

# Understanding Our Salvation

by Harold Erickson

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*The sermon explores the nature of salvation as a joyful feast, a healing cure, and a personal transformation through Christ.*

**Duration:** 44:31

**Scripture:** Hosea 6:6, Matthew 4:13, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 9:9-17, Mark 2:14-17

**Topics:** "Personal Salvation", "Spiritual Transformation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares the story of James Gardner, a British soldier who lived a life of moral reckoning. Despite his repeated attempts to quit his sinful habits, he was unable to do so until he had a real experience of conversion and met Christ. Gardner testifies that he was completely cured of his sinful inclinations and desires, experiencing a transformation as if he were a little child. The preacher emphasizes that salvation is not a patchwork solution but a personal newness, using the illustrations of a new garment and new wine in new bottles. He concludes by reassuring the audience that becoming a Christian is not like entering a prison but rather a joyful experience that does not require giving up the joys of life.

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## Transcript

I trust you have your Bibles with you tonight. Will you turn with me then to the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew? We shall begin the reading at the ninth verse of that chapter and go through the seventeenth verse. And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and he saith unto him, Follow me.

And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that behold need not a physician, but they that are sick.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth. I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then

shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles, else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish.

But they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved." Tonight we are going to speak on the general topic, Understanding Our Salvation. You may feel that that is an unnecessary topic on which to speak. Well, my friend, are you so sure that you understand everything about this great and wondrous salvation that God has given you? And if we can be a little help to you in seeking to see the divine side of it in its fullness, I think you will be happy.

Now, the story centers around a man whose name is Matthew. He is called Levi. He is spoken of as the son of Alphaeus.

He is the writer of the Gospel of Matthew. He was not always a saint. Now, I want you to notice this man's experience with Christ.

The story as we find it in this chapter is laid on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. And if you turn to the fourth chapter, you will find in the thirteenth verse that Jesus, after having lived in Nazareth, moved to Capernaum. And therefore, it says, he entered into a ship and passed over and came into his own city.

He had been across on the east side of the Sea of Galilee to the land of the Gadarenes. Now he is coming back. So this area on the northwest corner of the Dead Sea and on the west shore is where this whole story is laid.

That's where Matthew came from. That's where the other fisherman disciples came from. It's a great experience.

About a year and a half ago, to walk in the footsteps of these men in that part of the world, traveling up to Capernaum and the ancient sites of Bethsaida, having a swim in the sea just south of Capernaum, and walking around in the old synagogue where Jesus undoubtedly preached, and seeing the mountain slopes where he stood and fed the five thousand. Well, this was the area in which this story is laid. Now Matthew was a tax collector, and tax collectors were hated.

The Jews hated the tax collectors because these men had sold out to Rome. They were in the employ of the Roman Empire. They were collecting taxes from their own people, and the tax situation was farmed out to these men.

There was a definite legal amount that must be turned in to the Roman Empire. And if a man didn't have too many moral scruples, he could collect as much above that as the traffic would bear. And most of them did, and so tax collectors were rich.

But they were men with wounded consciences, if they had any. They were men who somehow had felt that integrity was no longer a part of the fabric of life. And I suppose some of them hated themselves for the way that they had let themselves go in this game of trying to get as much out of their fellow men as they possibly could.

And I rather think that this man Matthew was a man who was sick of his occupation. He was crooked. He was hated.

He didn't only hate himself, but other people did too. He was an outcast. And I think I can see forming in this man's heart something of a decision.

Perhaps it could be worded thus. I don't know if Jesus cares about me, but if he ever comes my way and he ever asks me to be his follower, I will. For I'm so sick and tired of this business.

I've heard that he calls fishermen. And I've heard of the wonderful things he's done. I heard about that remarkable thing up there the other day where he just took a little lad's lunch and fed 5,000 men and 5,000 women.

That must have been a great experience. And I've heard of some of his sermons. I'd like to make his acquaintance.

And lo and behold, one day it became true what the songwriter has put into words. Then Jesus came. And he saw Matthew sitting at the receipt of customs.

He said, come, follow me. And Matthew got up and followed. There is not a slight, there's not the slightest record that Matthew ever went back to collecting taxes.

