

A SIMPLE SALVATION MESSAGE

Today I bring to you what I am calling “a simple salvation message.”

It is possible that you may be disappointed with my announced theme. Some people expect preachers to be always bringing something new instead of rehearsing the well-known old truths of the Christian faith, but as Peter wrote, “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth” (2 Pet 1.12).

Some may be disappointed not because of familiarity with what I would preach, but because of its simplicity. I aim to be so simple this morning that even six-year-olds will get the main points. Sometimes Jesus taught like that.

My simple salvation message has a simple outline of three points: 1) We all must be saved. 2) Jesus Christ is the Savior we all need. 3) Christ is yours if you will have Him. My primary Bible text is Acts 4.12 which says,

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

We All Must Be Saved

First, then, note that this inspired text of Holy Scripture says, “We must be saved.” That applies to everybody. We all must be saved.

By “saved” I mean rescued from danger and eternal harm—yes, even damnation and hellfire forever. Another way of putting it is that we are all lost, that is, until we are saved. When the Bible talks about being saved and lost, it has to do with the greatest deliverance and the greatest suffering there is. I know that a message like this is despised, and that people will think I am stupid to believe and preach such things. By the grace of God, I am willing to bear their scorn. All the godly preachers from the beginning of the world have said things like this, and all have been so ridiculed, including our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, I am His spokesman to you today. He has sent me here and now to preach these things.

First, God is. “God” is not a religious idea for religious people. He is the eternal I AM, the Creator of all things and people including you, and deep down every one of you knows this. God really exists whether you say you believe in Him or not. Atheists are not excused; rather, they have no excuse for their wicked unbelief. Agnostics are guilty in their skepticism.

Second, God made you and has a right to all that you are and have for His glory. He requires *righteousness* from you, that is, conformity to His will inside and out. We have a summary of His moral standards in the Ten Commandments, which most people don’t even know—much less try to keep. Do you know them? I am not asking if you can recite them perfectly, but only if you can tell me what they are, even in your own words. Stop for a moment now and see if you can call them to mind—all ten of them. Surveys show that most people cannot name more than a couple. They are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Here is a quick refresher:

- 1) You must not have any other gods. You must not love or fear or trust anyone or anything more than God, the God of the Bible. Knowing Him intimately and pleasing Him well must constantly be your number one priority, period.
- 2) You must not worship this true and living God using idol statues or any other way than His way appointed in the Bible.
- 3) You must not take the Lord's name in vain. This condemns any irreverent speech.
- 4) You must observe the Sabbath day every week in a religious way. Since Christ came, that has been the first day of the week known as Sunday, the Lord's Day.
- 5) You must honor your parents, which means obedience when you're a kid and showing them deep love and respect when you're older.
- 6) You must not kill. That condemns not only murder but also malice in the heart. When Jesus interpreted this commandment, He made it very broad and deep so that it condemns us all as sinners. "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt 5.22). Positively, it requires us to live in such a way that we promote human life, both our own and others'.
- 7) You must not commit adultery. This requires everyone to be sexually chaste. For single people that means no sexual activity at all, not even in your mind. For the married, that means complete fidelity to your spouse (of opposite gender from you, I might add), including in your thoughts. Jesus said even to look at another woman in a lustful way is a violation of this commandment (Matt 5.28).
- 8) You must not steal. That means that if you are able, you must work to support yourself and give to the worthy poor as you have means and opportunity.
- 9) You must not lie. Positively, you must practice speaking the truth in love if and when you speak at all.
- 10) You must not covet. Covetousness is a desire for things forbidden by Scripture or even an excessive desire for legitimate things (e.g., gluttony and materialism). This implies that it is our duty to be always content with such things as God provides. Symptoms of covetousness include hoarding, stinginess, worrying about the necessities of life, and neglecting the needs of your eternal soul.

