

Title: **WHAT DOES IT TAKE**
FOR GOD TO SAVE A SINNER?

Text: 1 Peter 4:18

Reading: *Job 9:1-10:22 or Matthew 19:16-26*

Subject: *Salvation*

Introduction:

How can a man be just with God? How can he be clean that is born of woman? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? What does it take for God to save a sinner? These are the questions I want to answer in this message.

Most people seem to think that it is a very easy thing to be saved, that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is very simple. There is no sense of astonishment, awe, and amazement among religious people with regard to salvation, because the salvation they think they have is really no big deal. There is nothing amazing about the grace most people talk about.

Traveling back and forth, up and down this country for the past forty years, I have met a lot of people, most of them have been very religious people. Most of the people I preach to are very sure they are saved. Most of them never disturb themselves by questioning the matter. They have walked down a church aisle, knelt at an “altar”, and said “the sinner’s prayer.”

- Some Because of Tragedy
- Some Because of Fear

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- Some Because of Pressure — Peer Pressure — Emotional Pressure — Psychological Pressure, Etc.

They did what the preacher told them to do. They said “the sinner’s prayer.” They said, “I believe in Jesus.” I know many who had this experience, even as small children. They are confident they are saved, because they followed what is called “the simple plan of salvation.”

Some of you have had that same experience. You profess that you are saved, because you walked that church aisle, said that “sinner’s prayer,” and felt that unexplainable feeling of relief when it was all over. You were talked into a profession of faith by a slick “soul winner;” and you never question the reality of that profession. Perhaps you do sometimes question it; but you suppress those questions, fearing that they are satanic temptations.

Now hear me well. **Salvation is not an easy thing. It is not a simple thing for a sinner to exercise faith in Christ.** In fact, faith in Christ is, with men, an absolute impossibility. Is that not what we read in the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19?

Faith in Christ is the gift and operation of God in us. It is not something conjured up by man’s imaginary free will, or religious excitement. **No one has ever been saved by walking a church aisle, kneeling at an altar, or reciting “the sinner’s prayer.”** If you are still clinging

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to such a profession as the basis of your hope before God, I urge you to give it up. Renounce it at once. It is a satanic delusion.

(Proverbs 14:12) “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.”

(Proverbs 16:25) “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.”

Proposition: My friend, **it is not an easy thing to be saved.**

I know that in this day of mass-evangelism, easy believism, and decisional salvation, the statement I have just made will not be popular, nor will it be quickly received. Some of you may even become angry at hearing it. But hear it you must. It is not an easy thing to be saved. Let’s see if the Word of God will back me up in that statement. It is not an easy thing to be saved.

- Matthew 19:25-26 — The Rich Young Ruler
- Luke 13:24 — “*Strive (agonize) to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*”
- “The gate is so strait that you can’t take anything in as you enter; and the way is so narrow that you

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can't pick anything up along the way.” – (Maurice Montgomery)

If saving faith is no more than saying a prayer, making a decision, walking an aisle, or believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (the historical facts), why did Judas perish? Why was Simon Magus lost? Why did Demas die? Why was Diotrephes destroyed?

True saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is such a rare thing that our Lord himself asked, “**When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?**” (Luke 18:8). **The way of truth and holiness is so plain that wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.** Yet, because of the sin and hardness of our hearts, it is no easy thing for us to enter into that way, and no easy thing for us to continue in the way until we reach our everlasting home in glory.

Now, look at **1 Peter 4:18** — “*If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*”

The word “*scarcely*” is a very poor translation of the text. **Peter is not suggesting** that God's elect barely get into heaven, or that we shall enter into glory with fear, trembling, and hesitancy. **God's saints shall be ushered into heaven in a blaze of glory, triumphant and**

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victorious by his grace! The word “*scarcely*” would better be translated, “*with difficulty.*” Peter’s meaning is this: “If the righteous are saved with great difficulty, what shall become of the ungodly and unbelieving?”

WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR GOD TO SAVE A SINNER? I have nothing new, deep, or profound to say; but what I have to say ought to fill your heart with gratitude, praise, worship, and devotion. Searching the Scriptures, I have found seven things that are absolutely indispensable in the salvation of a sinner.

- **If you would be saved,** give me your attention. Here are seven things which ought to give you hope and encourage you to seek the Lord.
- **If you are one of God’s ransomed ones,** give me your attention. Here are seven things that ought to fill your heart with utter, unceasing amazement, praise, and gratitude before God.

THE WILL OF GOD

The salvation of a sinner requires the will of God, particularly, the sovereign will of God in election and predestination. It takes a work of God’s sovereign, eternal, electing love and predestination (Eph. 1:3-6).

