

Jesus, a Savior From Sinning

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of salvation from sin, which is the great want of humanity, and highlights the power of Jesus to save from sin.

Scripture: Matthew 1:21, John 10:9, Romans 6:14, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 7:25, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Salvation", "Faith in Christ"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that humanity's greatest need is salvation from sin, as highlighted in Matthew 1:21. He explains that mere pardon is insufficient without true salvation from the sinful nature, which is essential for true happiness and holiness. Finney discusses the biblical assurance that Jesus is willing and able to save individuals from their sins, urging listeners to recognize their need for a Savior who transforms rather than just forgives. He warns against self-righteousness and the misconception of seeking salvation without true faith in Christ, stressing that genuine faith leads to a complete reliance on Jesus for salvation from sin. Ultimately, Finney calls for a heartfelt acceptance of Christ as the true Savior from sin, encouraging believers to fully embrace His transformative power.

Transcript

"Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins." --Matt. 1:21.

In discussing fundamentally the subject presented in the text, it is pertinent to remark,

I. That salvation from sin is the great want of humanity. On this point there can be no mistake. Whatever else may be controverted or denied, this cannot be. Universal observation combines with universal consciousness to attest that this is a stubborn fact--salvation from sin is the great want of our sinning race. Nothing is more true than that as a race, men are sinners. All men know each other to be sinners, and of course what all know to be true of each one, and what each one knows to be true of all, must be a matter of universal knowledge.

I said, whatever else is true or is not true, this is true;--that men need salvation from sin. The reason of this need is that they are sinners, and as sinners, they are utterly lost to happiness, unless they can be saved from their sins. No man can be honest and yet deny this. This one truth is forever settled and known by all men.

By being saved from sin I do not mean pardon; for every man knows that pardon, without salvation from sinning, would not really save; for if a man were pardoned, but were still given up to the working of his sinful passions and selfish spirit, he would make for himself a hell even in heaven; nay more, it is undoubtedly true that heaven would be the severest form of hell to the unsaved in heart. There can be no heaven without holiness, and the change from sin to such holiness as fits for heaven is exceedingly great. A world of selfish beings thrown together anywhere would be unutterably miserable.

II. The facts already adduced are always assumed in the Bible. The Bible throughout assumes these facts, as if everybody knew them. It assumes that all men need to be saved from sin and have sense enough to know their need. Consequently it brings forward a plan by which through Jesus Christ they may be saved from sin. This is the great burden of the message sent to us from God in his revealed word.

Our text speaks of Jesus Christ. The angel said to Joseph; Mary "shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins."

The Bible represents Jesus as having undertaken this work. It represents his name as being prophetic of the work he came to do. He is a Savior. His work is denoted in his very name. So the Bible uniformly represents him, as the following instances will show.

It is said that "in him shall all fullness dwell." "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." "Who is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us;" "who is able to keep us from falling," and "to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."

The Bible also represents Him as being perfectly willing to do this work, as coming for the very purpose of doing it; as making this his errand and business in the world. He is ready to undertake this work for all who will meet the conditions. The Bible represents him as waiting to enter upon it and anxious to effect it in the case of all sinners and of every individual sinner. "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me." He thus presents himself to be accepted by each and every sinner, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him." And this is only one of a large class of passages which represent Jesus as waiting to accomplish this work of salvation in the sinner. He waits to be allowed to come in. He knocks, and knocks; but then does not force the door; he waits till it be opened in the proper way, and his entrance is invited.

Yet does the Bible most fully represent Him as being anxious to gain admittance--as "waiting at the door of the sinner till his head is wet with the dew and his locks with drops of the night."

O He would show us that he has the greatest desire conceivable to save us from all our sins. His heart is oppressed with sorrow and grief because sinners will not consent, and because he must therefore give them over to final ruin. Hear him cry--"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? my heart is turned with me, my repentings are kindled together. O, that there were such an heart in them, and that they would consider their latter end!" In fact the Bible is full of the most earnest and affecting testimonies of this sort.

Moreover, the Bible represents Jesus Christ as taking the greatest pains to secure the consent of mankind to his terms and proposals of salvation. For this end He places before them the humiliation to which He has voluntarily subjected himself--the sufferings He has endured, and his waiting attitude now to do for

them all they can possibly need to have done for themselves. O could he only make them believe all this, and appreciate it all as the fruit of infinite compassion for their souls!

The Bible also represents Christ as hearing and granting all the petitions of really praying souls. Christ Himself says--"everyone that asketh receiveth." He does not merely say--he shall receive; but he receiveth. It is asserted as a fact--a universal fact--from which there can be no exception.

