:10. So many statements of the purposes that we could look at but we'll just look at Luke 19:10. I'm actually not even going to turn there. I hear your pages rustling. Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man," Jesus speaking, describing himself says, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." 2,000 years ago, roughly speaking, Jesus Christ came from heaven into earth, took on human flesh. Why? To seek and to save that which was lost. There's your statement of mercy. There's your statement of God's saving intentions. In Mark 10:45, Christ again speaking of himself said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." 2,000 years ago, before generations of your ancestors were even thought about, Christ appeared. Christ came to earth and he came on a saving mission. He came with the intention to do what was necessary to execute the plan of God determined before the foundation of the world and Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, lived a sinless life, died as a criminal on the Roman cross for the sake of securing your salvation 2,000 years before you were born.

In Ephesians, the Bible interprets the significance of the cross of Christ for us. Look at Ephesians 1:7 says that "In Him," that is in Christ, "we have redemption through His blood." Where was that blood shed? At Calvary. When was it shed? 2,000 years ago as we stand here today. We have redemption, the price of salvation was paid through his blood. Verse 7, "the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." God did a work at Calvary. God did a work through the sinless life of our Lord Jesus Christ and in his life, in his death and in his resurrection, the price was paid 2,000 years ago. This was a work of God, not a work of man. And the resurrection of Christ stamped the divine approval upon Christ, upon his work, and it established his authority to bring salvation to his people.

Look at verse 18 of chapter 1 of Ephesians. Paul is praying now for his readers and he says, "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, 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 which," watch this, "He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 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." The resurrection of Christ established the divine approval of his work. It showed that Christ had the power to deliver his people, that Christ had the authority to bring salvation to his people. The resurrection showed that the price of our salvation had been fully paid and accepted and received 2,000 years ago. A work of God.

And so Christ stepped into time, took on human flesh. These are such magnificent holy themes of which we speak. The eternal Son of God stepped into time, taking on human flesh, with the express intention of going to the cross to voluntarily lay down his life as a sacrifice which would turn away the wrath of God from your sin and mine. He did that. He shed his blood for our redemption. He was put in a tomb and God raised him from the dead and now he has ascended on high where he rules and prevails over all at the right hand of God. What is salvation? It's a divine deliverance. How as it effected? How did this come into being? God chose us before the foundation of the world knowing that our sin would one day need to be paid. Christ 2,000 years ago stepped in and by the magnificent holiness and glory of his own perfect life shed his blood so that your sins could be paid for. This was a work of God.

So, beloved, as you're seeing this unfold, as we're looking at the broad sweep of salvation, understand that there has been an unfolding, a progress of history, from the very beginning of time where God was most certainly fulfilling his intentions to save his people and by his grace, by his goodness, by undeserved favor upon you and me, he included us in that plan. He didn't include everybody. From equally undeserving people, he chose to save some and to give them favor and if you're here today as a Christian, he had favor on you that he didn't show to everybody else. As you and I are walking through life, stepping through life and just doing our thing going on with our lives pretty preoccupied by what we see all around us, we're living out our lives against the backdrop of the certain unfolding of a plan of God that included his intention to rescue you, to deliver you from sin and to make certain that you would one day end up with him in heaven forever. No aspect of history was outside his control and in the end incalculable complexity of the outworking of his providence, somehow for reasons known only to God, he looked on you and me by name and said, "I'll include them with favor and I'll never lose sight of them in the process. Nothing in the whole course and sweep of history will hinder my intention," God says, "to save you ultimately in the end," if you belong to Christ.

The whole force of history could have been arrayed against you and me and it would have failed. The whole design of Satan to thwart the ultimate outcome of our salvation. Satan himself could not thwart the plan of God to save his people from their sins. So, at whatever realm or perspective at which you want to look at this, we see that God has done a mighty divine work, a powerful work, to deliver us from our sin. It wasn't happenstance. It wasn't an accident. It wasn't by our wisdom that we came to Christ. This is what God had been working out all along. And when you were born, unbeknownst to you, unbeknownst to your parents, when you were born God had already made the provision to secure the eternal well-being of your soul. Lost in wonder, love and praise. His perfect salvation is wonderful love, I'll shout with the millions on high. You'd better believe we'll be shouting in heaven. You'd better believe that there won't be enough volume to our voice to magnify God, to magnify the Son, to magnify the Spirit for this kind of greatness of salvation. What is the divine plan? What is the divine mind? What is the divine love and mercy that he's shown to us, that he has so perfectly secured, that he was working it out thousands of years ago in time, that he had determined it before time began? Do you realize? Do you realize? Do you have a sense of the magnitude of grace and mercy that's been showered upon us?