Jesus summarized this moral standard even further. He said it means we must love God with our whole being, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Someone said to me lately that this goes beyond "liking" God and your neighbor. True love to God is worshipping Him in perfect obedience. True love to neighbor is doing everything you can toward their blessing.

Third. So, how do you measure up by this standard? Don't tell me; I already know. Like me, you are exposed as a sinner. You see, according to the Bible, you begin this life as a sinner by nature, and inevitably, you commit many and serious actual sins throughout your whole life, even until the very day you will die.

So we have heard three very simple, basic truths. First, God is. Second, God holds us accountable for righteousness by His definition. And third, we fail to measure up to His reasonable and righteous standard. We are all sinners by nature and by deed.

Now moving on, there is a **fourth** thing I need to say to you here, if I would be faithful to tell you the simple truth related to salvation. It is this: God evaluates you moment-by-moment with respect to your heart and conduct. You are accountable to Him, and you will give an account to Him on Judgment Day for everything. Romans 14.12 says plainly, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” Another passage says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5.10).

To draw this first major point to a close, namely, that we all need to be saved, let me mention one more thing, the **fifth**, and something that is almost unheard of today and very unpopular. It is this: “Because of these things [i.e., our violations of the Ten Commandments] the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5.6). Yes, we need to be saved from our own depravity, because as Jesus said, whoever practices sin is a slave of sin (John 8.34). And we need to be saved from self-inflicted wounds, because the Bible says, “the way of transgressors is hard” (Prov 13.15). But more than anything else, *we need to be saved from God* and His just wrath burning against us on account of our sins which He, the ineffably holy God, finds so disgusting and worthy of punishment.

Many people have a nagging sense of guilt and yet maintain their sanity by convincing themselves that God is really just nice after all and He does not mind it very much if we live in sin. In their view He is not only loving, but He is all love and nothing else. He is not only merciful, but mercy is all there is to His character, and He will not judge or punish anybody, ever, unless it is only a few of the very worst examples of humanity—coincidentally, the ones we despise, but not us. If you think of God that way, you are worshiping an idol of your own mind, and not the God of the Bible. Scripture says, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10.31). There really is a hell of conscious torment for sinners in the afterlife, and you are going there unless God saves you. I have been reading this Bible cover-to-cover for decades, and very much of it is about God’s holiness and His hatred for sin and sinners. Anyone who has read it through knows that very well. Anyone who doesn’t know about God’s wrath and the reality of hell torments is more ignorant than the most unlettered but faithful gospel preacher.

I hope you understand and are convinced that we all need to be saved. But if that were all I had to tell you, it would be better that I had not even begun in the first place, because at least then you might have been more comfortable not knowing. Ignorance is bliss, at least for this brief life. Thank God, there is more! There is wonderful, glorious, good news to tell, and it is good news of a specific Person and His work to save sinners like you and me.

Jesus Christ Is the Savior We All Need

Remember our main text, Acts 4.12: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Here is a good paraphrase of the same verse: “Jesus is the only One who can save people. No one else in the world is able to save us.”

This is a wonderful announcement of the Christian gospel, and it is at the same time both exclusive and inclusive. It is saying that Jesus Christ is the only Savior there is, and that is exclusive, but it is inclusive because it is saying that Jesus Christ is the Savior we preach for

everybody in the world, not just for Jews, but for Gentiles, not just for Christians, but for non-Christians, not just for the most evil people in the world, but for garden-variety sinners like you.

Like it or not, the Christian message is narrow in one sense. It insists that there is only one way for sinners to be forgiven our sins, liberated from our addictions, and ushered into lasting joy and happiness in fellowship with God, and that way is through Jesus Christ alone. Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14.6). There is just no getting around that without calling Jesus a liar. Buddha cannot save you. Muhammad cannot save you or anyone else. The Virgin Mary cannot save you. I cannot save you.

Maybe the most important thing you need to realize, though, if you realize that you are a sinner by nature and by choice, and that you are lost and you need to be saved, is this: *YOU* cannot save you.