To vary the figure, He says, the door is opened to everyone that knocks. None can fail of gaining admittance who really knocks. Christ does not say that every one who supposes himself to ask, receives; or who supposes himself to knock, shall find the door opened to Him; but everyone who really asks, receives. This is all He can be understood to mean.

III. Why is it that so many men are not saved at all? It is a fact beyond dispute that some who hear and know the gospel, have no part or lot in its blessings. Why is this?

(1.) Many do not care to be saved from their sins. This is not the kind of salvation which they would have. If they could be saved in their sins, they would like that full well. But they have no desire to be saved from their sins. The punishment they would gladly avoid if they conveniently could; but the presence of sin and its daily practice is no source of grief or trouble to them.

(2.) Some have a sort of desire, but yet are not willing to be saved from sin. They have seen so much of the hatefulness of sin as to wish to be saved from it; just as many drunkards wish to be saved from their cups, but you can not for their life get them to sign a temperance pledge. This is often the case with sinners. They mistake their desires, for a willingness; but they are not really willing. They often pretend they are willing, but if you push them you will find they are not. They will draw back and will not go straight forward in the gospel path of faith in Christ Jesus and of self-renunciation.

(3.) Many mistake entirely the nature of this salvation, and hence fail of embracing and securing its blessings. They are looking for salvation from punishment and from hell. Hence the thing they have their eye upon is not a pure heart, but a hope. They want to be rid of their fears. They would fain have a salvation, but not this, which consists in deliverance from their sins. They would fain have a Savior, but not Jesus, for He saves men from their sins. They can not get Him to do the thing they want done; for He will save none from hell who will not be first saved from sin. Hence many fail because they are trying to make Jesus Christ serve with their sins. Their effort is to induce Jesus to take them in their sins, and make them--in this state, His people, and give them heaven. Their essential mistake is that they seek salvation from punishment and not from sin.

(4.) Others are so self-righteous that they really depend on their outward morality for salvation, and of course they can not take Christ as their Savior. It is astonishing to see how many such are found even among those who hear the gospel preached in its purity. They reason in their own hearts--"If this or that professor is saved, I shall be, too; for I am as good as he is. My life is as fair and unblemished as the life of any professed Christians within my knowledge.["] They are blessing themselves continually that they are no worse than some Christians are. In all this they look only on the outward appearance. No wonder that such persons never come to Christ to be saved from their sins.

(5.) Many are not expecting to be saved without being in some way interested in Christ; but they seek this interest by means of their religious duties or works, and not by simple faith. Their works are after all works of law; and what should be especially noted, they are works of law, put either in the place Christ should

occupy, or done as a means of securing the blessings which are to come from Christ. Hence they are exceedingly strict and precise in their observance of the Sabbath, and of all the external duties of religion, and by this means they hope to get the salvation of the gospel. They know indeed that their hearts are not filled with the love of God. They know that theirs is not a religion of heart-rest, of joy in the Holy Ghost, and deep peace of conscience. They find in themselves none of that which lifts them above the world. Most strict are they in their outward life, but without a particle of true religion. They forget that religion belongs to the heart, and that all their duties are nothing but self-righteousness. A man might keep every one of God's commandments in the letter, from the day of his birth to the day of his death, and yet know no more of the real gospel of Christ than a heathen does. All his observance of law might not give him even the first idea of salvation by faith in Christ. I have often thought of what Paul said to the Christians at Rome on this point; "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone." The Gentiles who had no law or righteousness of their own, attained readily to the righteousness which is by faith. But Israel who was following hard after a mode of righteousness, failed of receiving the gospel. Why this failure? The apostle gives us the clew to the answer: "They sought it not by faith, but as it were by works of law." Their self-righteousness prevented their getting a correct estimation of the gospel. The gospel did not take hold of them; it could gain no access to their souls.

But the Gentiles who had no law and no self-righteousness to stand in their way, readily apprehended the gospel.

Now many persons brought up in pious families and under gospel light are in a state similar to ancient Israel. They have too much good morality and self-righteousness to come to Jesus just as if they had none at all; and yet all this time they know that their own hearts are a moral desolation.

(6.) Many are endeavoring to get faith by works. They see their need of faith, and they think to get faith not by simply believing, but by setting about a series of works. When they have practiced works long enough, they seem to suppose that faith will be wrought out as a product of their working.