He had met the Savior. And when he had met the Savior, as our text says, he made a great feast for Jesus and he invited many and many publicans. Those were the tax collectors.

Many publicans and sinners came to this great banquet in the house of Matthew. Now, the fellow must have had both a good-sized house and a good-sized entertaining budget if he could handle that big a crowd. And out of that incident comes the message of tonight.

Now, I want you to notice that there are three definite things in this text that describe what salvation is. The disciples came around and they looked rather askance at this whole business of putting on a feast. They said, don't you know that this is the time to fast? This is the fasting season.

And out of that remark, let me say first of all, salvation when it's real is always a feast instead of a fast. Then Jesus spoke and he said that it is those who are sick who need a physician. And out of that remark of Jesus, we learn that salvation is a cure instead of a conformity.

And then he talks about the new wine bottles and the new garments. And out of that we get the truth that salvation is personal newness, not just a patchwork. So keep those three things in mind.

Salvation is a feast, not a fast. Salvation is a cure, not a mere conformity. Salvation is personal newness, not a patchwork.

And along that line, let's just try to understand our salvation. In Luke 5:29, this story is phrased just a little differently. This is the way it reads.

He made a feast for Christ in his own house, that is, in Matthew's house, and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. Now Matthew's dinner was his way of confessing to his associates that he was a follower of Christ and that Christ was his Lord. The renunciation of his former business, that crooked business that had never satisfied his heart, that renunciation must have cost him something, but it led him to put on a feast.

You know, whenever there's a great surrender, God sets up a feast in the soul. Every Christian can testify to that. The feast was in honor of Christ, of course, because he was the one that had brought release to Matthew's heart.

Now, a clear-cut confession of what Christ has done for us is always a stepping stone to my own personal realization of what God has done. It was Dwight L. Moody, on one occasion, who saw a man whom he recognized from one of his after-meetings, standing dejectedly, leaning up against a light post in New York City. Moody went up to him and he said, "Didn't we pray for you in the meeting the other night?" "Yes," the man said.

"Well, aren't you happy?" "No," he said, "I'm not." And Moody said, "Well, how many people have you told that you're a Christian?" "Well," he said, "I haven't told anybody yet." "All right," said Moody. "Get to work and tell somebody what Christ has done for you." And that man came to the meetings later on. Moody said there was a new shine on his face and a new joy that was reflected in all his features.

And Moody went down to him and he said, "You did tell somebody, didn't you?" "Yes," he said, "I did, and the joy filled my soul." You see, salvation is never complete merely by believing in our hearts. Romans 10, verses 9 and 10 clearly state that, with the heart man believeth unto salvation, and with the mouth confession is made. Then the joy of the Lord comes.

Matthew was now confessing. Not to a lovely church crowd who sat around and said, "Oh, isn't it wonderful that Matthew's going to join our church?" No, he didn't take on that kind of a crowd. He made a feast for a bunch of tax collectors who were still in the crooked business, because he wanted to win them.

Martin Luther did something like that even before he was converted. You read any standard work on Luther, you remember that Luther was scared to death by a thunderstorm in the Thuringian forest in Germany on the 2nd of July, 1500, and as he walked through that forest and the lightning was coming down all around him, he decided in his heart that he wasn't going to be a lawyer anymore. He was attending law school.

He said, "I'm going to be a monk." He thought that somehow that would satisfy God. Well, it was a turn in the right direction. There's no question about that.

It was later that he became a Christian. But I want you to notice what the books tell us about Luther. When he made that decision, he called all the members of his class in the law school together and had a dinner for them, and proclaimed to them that he was no longer going to be a monk.

He was no longer going to be a law student. He was going to be a monk. And that eventually led to his salvation.

Now, with this feast going on in this man's house, a gathering began to come around. They saw what was going on, and these disciples, disciples of John they were, good people, you know, but who had the idea that religion ought to be taken very seriously. And here was a feast going on.

So they gathered around and they charged the disciples with lack of seriousness in religious matters. They charged Christ with moral callousness in cultivating the friendship of a group of despised men. Now, what was Christ going to do in a situation like that? In Mark 2.18, in the revised version, it reads as follows, and the disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting.