You see, it had to be God's work because you weren't there before eternity began to influence his decision. It had to be God's work because you weren't there counseling Christ on whether he should go to the cross or not. You weren't there that Christ would look on you and have that influence his decision. This was all outside the realm of the time of your life. All outside the realm of your conscious existence. God was already doing this. When we were born into this life, we were born into a flow of history that God had determined to use to bestow blessing upon us. You see that these are the things that are disclosed to us in the gospel, disclosed to us in Scripture. They are so great. They are so glorious. They are so precious that it makes us step back and appreciate with a greater depth the sheer greatness of what's been given to us. This is incalculable. This transcends anything good or bad that could happen to us in life. This makes earthly prosperity and well-being or earthly poverty and suffering pale in comparison. There is nothing, beloved, there is nothing to compare to the greatness of this. Everything else is trivial by comparison. We have been brought into a divine realm of purpose and love and grace that words can't really describe. We've received a priceless gift and we love him for it.

Thirdly, there did come a point where this had to be made real in your own life. We weren't born into salvation, we had to be converted. We were born into sin. In time, we came out of our mother's womb as sinners. Well, something had to happen. God had to do another work. There was a different aspect of work and it brings us to point 3. We've talked about God's work in eternity past. We go forward and we see God's work 2,000 years ago in the life and death and resurrection of Christ. Now we step into time as you know it. We step into the realm of your life as a Christian and we're going to look at point 3: God's work in your conversion. God's work in your conversion. There came a point where you repented and put your faith in Christ. There came a point where God worked in your heart and you personally turned from sin and put your faith in Christ. That was a work of God. It was a multifaceted, perfect, unblemished diamond of a work that God did to secure the salvation of your soul in time, in your life, in your heart.

What was God's work in your conversion? We're now talking about what has happened in time in your life if you're a Christian. What happened then? The Bible describes many things that happened at the moment of your conversion and we're just going to touch on them. First of all, God's work in your conversion. First of all, he did a work of regeneration. He did a work of regeneration. You, as we saw earlier from Ephesians 2, you were dead in sin. In order for you to be converted, in order for you to be given salvation, regeneration had to take place by which we mean God imparted new spiritual life to you. God imparted new life to you. Look at Ephesians 2 again. This makes it so plain. When you just pay attention to who's the subject of the sentence, what the verb is and who is the direct object. Who did this? Who received it? And what was done? This is describing God's work of regeneration in our conversion. Look at Ephesians 2:4, Paul had just said we're dead in sin, dominated by the devil and doomed to suffer the wrath of God and in that condition of your soul, verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us," you see this is rooted in a benevolent attitude of God toward his people, mercy, love, verse 5, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, God made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

You were dead in sin and God came and made you alive in Christ. God imparted a spiritual life from outside of you and imparted life to you so that you would be converted. God as part of his great work. It wasn't simply an abstract mathematical accounting exercise that he did before time began. It wasn't simply an historical fact of the death and resurrection of Christ. Oh, beloved, we're talking about the things upon which the well-being of your soul and your eternal destiny hinge. This is kind of important. In time, in your life, God acted on your heart with love, grace and mercy and imparted new spiritual life to you where before there had been death. Through the proclamation of the gospel, through the word of God, somehow the Spirit of God turned your heart so that that which you had once rejected now became that which you received. God imparted new life to you. He made us alive together with Christ.

Secondly, something else, another aspect of God's work in your conversion. First of all, we said regeneration, secondly, we can describe it this way as faith and repentance. Faith and repentance. The Bible commands us to repent and believe in Christ. All men everywhere are under an obligation, are under the command of the gospel to repent, to turn from sin and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Mark 16, "repent and believe in the gospel." That's the message of the gospel and it is a command. Man is responsible to believe and yet in that, the Bible says that it's a gift of God to believe. Look at Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Faith is the means by which we receive this grace. We believe in Christ; that is the way that we receive the gift. And yet, even though it's a command elsewhere in Scripture, we see that continuing on, "you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves." The whole saving complex of faith, the whole act of salvation, the whole act of faith, is not something that came from you, it is the gift of God. It is something that God gave to you as part of his work in your life to bring that to pass in your heart. Verse 9, "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." In 2 Timothy 2, it speaks of those who are unsaved and says "perhaps God may grant to them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." We stand here as believing, repentant people. We have that belief and repentance as something we received as a gift from God. That's the testimony of Scripture. God so worked in our hearts that we willingly believed and repented of our sins so that we could receive Christ.

So, what was God's work in conversion? Regeneration, faith and repentance. Thirdly, the whole issue of guilt had to be dealt with and he dealt with that in the gift of justification. Justification. God declares us righteous in salvation based on the righteousness of Christ. The perfect merit, the perfect obedience of

Christ is credited to your account; it is imputed to you. God treats you as though you had lived the perfect life of Christ and now deals with your soul on the basis of that perfect righteousness. Your legal status has been changed from guilty to righteous. Not merely not guilty, God has given you such a perfect gift that he now declares us righteous based on the perfect righteousness of Christ; that perfect righteousness of Christ has been credited to your account.