Now this is strange indeed! As if they could perform duty without faith, and as if their duties, performed without faith, would be so acceptable to God that He would give them faith as their reward for duties wrought out in the spirit of unbelief! As if God had never said--"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin!" How marvelous that men should think to get faith by mocking God, and by sinning against God! How is it possible that men with our Bible in their hands should hope to get salvation without faith, or faith by works and without believing? Yet so it is. Instead of resting right down upon the divine promises by simple faith, they go to work to get faith by works of righteousness! Nothing can be more plain than that such persons misapprehend the Gospel scheme of salvation by grace alone, through faith in a crucified Savior.

IV. Why is it that so many are saved only in part? It is a fact too obvious to be denied or doubted that many Christians stumble and fall in their Christian course. They show that they have not thoroughly taken hold of this Jesus who saved his people from their sins. Why is this failure of real salvation?

(1.) Some apprehend their necessities only in part. They have only a partial view of their real need of such a Savior from sin as Christ is. They are so far blind to their necessities that they do not lay hold of Christ with an active, earnest faith. They almost assume that they are already saved, and thus entirely

misconceive their own real case.

(2.) Others apprehend Christ only in part, having very imperfect notions of his offices and character. It would seem that the great mass of professed Christians are looking to Christ to forgive their sins and secure their pardon; but this is all. They look for no sanctifying influence or agency from Jesus Christ. In place of this they resort to a notion of Christ's imputed righteousness. It is remarkable that so many Christians have settled down in this notion of an imputed rather than imparted righteousness; on the notion that Christ, instead of imparting, imputes righteousness to his people; instead of begetting in them personal holiness, makes over to them the credit of his own holiness, while they are yet unsanctified; instead of making them holy in fact, only accounts them holy in law, while they are really sinful. This is a most strange and singular doctrine indeed. I am well aware it is not singular in the sense of being uncommon or out of fashion; but it surely is most strange in view of either Bible teachings, or the essential nature of things. Its advocates must read our text thus--not "He shall save his people from their sins"--but, shall save them from the punishment of their sins. Salvation from punishment is to them the essential thing in the Gospel. They do not, to be sure, expect men to be saved without holiness; but they suppose that death secures deliverance from sin; and then to finish the work, Jesus imputes to them his own righteousness. This they deem all-sufficient as both fitness and title to heaven.

Said a Presbyterian minister of high standing in his church--"I never heard of such a thing as this--that Christ is the sanctification of the soul!" Horrible! Horrible!! This, a leading man in the Presbyterian church, and yet has not heard that Christ is a sanctifier of his people--seems never to have heard that Jesus "saves his people from their sins!"

This class of Christians have some notion that there is a Holy Ghost who will have some agency in sanctifying his people just at death, or just after death--somehow, and somewhere near the eventful point of death, but just how or when is certainly not made very definite in their teachings. How it is done in cases where death supervenes suddenly, or where disease arrests all sane action of the mind, I believe is not distinctly stated. Yet death is relied on as the great sanctifier! The Christian in the prospect of death is encouraged and animated with the hope that his deliverance from sin is just at hand! All this is said as confidently and solemnly as if the Bible had said, not of the child Jesus, but of death,--Death's name shall be called Jesus--for death shall save you from your sins; or as if God had never said--"Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

O how great and how prevalent is this difficulty--men apprehend Christ only in part, and seem incapable of apprehending Him in all his precious relations!

(3.) Many who have known something of the Gospel live on their resolutions, and not on Christ.

They are not perhaps aware of this fact; but if they ever come to depend on Christ, they will see that they have been trying to brace themselves up on the strength of their own resolutions.

(4.) Many depend on faith without any resolution. Theirs is a puny, sickly faith, void of energy or activity. Now both these last mentioned classes are utterly mistaken; both those who depend on resolutions without faith, and those who trust in faith without resolutions. Both equally miss the very thing which the gospel requires, and which alone can ensure success--namely, resolving and executing in the promised strength of Jesus Christ.

Again, many who know something about the necessity of having a pure heart, are yet seeking comfort without purity. They give themselves up to pray for comfort and happiness, while all the time they are inflicting self-torture by the indulgence of sin. They act as if they supposed that by his own arbitrary act God could make them happy and fill their souls with blessedness, while yet their hearts are full of sin; than which, no more rank delusion or essential absurdity was ever broached by mortals.

Yet again, some want to be delivered from sin because they want the personal comfort of being sanctified. Inasmuch as their desires extend not at all beyond themselves, and are hence purely selfish, there is good reason why they get so little of that blessing which they so selfishly seek.