Here is what I mean. You are totally unable to be a god and savior to yourself. You cannot will yourself into a life of true and lasting blessedness. You cannot just decide not to sin anymore and then begin keeping the Ten Commandments perfectly. And you certainly cannot appease God's wrath by anything you can do or suffer. Even if you could live righteously from this day forward, it would not make up for your countless sins and mountainous guilt because you would only have just begun to do your duty, and nothing more. Whatever you have suffered or could suffer in this life would be less than your sins deserved, a drop in the bucket compared to the deluge of God's wrath that is coming toward you in the afterlife.

There are two good reasons for believing that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. First, He is absolutely unique in His person. Second, no one else has done what He has done to save sinners.

First, the Bible reveals to us who Jesus Christ really is, and He is totally in a class by Himself. There is no serious doubt among well-educated people that a very special man named Jesus of Nazareth lived in first-century Israel and that the biblical gospels point us to that person who has changed the world more than anyone else. The historical Jesus is just as real as Julius Caesar.

The controversy really comes in about the matter of Jesus' true identity, but the Bible plainly speaks to that issue. Jesus was not merely a wisdom teacher, nor some kind of political revolutionary. According to Scripture and the historic testimony of the Church over 2000 years, Jesus Christ is God Incarnate, God in the flesh, the only one in the history of the world who is truly God and truly man in one, indivisible Person. "There is no other name" like this besides the name of Jesus Christ.

Second, Scripture celebrates the unique saving work of Jesus. Throughout human history many charismatic leaders have stirred up many desperate people to hope for a new day of peace and prosperity. Oh the promises they have made to their followers! Some of these leaders have been good people who did some good, but even the best of them died, and that was that. The more infamous ones spewed doctrines of demons, and in some cases, they led multitudes to violence and millions were killed as a result.

But only Jesus could stand publicly and challenge His opponents, "Which of you can convict me of a single sin?" (John 8.46), and you could hear a pin drop. Only Jesus has

preached and lived out what is generally admitted to be the highest moral standard ever known, so lofty that even non-Christians freely admit that if we all embraced it, the world would be a much better place. Only Jesus claimed to be the Messiah-Savior during His lifetime and proved His divine authority by performing countless public miracles, miracles which even His enemies could not deny actually happened, so that they felt they had to resort to the most unbelievable claim that Jesus was raising the dead and healing the blind by the power of the devil! Only Jesus fulfilled very many Old Testament prophecies predicting a great Savior was coming into the world. Jesus fulfilled them to a T in many ways. For instance, the prophets said that He would be born in Bethlehem to a virgin by a miraculous conception, and that He would come up out of Egypt which happened after Joseph and Mary hid there a while for family safety, and that He would preach salvation in the regions around Galilee of the Gentiles up north of Israel.

But all this is secondary compared to the main thing Jesus did to save sinners. At the end of His righteous life on earth, He voluntarily gave Himself up to be unjustly condemned and sentenced to execution by crucifixion on a cross. And the Bible teaches that when Jesus died on the cross, He was suffering for the sins of others in their place. This is what it means when it says that God the Father loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3.16), and when it says that Jesus “was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53.5, 6). Both God the Father and God the Son are holy and righteous, and both are love itself. The Father punished Christ in wrath for sins of the wicked people He represented, and the Father punished Christ in love for the salvation of those same sinners. Likewise, Christ was willing to endure the penalty from His zeal for God’s honor and hatred of the sins that had dishonored Him, and Christ was willing to die on account of His love toward the sinners He intended to save.

Of course many other people besides Jesus were crucified in those days, but none of them rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs to His disciples before He ascended into heaven in their sight, and that is where He lives today.

Absolutely no one else has credentials like this for a claim to save people from their sins and from God’s wrath. I know that you know that I could go on for hours about Jesus Christ, but this has to suffice for my explanation today that Jesus Christ is the Savior we all need.