Did not simply say that they fasted on certain occasions. It says they were fasting. It was a present tense situation.

It was an actual fast at that particular time that they were engaged in. And they felt that Jesus and his disciples should have been participating in that fast. But they were not doing it.

Now, in the Orient, weddings were quite an occasion. They spent seven days in mirth and marriage. And during this period, the Talmud absolved those who were participants in the wedding feast from prayer and worship and fasting.

Now, Jesus here talks about a wedding. He says, can the children of the bride chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? Now, that doesn't make too much sense to us 20th century people, but to those disciples that made a lot of sense. They said, oh, we know the rule on that.

That when somebody gets married for a whole week, they are not expected to break into that week of marriage with a fast. They're not supposed to mourn or disfigure their faces. We can understand that.

But look, this is a time of a fast. You haven't got any wedding going on here. As if to refute this, Jesus says, well, that's exactly what's happening here.

This is a wedding feast. We've added someone to the bride of Christ. His name is Matthew.

We're having a feast because of that. We're having a feast. My friend, there is always joy in the heart of the Savior when someone comes to know him.

The Bible is so clear on that. He says, actually, there is more joy in heaven over one soul that repents than over ninety and nine who need no repentance. We should rejoice when men and women turn to Christ.

How about that, Christian? Have we lost our capacity for joy when people are saved? There was a time when the Church of Jesus Christ was swept by waves of ecstasy as they saw the altars lined with those who were seeking Christ. And I think sometimes we have become too sedate when that happens, because it ought to be a time of joy. The angels up there rejoice when it happens.

Why shouldn't we? And Jesus is saying, this is a wedding feast. You may not think it is, but there's a man here who's become a Christian, and that always makes a wedding feast. And so we're not having any fasting here.

He's telling all his companions, and some of those are going to come. Oh, the joy of the companionship of Jesus. These men knew what it was like, the charm of his purity, the revelation of nuggets of truth which he spoke, the beauty of his fellowship, and the tender, sweet presence that loaded the air with a kind of perfume that did not easily vanish.

When we know the Savior as our Lord, true sanctity is not a solemnity. It is the joy of being with a person, not a fasting situation. Now, I'm not denying that there are times when Christians ought to fast, but we're not on that subject.

We're talking now about the fact that salvation is a feast, a wedding feast, when men and women become members of the Bride of Christ. Now we go on. Now, you know the Pharisees.

My, what a lot of rules and regulations they made. And there is this to be said for Phariseeism, that they were against a lot of wrong things, and they were right in that. They were hard on all kinds of transgression and sin.

Now, Jesus didn't approve of the sin of Matthew. He didn't approve of the sin of the publicans. Christ was against the same things that the Pharisees were against.

But the difference between Christ and the Pharisees lay in this, that Phariseeism had absolutely nothing to offer sinners. They could give them a lot of rules and regulations. Their books were full of them.

They could say, you mustn't do this. You mustn't do this. You mustn't do this.

And on the Sabbath day, you do this and this and this. And you walk so far, you can't go any further. You bring in your firewood on the day before the Sabbath.

Oh, there were multitudinous regulations. That they were good at. And sometimes we've been very good at that too.

We have laid down, even evangelical Christians have done that, laid down a lot of regulations for sinners. I heard a preacher not too long ago make this statement. He said, you know, we sometimes scare sinners away from our churches because we don't let them be sinners until Jesus saves them.

So what did he mean by that? He meant by that simply this, that sometimes when a man comes around, he may be a drinking man, he may be a smoking man, he may be a gambling man. And the first thing that some Christian will do will be to try to set him straight on the fact of gambling. Or tell him to throw away his package of cigarettes.

Now friends, that's not the place to start with a sinner. Let him be a sinner until he meets Christ. Then Christ will clean him up.

And I think that's the lesson that we need to remember here. The Pharisees were that kind of people. They could come up to these tax collectors and give them all kinds of rules and regulations on how to stay straight.

But that didn't save any of them. But Christ came with a cure and no rules and no regulations. Now don't misunderstand me.

There are some things a Christian doesn't do. There are some things that a Christian is saved from. There are some things that just vanish out of the Christian life when we become completely taken up with Jesus.