Many satisfy themselves with the hope of a future salvation only. They are satisfied with the hope of its coming at length, and can forego the present possession without any painful solitudes. It is enough for them that they shall ultimately go to heaven, and they seem not to be straitened with the intense desire of entering into the deep rest of the gospel at once. When persons begin to be pressed strongly with the desire for present and full salvation, there is hope for them that deliverance is near. When like the prodigal son, they begin to be in want; then they become painfully conscious that there is a mighty famine in the land where they are, and that starvation stares them in the face; so that when their thoughts revert to the bread in plenty, in their father's house, there is a deep yearning of desire and a stirring up of purpose--then there begins to be hope in their case. But many content themselves with the hope of future salvation, and have no strong conceptions of the power of Jesus to secure for them a present salvation. Thus they slide along, and never know half the present power, the present value and present blessedness of gospel salvation.

Many draw back through fear of the present consequences of being pure from sin. They see, or think they see the trials to which it may subject them, and they shrink before these trials--as if the blessing of a pure heart must cost too much!

Many think their sins are forgiven, and seem to satisfy themselves with the hope that they are justified before God. They know they live in sin, but they strangely imbibe the impression that they are accepted of God, are his real children, and have a well-founded hope of eternal life. Of this class, one thing must be certain;--they have not one particle of religion. If they can content themselves and bless their souls that they are justified, and then live along without a devoted life and without a penitent, grateful heart, drawn to God evermore by a sense of his pardoning grace, they have not the first particle of real religion. For how can this state of mind consist with real love to God? How can there be real love to God in the soul, which yet shall not "constrain" the soul to love God and do his will?

Multitudes who have professed religion have lost their path, have got out of the way; are thrown off their track, and are now wandering like boys in the woods; going round and round forever in a circle perhaps when they think they are steering a straight line and in the right direction. Whoever has been really lost in the woods so as to lose utterly all his points of compass and to have his head completely turned, will understand the situation of multitudes of professed Christians. They once knew what it was to believe, and rejoice in hope--to live under the smiles of God's countenance; but they have sinned; they have got out of the way; for days and weeks, they are lost in the wilderness of sin. Dark clouds and dense fogs alternate around their path, and they feel sadly desolate. They seem to be as much at a loss what to do, as if they had never known the way of life. A darkness that can almost be felt gathers around and seem to press its thick gloom hard upon them on every side. I recollect to have seen the remark in some of the old writers, that "it is one of the hardest things in religion for a backslider to return to God." At first I thought this a

strange remark, and said to myself--"How can this be?" But subsequent observation and reflection showed me that there is much truth in it, and I have seen many striking manifestations of its truth. So doubtless have you. You have seen professed Christians get out of the way; begin to struggle and flounder; plunge into the mire, and only get in the deeper for all their struggles to get out. They even begin to doubt whether they were ever converted, and perhaps even whether anybody else is, not even excepting those who are most esteemed for piety. They may next question whether there is any such thing as conversion, or whether the Bible be true. They find no God to pray to, and when they attempt to pray, it is as if they were speaking into the vacant air. When Christians get away from God they often go farther into doubts and skepticism than they did before they were converted at all. Some dreadful cases of this sort are a warning--a portentous warning against the perils of backsliding.

But it often happens that those who go not nearly so far as this, and who never doubt the truth of the Bible, yet get away so far that they lose their way and do not know at all how to get back. This leads me to say that when these persons become anxious and perplexed, one reason why they fail of finding their path is, they seek it without their guide. They think they must get back on to the right track before they can have Christ to help them. They think they are seeking the track in order to find Christ there. Like a man lost in the wilderness, who is trying to get out somewhere, so that he can get a guide, he pitches into a slough on this side, and into a thorn bush on that side, and never thinks to ask himself--How can I hope to get out of this dreadful swamp, in this pitchy darkness too--without a guide? So the Christian sets himself to work self-righteously with all his might, to get relief. Like the lost traveler, he runs; he shouts at the very top of his voice and makes the deep glens of the forest echo with his cries; he rushes into thickets and brambles, and plunges into sloughs of deep mire, and wears out his strength in vain: alas, it does not seem to occur to him to ask--How can I ever extricate myself from this dreadful condition without my guide? See him; his heart struggles intensely; he cries, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" All is discouragement. What is the matter? The trouble is--he has no guide. Where is his guide? Where is his Jesus? Has Jesus lost sight of his dear child? O no; He is following hard and close after him; crying in his ears--"Lo, this is the way, walk ye in it." He draws near; he offers to the lost wanderer his own hand to help and to guide. Alas, that the poor and the guilty wanderer will rely on his own wisdom to find the way himself, and on his strength to get out of his deep Slough of Despond; and will not cast himself wholly and at once on the offered help of his present Savior!