Look at 2 Corinthians 5:21 for this. We'll stay in 2 Corinthians for a moment, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." A divine exchange. The sin that was on your account had been transferred over to Christ where it was punished in full. The perfect righteousness of Christ to which you had no claim, freely, graciously credited to your account; imputed to you. God's work in your conversion included a complete acquittal of all of your sins and a gift of declared righteousness that you never could have earned. If you wonder how God looks on you, he looks on you in Christ. His law no longer condemns us because Christ met all the demands of the law on our behalf and God gave it to us.

Regeneration, faith and repentance, justified, all in that moment of the saving act of God and that's not all. Even in that moment of conversion, there is another aspect of it: you were made a new creation. You were made a new creation. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:17. From your guilt and darkness to forgiveness and light; from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." When you were born-again, the old you died. You were made someone new in Christ. Not made in perfection, that's still awaits us but you were given a new nature whereas before you had been resistant and stubborn toward the things of God, now you are soft and tender and willing to receive and be instructed by them. Where before you cursed the name of Christ, where before you gloried in sin, now you love Christ, you praise his name and you pursue holiness instead of sin. That is the mark of the new creation. That is the mark of the fact that God has made you new. It was part of the work that God did in your life at your conversion.

Finally for what we're going to say this morning, you were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. You were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Go back to Ephesians 1. God gave his Spirit to us in this work of conversion, in this work of salvation that occurred at a moment, at some point prior in your life if you're here as a Christian. 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 promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." You were sealed in the Holy Spirit. God gave his Spirit to every true believer. There is no such thing as a Christian who does not have the Holy Spirit. God in the perfection of his grace, gives his Spirit to indwell us, to seal us, and that acts as the pledge. It is a down payment for the certain ultimate outcome of our final deliverance in heaven.

This is God's work at the moment of your conversion: regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, a new creation, the indwelling of the Spirit (snap) just like that at the moment of your salvation. And I'm leaving out a whole bunch more just for the sake of time. When you think about your conversion, when you think about being a Christian, beloved, you need to think about it with a sense of awe, a sense of reverence, a sense of magnitude, recognizing that your conversion was a radical change in you. It wasn't a simple walk down an aisle and then you walked away and everything was the same. No, when a man comes to Christ, when a man comes to the cross of Christ, he dies. The old man passes away and a new man walks away never to go back again. That has to be the power of God because our efforts to change ourselves are always futile and end in failure. How many of you are keeping your New Year's resolutions from just eight weeks ago? You haven't kept eight weeks of New Year's resolution. You can't change yourself. We're miserably powerless and so if a perfect salvation has come to us, if there is an enduring spiritual power in your life that flows from your conversion, you can know that it had to be a work of God because you couldn't have done it on your own. The best and the most self-disciplined people can only take it so far and it's like running on the beach and trying to jump over the Pacific Ocean, you just can't. So if we're changed, it's a result of the power of God.

Someone might ask, "Can so much really change in a moment? Can you go from darkness to light? From Satan to the Savior? Can all of that change in just a moment?" Well, there's a faint analogy that we're all

familiar with in life that gives us a sense that, yes, many, many things can change in a moment. You've all been to weddings and there's that moment that the service is leading up to where a man and a woman with separate lives are standing there before the officiating pastor, he with his name, she with hers, and their separate lives. They've gone through the vows and there comes that point where the minister says, "I now pronounce you man and wife." In that moment, everything is changed: name changes, tax status changes, the future of life together changes. Two become one in a moment. In a faint, faint way we see that a moment can change everything on a human level. In a much, much greater way at the moment of your conversion, so many things happened, so many things changed inside you: your legal status, your destiny, as it were. You went from the realm in which you lived and all of it changed in that moment of your conversion. The magnitude of that, the magnitude of what Scripture describes all has to be a result, a manifestation of the work and power of God because no man could do that on his own. God brought the power of his omnipotence to bear on your soul and he changed everything in a moment.

That was God's work in your conversion. God's work before eternity began. God's work 2,000 years ago. God's work at your conversion, at some point in the past. Some of you maybe a few months, some of you a few decades but there was that moment in the past at your conversion. Let's look at fourthly now, God's work in the present. God's work in the present. We'll stay here just for a moment. Your salvation was perfect and secured at the moment of your conversion and yet there is more to it than that. Salvation, your conversion, began a process of change known as sanctification. Sanctification is a work of God in which the believer is brought closer to the likeness of Christ in his daily life. God commands this from us. 2 Peter 3:18 says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," and so we're under a responsibility to pursue this change and yet God is working in us to make sure that that change is fulfilled.