We don't have taste for these things anymore and we don't have time for them. But that isn't where you start. Oh my friend, if you understand your salvation, you will realize that there's something tremendously supernatural when you come to Him.

It's a cure. Not a mere Pharisaic conformity to a few rules and regulations. These men, however, charged Jesus with being morally careless because he accompanied with sinners.

Now this is rather a problem with a great number of people. To what extent shall I accompany with sinners? Now Paul says that if you are going to get away from sinners altogether, you will have to get out of the world, he says. You're going to have to meet them in your daily tasks, in your daily job, at the office,

at the school, everywhere.

You can't get out of the world of sinners. But another writer of the New Testament says, be ye not partakers of them in their evil deeds. That's where our separation comes in.

We are to love them with the heart of the Savior. And yet not sit in condemnation over them. For you see, there are some things that a sinner can't help doing.

There are some things that a saint can't help doing, but they're opposites. And they belong to the genius of each particular kind of life. A sinner, well naturally he's drawn to the things of the world.

That's the thing he lives in. He doesn't know anything different. His whole nature responds to that.

Oh, how wonderful it is when God gets a hold of a sinner and cleans him up. And puts a new nature within him. Then immediately he finds that all his values have changed, and the new attraction becomes operative in his life.

And it's all the work of the Lord Jesus. Now Christ justified his presence with these sinners, not on the basis that he was approving of tax collectors that were crooked. Oh no.

But because he said, I am a physician. And the ones who are whole do not need a physician, but those who are sick do. And so he says, I go around with a cure.

I come to these men with a cure. Here is the whole plan of salvation. Jesus is out looking for sick men.

He is out looking for those who have become sick and weary and frustrated and empty and hungry and longing for something that's higher and better than what they've got. And the ones who are perfectly self-satisfied and say, I'm having a good time and I don't need any salvation, everything is lovely. He passes them by.

Until such a time as they begin to hunger and thirst for the wells of salvation. He comes to those who are sick. He comes to redeem them from the sin and the selfishness that are at the bottom of the sin sickness of the soul.

Now the last thing we want to point out tonight and it's a glorious, wonderful thing, is the fact that salvation is personal newness, not a patchwork. He uses two illustrations. First of all, he speaks of a new garment.

Now, we must remember the things were different in that faraway day. They were not on to the process of sanforizing cloth in that day. We are.

So when we buy a good piece of material, it's sanforized. That is, it won't shrink. The cloth that was woven in the time of Christ would shrink with the first washing.

And old garments, therefore, were garments that had shrunk to the place where you could depend on them not to shrink anymore. And Jesus said, now, if you take a piece of new cloth and put it on this old garment, then the new one is going to shrink. And if the old cloth has gotten through with the shrinking process, it's very possibly so old that when the new one begins to shrink, it'll just tear out all the seams that you've sewn all around this patch.

So he said, we don't put new cloth on an old garment. Now, you ladies ought to find that interesting. That tells you how they did patching.

All the patching at the time of Jesus was done by old pieces of cloth. You remember way back many, many years ago? I remember this when I was a boy. I wore blue overalls.

And I can still remember that my mother never patched a pair of my blue jeans with a new piece of cloth. She always took a piece from an old pair that had been worn completely out. And I suppose that was because sanforizing hadn't even been discovered at that time.

Now, Jesus makes a spiritual truth out of this. And he uses another truth. He said, you do not put new wine in old wineskins.

I saw wineskins in Israel about a year and a half ago. They still have them. They skin an animal, not by splitting the carcass open down the middle as we very frequently do when we butcher, because as a young man I did a lot of butchering and I know just how you can skin a calf or a cow, all of that.

They don't do that. Instead of that, they peel the skin off without splitting it down the middle. And then they tie up all the orifices, like the neck and the legs and so forth.

And then they put this wineskin in the smoke to make it pliable. Do you remember that passage in, I think it's the 119th Psalm, isn't it, where David says that he's like a bottle in the smoke? Now, that doesn't mean a glass bottle at all. That means a wineskin in the smoke.

It wasn't a pleasant experience for David to be in the fogginess of the smoke like that. It has a spiritual application. But when this wineskin has become pliable, not by the application of heat, but by the application of smoke, then wine is poured into it, and the skin now will stretch.