How many times have I seen people in this state, pressed with trouble, till they actually give up all for lost, and then bethink themselves of one more last resort--just to leave themselves simply in the hands of Jesus: then salvation comes! They return to the first simple thing of the gospel--let go of self-dependency and cast themselves on Christ--or rather--drop in the sinkings of their self-despair--drop into Christ alone and there find help! Then they see the pole star of hope, peering through the darkness of their despair!

In all this I am speaking of things that I know; for I can well recollect being in this state of mind myself. I was striving to get the salvation of the gospel without Jesus. I had not forgotten that there was a Jesus, but I was conscious of not enjoying his presence and his aid; and the deep inquiry in my heart was, Where shall I find him? While thus sitting and deeply musing with myself to know why I did not get hold of the gospel, those words of Isaiah came to me--"I will lead the blind by a way which they know not." I saw at a glance that my trouble was--a want of my guide. I had spent many days and hours trying to get hold of salvation. This passage came home to me as if sent on purpose to meet my case. "Now," said I, "the remedy has come. I have been trying to get out of my entanglements without my guide." Here is the explanation. "I have been blind, and I have not taken hold of his hand who says, "I will lead the blind by a

way which they know not." O let me now take hold of Christ, just where I am, here in this deep and dark wilderness, and all will be well. He is on my right hand and I need not fear."

Again, many do not lay hold of Christ because they totally misapprehend the way, and are trying to do something else first. Instead of committing their whole souls to Christ, they are trying to save themselves. Hence they run hither and thither--every where else but to Christ alone. They do not seem to understand that Jesus is really the Savior from sin, and that they have only to commit themselves to Him at once, just as they are. They seem to have lost the idea that Jesus must be received for just what he is--a Savior from sin; and that they must renounce themselves and receive Him--saying--I never shall keep myself--I renounce forever the expectation of doing anything without laying hold on Thee;--Lord Jesus, hold me up; the work is Thine; I depend on Thee to do it, and on Thee alone will I rest henceforth and forever.

What Christian does not know by his own experience what it is to be thrown into circumstances of great trial, in which the soul is fully brought to say--"Lord, I can not hold myself up at all; I must sink without Thee; Lord, save, or I perish!"

REMARKS.

1. Many have hope who are not really saved in any proper sense of the word. They are neither saved from sin now, nor will they be saved from hell hereafter.
2. No one has reason to hope for heaven any further than he is really saved from sin.
3. They who possess the religion of the gospel and yet are not sanctified, virtually bring up an evil report against the gospel. They say,--"I am a Christian, but I know that I am not saved from sin. I embrace a gospel which professes to save from sin, you see in me how much its professions are worth." What must be the influence of such a testimony?
4. When a Christian commits himself to Jesus to save from sin, it is well for him to use this argument in prayer; "Lord, it will dishonor Thee if Thou dost not save me from all sin. I have trusted in Thee; I do now take hold of thy promises; let them be fulfilled in my case, and let all men seeing what thy grace has done for me, know thy salvation."
5. Some seem not to have in view Christ's honor, but their own. They think they shall disgrace themselves if they do not overcome temptation; but they do not feel that the greatest evil of all is that they will thus dishonor Christ.
6. If any man will believe, he shall see no other difficulty. No obstacle can possibly be in his way to shut off the power of the gospel from his soul, when once he has embraced the sinner's Savior by a living faith.
7. The great difficulty now is for the Savior to persuade men to believe, and to cast themselves on him by a perpetual self-renunciation and a perpetual dependence. Let me ask you, my hearers, how many of you can testify that this is the case with yourselves:--that in your own individual case, Jesus has to your certain knowledge been laboring to present himself before you in such inviting forms as should inspire faith in Himself; but he has labored almost, or perhaps altogether in vain.
8. Half-way believers are the greatest stumbling-blocks in religion. They profess to embrace Christ, and to be religious, and yet fail of having grace enough to overcome sin. O! if they would only embrace Jesus, so as to be full of his Spirit, how greatly would they honor their Lord! As it is, how earthly-minded, sensual,

and devilish do they become! No wonder they are ashamed to say that Jesus is a Savior from sin. How can they bear such testimony without reading themselves out of the pale of the heirs of heaven?

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