Salvation has to begin with someone’s will, with someone’s choice. The whole world says it begins and

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ends with man's will and man's choice. The Bible declares that it begins and ends with God's will and God's choice. **Election is** God's free, sovereign, eternal choice of his people in Christ unto salvation. **Predestination is** God's wise, gracious, orderly arrangement of all things from eternity, by which he secured the salvation of his elect.

(Ephesians 1:3-6) "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: (4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

The salvation of a sinner requires **blood atonement**. It takes a work of effectual, blood redemption, the satisfaction of divine justice by an infinitely meritorious Substitute – The Lord Jesus Christ (Isa. 40:3-5; Rom. 3:24-26).

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(Isaiah 40:1-5) “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. (2) Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. (3) The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (4) Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: (5) And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.”

Isaiah 40:4 describes great, apparently insurmountable, difficulties which lie in the way of God saving sinners. God could not get to us in mercy and we could not get to him for it, until these great difficulties were removed. The fifth verse tells us that the glory of the Lord is revealed in Christ removing them.

Mercy could never have been exercised toward guilty sinners so long as justice stood like a high mountain between the holy Lord God and us guilty sinners. But our all-glorious Christ, by his obedience and death as our Substitute, by satisfying the righteousness and justice of God for his elect, has leveled that infinitely high mountain.

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(Psalms 85:10) “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other*.”

There stood between us and our holy God the high mountains and hills of our sins, too, reaching up to heaven, calling for wrath. But, blessed be God, our great Savior leveled these as well, casting them into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19). Precious, glorious Savior! He bare our sins in his own body on the tree and bare them away! By his own blood, he put away our sins forever!

That same Lord Jesus Christ, who leveled the mountain of God’s offended justice and the black, high hills of our iniquities, is also the one who, by the revelation of himself, makes the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth. That is to say, when Christ comes in saving grace by the power of his Spirit and reveals the gospel in our hearts, we see things we could not see before. He makes the way plain.

“*Without shedding of blood is no remission.*” **God almighty cannot and will not save anyone, election and predestination notwithstanding, without blood atonement.** There is no other way whereby he can be both “*a just God and a Savior.*” The Son of God came into this world and lived and died as our Substitute

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because there was no other way for God to save his people.

(Romans 3:24-26) “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (25) Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

- God requires righteousness.
- He requires satisfaction.
- Christ alone could give them.

(Galatians 2:21) “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

(Galatians 3:21) “*Is* the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.”

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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The salvation of a sinner requires divine providence. It takes all the work of God's wise, adorable, universal providence (Rom. 8:28-30). Providence is the outworking of divine predestination, the accomplishment in time of that which God purposed in eternity.

(Romans 8:28-39) "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (29) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (30) Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (31) **What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?** (32) He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (33) **Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?** *It is* God that justifieth. (34) **Who is he that condemneth?** *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (35) **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as

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sheep for the slaughter. (37) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 11:33-36) “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (34) For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (35) Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? (36) For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen.”

(Ephesians 1:11-12) “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (12) That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”

What does it take to save a sinner? All things!
Everything that is, has been, and shall hereafter be!

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Nothing in God's universe is excessive, unneeded, redundant or superfluous.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

The salvation of a sinner requires a work of God's irresistible grace. It takes the infallible, irresistible grace and power of God the Holy Spirit in regeneration and effectual calling, by which chosen, redeemed sinners are raised from the dead and given life and faith in Christ (Eph. 1:17-20; Ps. 65:4). — The work of God the Holy Spirit is as necessary to the salvation our souls as election, redemption, and providence.

- **By election and predestination**, we were marked out for grace and the path by which God's saving grace must come into our hearts was fixed.
- **In redemption**, Christ met all the demands of God's law and justice, removed our sins, and opened the way for grace to come.
- **In providence**, God our Savior sovereignly manipulates all the affairs of the universe to bring his elect to the appointed time and place at which he will be gracious to them, and prepares them to be the willing recipients of his grace.
- **In regeneration**, effectual calling, and conversion, God the Holy Spirit performs the work and operation of his grace in our hearts, making chosen, redeemed

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sinners willing in the day of his irresistible power to trust Christ. — “**Ye must be born again!**”

(Psalms 65:4) “Blessed *is the man whom* thou choolest, and causest to approach *unto thee, that* he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, *even* of thy holy temple.”

(Psalms 110:3) “Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.”

How does God cause his chosen to come to Christ?
How does the Lord of Glory make his chosen, redeemed people willing in the day of his power?

- By Holy Spirit conviction!
- By the gift of faith!
- By almighty conversion!
- By omnipotent, irresistible grace!

(Ephesians 1:17-20) “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: (18) The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and **what the riches of the glory of his inheritance** in the saints,

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(19) And **what is the exceeding greatness of his power** to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, (20) Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*.”

