

Sermon – What is salvation all about?

Before we can decide what salvation really is, I guess we need to determine the meaning of the word salvation. A common dictionary description defines salvation as “a source or means of being saved from harm, ruin, or loss”. In the broadest sense, that is a pretty good definition. Salvation is an escape from a set of circumstances that could bring us great harm, ruin or loss.

But since we are in church this morning and listening to a sermon, we probably need to narrow that definition down a bit to let it talk about spiritual circumstances. Therefore, from a Christian’s spiritual perspective we would define salvation as “deliverance from sin and its consequences. As a matter of fact the dictionary lists the opposite, of salvation as damnation. The Bible strongly indicates that this spiritual salvation is brought about by faith in what Christ did on the cross. And the Bible also says that this spiritual salvation is a gift from God and that there is no other way for spiritual salvation to occur.

This begins to be an interesting perspective. I got myself into a set of circumstances that will bring me great “harm, ruin or loss” by doing “stuff” outside of the will of God. Yet this God, that I have offended by doing stuff (sinning), loves me enough, that He arranged a way for me to be saved from the consequences “harm, ruin, loss” or damnation, that I deserve, because of my actions (Sin) against Him.

What a wonderful gift that God has made available to each and every person, if they will just accept it. Why wouldn’t everyone just jump at the chance to accept this salvation gift from God and escape the consequences of sin. Well accepting God’s gift requires a change of priorities in the life of the person accepting it. We have to change from a “Me First” mind set to a “God First” mindset and many are way too selfish to make that change.

I have seen individuals and families that start coming to church and worshipping God and seem to have a true desire to establish a heavenly relationship with the Lord. They ask about making a decision to accept Christ as their savior and soon they walk down the aisle, proclaiming their desire to make a “following Christ” change in their life and are baptized. But then, slowly, their desire to follow His will ebbs, their attendance slows and may finally stop entirely and you wonder, what happened to this commitment they made to serve the Lord.

It’s as if they say, well I’ve got my ticket to Heaven, when Jesus appears in the clouds, I’ll just show Him my ticket and He’ll let me on the bus. Or perhaps I’ve

bought my fire insurance policy so when the fire comes down from heaven to destroy this current earth I'll just hold up my policy and that will keep the fire away.

Well the Bible says God's Salvation gift doesn't work that way. Salvation requires a change in lifestyle and life priorities. It always bothers me when someone asks "You do believe in once saved always saved, don't you? It always makes me think that they are looking for an assurance that if they once bought the ticket or purchased the insurance policy then they are protected no matter what they do after that.

Let's look at some scripture that defines what salvation is all about.

The first time the gospel was preached, by Peter, in Acts 2 there were people in the crowd whom were cut to the heart by what Peter said about them killing their messiah "Jesus" and they cried out "what must we do". If we begin at Acts 2:38. Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." 40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Peter responded with the words "Repent and be Baptized". A new word has entered the picture, REPENT. But it really wasn't new in Peter's sermon. The word repent is used throughout the Bible as a requirement in getting ourselves right with God and bringing about that reversal of attitude that got us into our salvation crisis in the first place.

Sinful man stands as a rebel against God's government and authority. This is why John the Baptist in Mark 4:1 came on the scene preaching, in the wilderness, a message of repentance and baptism, as John paved the way for Jesus to begin His ministry. In Matthew 4:17 Jesus proclaims the same message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" as he began His ministry to the Jews. The Gospel commands every sinner to lay down his arms of rebellion and hoist the white flag of surrender to enter the Kingdom of God. In other words, a sinner has to change his mind about sin.

This is exactly what it means to repent: a change of mind about sin and about God, which results in turning from sin toward God.

The theme of repentance is found throughout the entire Bible and its idea is expressed even when the word itself is not used. In the Old Testament, two Hebrew words, the verbs nacham and shub, are often translated as repent. Nacham means “to be sorry, come to regret something, to repent”.