I have to draw this sermon to a close with my final point, which is,

Christ Is Yours If You Will Have Him

I have shown you that we all need to be saved and that Jesus Christ is the Savior we all need. But just because we all need Christ as Savior, and just because Christ has come and accomplished a great work of salvation—these things are no indication in themselves that we all, who are gathered here today and hearing this sermon, will be saved. With great sadness and concern I admit that some of you are probably lost now, and may be lost forever.

The fact is that Christ did not die to save everyone without exception. That was not His purpose. If it had been, then everyone would certainly have been saved, because Almighty God can and will accomplish all His sovereign will. Scripture insists on this truth. For example, it says

that just as rain and snow come down from heaven and water the earth as God intended, and they do not return there until they fulfill His will, so it is with His Word:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa 55.11).

No, Christ died for a specific people, and not for a mere possibility. The Bible refers to them as God's chosen people, or the elect. These people predestined for salvation are in themselves no better than anyone else, but from the mere pleasure and goodwill of God, He has purposed to bestow on them a gracious salvation to show how superabundant and how good is His mercy and love, for the praise of His own glory.

When many people realize that the Bible actually teaches these things, they get scared. "How can I know if I am one of the elect? What if I am not predestined to salvation?"

While it is right and reasonable for you to be concerned about these things, your anxieties are unwarranted if you will repent of your sins and trust in Christ the Savior. If you will repudiate any hopes of being good enough or doing enough good deeds to deserve forgiveness for your sins, and if you will accept with grief God's verdict against you as a guilty sinner, and hopelessly lost on that account, except He should have mercy on you, and if you will sincerely rely on Christ to save you, because you believe the gospel is true and trustworthy, then you can be assured that right now you are a real Christian, and all your sins have been forgiven once and for all, and that you will also be justified by God's grace alone on Judgment Day!

You see, only the elect are enabled to respond like this, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the good news about Jesus Christ. I can boldly say, without any fear of misleading any of you, that Christ will be your Savior, if you will have Him by faith. Yet He has not chosen to save you because you believe. Rather, you believe because He purposes to save you. The Bible is most clear about that. It says as much in many places. One of my favorites is John 5.24:

[Jesus said:] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (ESV).

I know all this sounds too good to be true, but would not we expect a salvation that comes from the Lord God to exceed all our expectations? Is it not reasonable that when the Lord saves sinners His great holiness and His overwhelming love would be seen at the same time, since salvation is totally His own work? And what more convincing explanation can be given for who Jesus is than what He claimed for Himself? What other significance could there be for His crucifixion than that it was suffered in the place of others who were guilty, and for His resurrection from the dead than that it proved His claims to be the Messiah and the Savior?

My friends, we all need to be saved because our sins have provoked God's wrath. Jesus Christ is the Savior we all need, God's perfect Son, and the only acceptable atoning sacrifice, proven by His resurrection. Finally, this glorious Christ, crucified and risen, beckons you from His throne in heaven to receive Him and to rely on Him for salvation. He will be yours if you will have Him by faith. Here is His call to you in His own words from Matthew's gospel:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt 11.28-30).

Now the question I put to you, which for your own good you should ask yourself in all Judgment Day honesty, is this: Are you saved? I know it sounds simplistic, but it is a fair question nonetheless, and the most important one for you to consider. Are you trusting in Christ alone to be Your Savior? Do you hate your sins and love the Savior? Have you taken Him at His Word that when you are trusting Him your sins are all forgiven once and for all? I promise to continue in prayer for you that you may be saved and know it for sure.

That is my simple salvation message. You must believe in Christ or you will perish. But if you will believe in Christ, you will never perish. Nothing is more certain than that. You have God's Word on it. Now may He supply His Holy Spirit to us all so that our hearts will be alive in faith to His gospel promise of salvation. Amen.