Salvation requires faith in Christ, not a free will, work of man, but a mighty operation of grace. You must believe on Christ if you would be saved; but you cannot believe unless you are saved. “*He that believeth on the Son of God HATH everlasting life!*” **Faith in Christ is not the cause of the new birth. It is the result, the fruit, and the evidence of it.**

(Ephesians 2:1-5) “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins: (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)”

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GOSPEL PREACHING

The salvation of a sinner requires, because God has so ordained it, the preaching of the gospel. It takes a man sent from God with the gospel of your salvation (John 1:6-8; Eph. 1:13).

I do not suggest for a moment that God could not save his elect without the instrumentality of gospel preaching. God almighty could regenerate sinners and cause his elect to believe on his Son by the buzzing of a gnat, or without any instrumentality at all, were that his purpose. But I am saying that the instrumentality of gospel preaching is absolutely necessary to the salvation of God's elect "*because it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*" (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21-23; Heb. 4:12; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25).

(John 1:6-8) "There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. (7) The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe. (8) He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light."

(Ephesians 1:13) "In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,"

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Gospel preaching is not an optional additive, but an essential part of God's method of grace. When the appointed time of love comes, when the time comes when a chosen, redeemed sinner must be saved, God will send a gospel preacher to him and send him to a gospel preacher, if he has to turn the world upside down to do it (Isa. 43:1-7).

(Isaiah 43:1-7) “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. (4) Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. (5) Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; (6) I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; (7) *Even* every one that is called by my name: for I have

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created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

Illustrations: *Lydia and The Jailor*
 Publius at Melita (Acts 28)
 The Young Man At Lima
 The Clock
 The Jogger in Australia

DIVINE PRESERVATION

The salvation of a sinner requires the preservation of grace. It takes a work of immutable grace, preserving the called in life and grace, causing them to persevere in faith, keeping them unto the end (Phil. 1:6). — **It takes the same grace to keep us saved as it does to save us.** We are “*kept by the power of God.*” And, blessed be our God, we are promised that we shall be kept forever by the power of his grace. Our Savior says, “*I give unto them **ETERNAL LIFE** and they shall **NEVER PERISH!***”

- Ecclesiastes 3:14
- Malachi 3:6
- Psalm 89:24-37

(Philippians 1:6) “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:”

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(1 Thessalonians 5:23-25) “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*. (25) Brethren, pray for us.”

Hear me now, my brothers, my sisters in Christ. – Though **you are weak**, Christ is strong. Though **you are unstable as water**, God is faithful. Though **you are tempted**, he has made a way of escape for you; and he is the way of escape! Though **you sin**, his blood cleanses us from all sin. He will forgive. Though **you fall**, he will raise you up. Our God declares, “*I will not depart from them.*” Though **we change**, he changes not. Though **our love for him varies greatly**, his love for us never varies. Did you hear what I just told you? — Our God declares, “*I will not depart from them.*”

- Neither in life!
- Nor when we fall!
- Nor when we fall again!
- Nor in trouble!
- Nor in sickness!
- Nor in sorrow!
- Nor in death!

Our God and Savior promises, “*Lo! I am with you alway!*” And he is!

- His presence is constant.

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- His forgiveness is perpetual.
- His faithfulness is unfailing.
- His love is unchanging.
- His grace is immutable.
- His goodness is sure.

“The Lord has promised good to me.
His Word my hope secures.
He will my strength and portion be
As long as life endures.

And when this heart and flesh shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
A life of joy and peace!”

RESURRECTION GLORY

The salvation of a sinner requires the resurrection of the body. It takes a work of resurrection glory, by which these bodies sown in corruption shall put on incorruption, mortality shall put on immortality, and God’s elect shall enter into that eternal state of bliss called “*the glorious liberty of the sons of God*” (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others

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which have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (18) Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

(Romans 8:17-21) “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. (18) For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (20) For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, (21) Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

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(1 Corinthians 15:51-58) “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (53) For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. (54) So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (55) O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? (56) The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. (57) But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (58) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

Illustration: *The Robin’s Eggs*

APPLICATION

Let me say just three things, and I am done.

1. “**Salvation is of the LORD!**”

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(2 Timothy 1:9-10) “Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:”

2. **This salvation, in its entirety, is found in the Lord Jesus Christ alone** (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

(1 Corinthians 1:30-31) “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

Illustration: “*Him!*” – (2 Tim. 2:12)

3. Since this great salvation is by grace alone, in Christ alone, without anything you do, then **there is no reason why you should not be saved**, too. – “*Welcome home, Sister!*”

Amen.

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¹ See Misc. Sermon #1356. Substantially the same message was preached at Danville on Tuesday night (8/24/99), Rescue, CA (6/30/00), Rocky Mount, VA (10/10/99), Rock Creek Baptist Church (8/14/00), Almont, MI (7/27/00) Ross, OH (8/6/01), Sovereign Grace Fellowship, Booneville, NC (8/14/07), Danville (AM 8/19/07), Grace Bible Church, San Leandro, CA 98/24/07)

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