The Bible describes man’s responsibility in the process of repentance. Such phrases from the Bible include: ‘incline your heart unto the Lord your God’ (Josh 24:23); ‘circumcise yourselves to the Lord’ (Jer 4:4); ‘wash your heart from wickedness’ (Jer 4:14); ‘break up your fallow ground’ (Hos 10:12) and so forth.

Brother Matthew has mentioned several times in recent sermons that God wants us to have a circumcised heart. A circumcised heart is one from which all desire to sin has been cut away and is instead focused on doing the will of God.

The Hebrew word shub combines in itself the two requisites of repentance: to turn from evil and to turn to the good.” It is perhaps illustrated in (Ps 51) more than anywhere else in the Old Testament. So combining the meaning of these two Hebrew words we have the meaning “regret the sins that you have committed and turn from your sinful past seeking to do the will of God.

In Psalm 51 David cries out to the Lord in sorrow for his sin and gives us a good example of repentance..

Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God [51:1] Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. [2] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! [3] For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. [4] Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. And it continues in verse 7 [7] Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. [9] Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. [10] Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. [11] Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. [12] Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. [13] Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. These words of David indicate his desire for repentance.

Even though Jesus on the cross had not yet paid the price for David’s sins, David was appealing to God for exactly what Jesus would do for us all when He died on the cross.

What does repentance include.

To repent is a change of mind about sin and about God, which results in turning from sin to God. And what a turning it is! Repentance affects the whole life of a sinner. Repentance includes a sinner taking the blame for his sinful condition before God and siding with God against himself. A repentant person blames no one else for his condition, but rather condemns himself under God's eternal wrath because he deserves it.

Repentance includes sorrowing for sin. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation."

Repentance leads to confessing sin. Hiding nothing, a sinner owns his sins and pours out his sinful heart to God just like David did. Furthermore, repentance leads to forsaking sin. A repenting sinner determines not to return to it. So in Biblical repentance, a convicted and convinced sinner takes his place before God as justly condemned. He hates his sin, longing to be free from it. He sorrows over sin, determining not to return to it. And he shows that his repentance is real by walking in the pathway of righteousness and true holiness. A repentant sinner will be engaged in, as Matthew 3:8 says: "Bringing forth fruits for repentance" as evidence that a radical change has taken place in their life.

What are fruits of repentance. A desire to serve God – using the gifts and talents that God gave you to bring honor and glory to Him.

I have heard in many sermons, that salvation is a gift from God and no matter what we do we cannot earn salvation. Salvation cannot be earned by works. It is futile to try to earn your salvation by the things that you do. The Bible is very explicit about that. But Salvation does require that you accept God's gift of Salvation and that you open up that gift and let it make radical changes in your life. Those radical changes bring about works or fruits of repentance in the Christians life. You can't earn salvation by what you do but salvation must bring changes in what you do. Too many times I think that concern about people trying to earn their salvation through works totally overshadows the teaching that salvation must bring about works that show a changed life in the saved individual.

My favorite passage on this subject comes from James. In James (ESV) it says:

Faith Without Works Is Dead

[14] What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed

and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

[18] But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works [26] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

This ties right into what we have been talking about using the word repentance. We said that repentance is only true if it brings about a turning from your old way of living into a new Godly way of living. That is exactly the point that James is making. If my Faith in God does not bring with it a changed life where I am using the gifts and talents that God gave me to serve Him, is it real faith at all. James says NO, real faith brings a changed life and one that is devoted to the object of that faith and in this case the object of that faith is God.

But there is another aspect to the works that we do with the gifts and talents that God has given to us. The Bible says that the saved will receive rewards based on the works that they do after salvation.

Revelation 22:12 says 12 says, Jesus speaking, “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. This passage tells us that Christ will reward us when He comes, based on the works we have done or the fruit that we have produced as a result of our salvation.