Look over to Philippians 2:12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling," here it is, verse 13, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." We're commanded to pursue sanctification and yet Scripture alongside that says God is working to make sure that his purposes are accomplished. It's a work of God so we can say right now, right as we sit here today, right at this moment, God is at work in the lives of his redeemed. He's continually working out his purposes in our salvation.

Go back to Ephesians 2:10 and you see again, you see Scripture describing us as the objects of God's work. Verse 10, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." God ordained the circumstances of your life to be the stage upon which you would live out his saving purposes in your life. Every stage a different one for every believer but God prepared the steps so that we would walk in them. It's an unfolding day by day of the work of God in your life. That's the greatness of salvation. Before time began, at the cross, at your conversion and at every moment from your conversion up until your life comes to an end, God is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure. There is so much divine power at work in our lives. There are such magnificent divine purposes being unfolded. There is such love and grace and mercy and tenderness of Christ toward his sheep in our salvation. Remember, if you want to think, to classify, a reference point for the compassion of Christ, remember in weeping over Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I wanted to gather you up like a hen gathers her chicks," well, beloved, it was with that sort of compassion that he gathered us to himself, that he took a rebel like me, a rebel like you, and brought us to himself to show mercy and love untold upon us.

Lost in love and wonder and praise. What is salvation? It is a divine deliverance. It is a divine deliverance of sinners from sin to a realm of righteousness. Not only in this life, but point 5: the life to come. God's work in eternity future. We're far too focused on this life, this here-and-now. We focus on the wisp of smoke as opposed to the permanent halls of glory that await us. God's work in eternity future. The fullness of salvation is not realized until this life is over. You and I as believers in Christ have a dwelling place in heaven reserved for us. Look at 1 Peter 1. Paul was praising God, talking about salvation. Peter does the exact same thing. 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again," there is your conversion, "to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." This perfection salvation culminates in greater glory than

we could possibly conceive. God in the ultimate final fulfillment of his purposes from eternity past is going to bring you and me into heaven, a place reserved for us which can never be taken away and that is the ultimate outcome of your salvation and mine. We end up in glory with Christ, perfected forever and ever and ever in a realm which will never fade away. God will perfect us spiritually and give us a glorified body. We will be like Christ. We will live with him forever. Look at verse 4 with me again, 1 Peter 1:4, this is the purpose, beloved, this is the outcome that God has in store for you and me, an inheritance, that which we own but haven't yet possessed, "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." In verse 5, Peter flashes back to look at the here-and-now. You see another aspect of God's work in the present, "reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

We were on the receiving end of God's choice. We were on the receiving end of the work of Christ 2,000 years ago. We were on the receiving end of the work of the Spirit in our hearts in conversion. We are on the receiving end of the work and the power and the protection of God here-and-now, right as we stand here. The perfection of this salvation is sure to come and we're being protected in this little interim time until we receive it. Beloved, beloved, beloved, from beginning to end, from before time began until after time is over, that is the realm, the sphere of God's salvation for us. That is what God has done. What is salvation? It is an unspeakably, great, eternal work of God to deliver us from sin so that we might be given to Christ as objects of the Father's affection, a people given over to Christ who will love him and glorify him throughout all the halls of eternity.

What can you say to these things? You were utterly lost in sin. Now you should be utterly lost in a different way. Utterly lost in worship. Utterly lost in wonder. Utterly lost in praising the God who has done all of this for you. This astonishing salvation gives us a window into the gracious merciful character of God toward his people and we worship him for his majesty and we worship him for the tender grace and mercy that he's shown to us and we worship him for securing it despite our ongoing unworthiness of it here today. Even in your unworthiness of this past week, God has not relented or turned away from his eternal purposes for you in Christ. We have no words to describe the greatness of this but the least that we can do is thank him and hand ourselves over to the service and love and worship of Christ as long as he gives us breath and then when we draw that last breath here on earth, we'll take our next breath in heaven and we will see the fulfillment of it all and that is going to be one great day.

Let's pray together.

To you who are still in our sins, why would you perish? How can you escape if you neglect so great a salvation as this? Won't you repent and come to Christ now for salvation in response to his call? He said, "The one who comes to me, I will certainly not cast out." He promises this salvation, the greatness of this salvation, to everyone who will believe in him. Why not make this the day of your salvation? Make this the day that you break from sin? Make this the day that you hand yourself over to this wonderful, merciful Savior?

Father, we thank you for such a great salvation as this. We thank you for your grace which has been bestowed upon us before time began and which will never end. Thank you for your grace now. Thank you for the even greater manifestation of that grace that is yet to come when we are with you and the fullness of your purposes in our salvation are finally achieved. We pray these things in the name of Christ. Amen.