Paul addresses both sides of these aspects of works. In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul addresses the aspect of works before salvation. “For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not as a result of works so that no one may boast. Paul is verifying that you cannot in any case gain your salvation by works. The 10 commandments proved that and the death of Jesus on the cross would have not been necessary if works could, in any way, bring about salvation.

But then Paul addresses the importance of works after salvation in verse 10, where he says, For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

So Paul is making the differentiation of works. No, works cannot earn our salvation but works are expected as a result of our salvation.

Before we became a Christian, our works were only sufficient to condemn us as sinners before God. But once we have become a Christian our works should commend us to God.

The Bible says that we will all appear before the judgement seat of Christ and be evaluated for our “after salvation” use of our God Given talents. At the judgement seat of Christ it won't be a Heaven or Hell decision. That happens at the Great White Throne Judgement spoken of Revelation 20:11-15.

A different judgement that those who are saved will undergo occurs at the Judgement seat of Christ and is described in 2 Corinthians 5:6

2 Corinthians 5:6 (ESV)

[6] So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, [7] for we walk by faith, not by sight. [8] Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [9] So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. [10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Nothing that we have ever thought or done is hidden from the mind of God.

That particular portion of scripture is pretty scary when we realize that God knows everything that we have ever thought or done in our lifetime. Nothing is hidden from Him. So we are standing there before Him as the thoughts and deeds of our lifetime are evaluated. The bible says that what we have done will be tested by fire.

So How do we build our structure of “after salvation” works and on what foundation do we build so that what we have done will survive the fire test. Here is Paul's example in 1 Corinthians 3:11 (ESV)

[11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— [13] each one's work will become manifest, for the last Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

[16] Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Do you realize the significance of what Paul just said. In Old Testament times the Jerusalem Temple was the place where God showed His presence. After Christ's

sacrifice on the cross, the tearing of the curtain separating the Holy of Holies in the temple, we became God's temple and His presence in us comes through the gift of His Holy Spirit that resides in us and thus we need to show that presence in the works that we do using the gifts and talents that God has given to each of us.

Other than us being the temple of God and His Spirit Dwelling within us, why are our post salvation works so important? There are rewards that will be given to us based on how well we used the gifts and talents that God gave us to glorify Him.

We've already read what Jesus says in Revelation 22:12 (NIV) [12] "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Some of the specific rewards are outlined in the Bible. For example -

1 Peter 5

[5:1] To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: [2] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; [3] not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the **crown of glory** that will never fade away.

James 1:12 (NIV)

[12] Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the **crown of life** that God has promised to those who love him.

Revelation 2:10 (NIV)

[10] Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the **crown** of life.

Revelation 3:11 (NIV)

[11] I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your **crown**. [12] Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven

from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. [13] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

2 John 8 (NIV)

[8] Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

Matthew 16:27 (NIV)

[27] For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

[23] Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, [24] since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Hebrews 11:5 (NIV)

2 John 8 (NIV)

[8] Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

2 Timothy 4:8 (NIV)

[8] Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

James 1:12 (NIV)

[12] Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

So the Bible tells us that we will receive rewards based on the works that we do after salvation. After we have trusted and put our faith in Christ. I want most of my works to be built of the gold, silver and precious stones that Paul says will pass the test of fire. I want to hear Jesus say to me at His Judgement seat, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

A couple things to consider in closing. If you were on trial for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you. Think about that. What could

the prosecuting attorney use from your post salvation work as evidence to convict you of being a Christian.

The second is similar – 1. Go offer your employer the same that you offer to God and see how long you will last. 2. Offer your friends and acquaintances what you offer to God and see how long they remain your friends. 3. Offer your family what you offer to God and see how long you have a family. “Quote from Paul Washer”

Think about it, how are you using the talents and gifts that He has given you to bring honor and glory to God to thank Him for the salvation He has given to you and to earn you heavenly rewards from your Lord and Savior. As Jesus said - Matthew 16:27 (NIV)

[27] For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Let's Pray.