Because, you see, wine has the principle of fermentation in it. And as the ferment goes on, the wine expands, and the skin expands with it. And then when the wine was fully fermented, it was used, and the wineskin was hung up, and it would dry.

And Jesus said, you don't put new wine in old wineskins. You use them for something else where there will be no expansive quality to it. Out of these two illustrations, we find out that our salvation is a personal newness.

First of all, it is an inward newness of spirit. We are transformed. We are born of the Spirit.

We are born again. Old things have passed away. Everything has become new.

The Spirit of God has come to dwell in us, and that's something vastly new, wonderfully new. Not only that, but we are clothed in new garments. You remember what it says about the prodigal son when his father had put his arm around and hugged him to his breast.

He gave orders, bring out the best robe and put it on him. And he shed all the old filthy garments in which he came back from the far country. And Isaiah tells us that our rags of self-righteousness are stripped.

We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Have you heard the story about the communist who was holding forth on the soapbox? And he said, you know, he said, communism will put a new coat on every man's back. And then a Christian who was in the audience listening said, my friend, could I say a word?

Yes, go ahead, say something.

He said, I've got something better than that, he said. I've got a gospel to preach that puts a new man inside of every coat. Now that's different.

A new man inside of the coat. That's what Christ does. Political formulas may bring us new coats, but it takes a divine work to put a new man inside of a coat.

That's more important. That's what salvation really is. Galatians 6.15, for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation, a new creation.

That's what salvation is. Then notice the new wineskin. Salvation is likened to the new wine which has a fermenting and an expansive power within it.

How about our salvation? Does it have this fermentation in it? Does it have this expansiveness in it? Well, you say, just what do you mean? Listen, my friend, there is something of pressure within the heart of the man who has found Jesus Christ. The same kind of pressure that's on a young man who has fallen desperately in love. He wants to buy presents and flowers for his girl.

He wants to be with her all the time. He can't see enough of her. There's an urge and a drive that this romantic turn of events has put into his heart.

Listen, friend, when this new life comes in, it's a life of falling in love with Jesus Christ. You begin to love people that you didn't love before. That's what happens.

You begin to love holiness. You begin to love to go to the prayer meeting. One of the tragedies of the modern church today is that people profess to be converted on a Sunday night, and then you never see them in a prayer meeting afterward.

What kind of a salvation is that? Things happen. A pressure that God has built up, just like the pressure inside of the wine bottle. And salvation is furthermore, in this parable which Christ gives us here about not putting it in old bottles, real salvation breaks the old bottles.

A lot of people have tried to put it there. You know, even denominationally, real salvation breaks the old bottles. That's why the mission covenant got started.

Because great, wonderful experiences of salvation came among our forefathers over there in Sweden. And the old bottles cracked. Now, without mentioning any names, you know what happened.

The old bottles cracked, and the wine was put into new forms. And every time God wants to do something great and wonderful and new, why, he gets a new wine bottle. And I think we ought to be very serious about that, my friend.

There is another illustration of this in the scriptures. It's worded entirely different, but Jesus said, except you repent, I will remove the candlestick from you. That's the same thing.

God is saying, unless you are willing to make room for the glorious, expansive, wonderful salvation of God, I'll have to get a new wine bottle. We need to think of that. You see, we can easily become the victims of formality.

And let me mention, sometimes we sit in judgment over ritualistic churches. But let me point out that Catholic masses and Protestant rituals and Quaker silence and Pentecostal shouting and even covenant and free church freedom can all become as ritualistic as a straight stone wall. The whole business.

We need to watch our steps so that we do not become cold and unbending and rigid like an iron rod, but we're ready for God to come in and move and work and pour out his truth. We need to do that. So many of us are so quick to criticize any movement of God that isn't like what we've seen before, see? Anything that's different, and sometimes just a little personal jealousy that's creeping out, that's all, because they follow not us, see? That's the disciples.

They came up to Jesus and tapped him on the shoulder, and the Lord, they said, we met some people, and we were pretty hard on them because they followed not us, and the Lord wanted to teach them a lesson, but oh, how often we are like that. Well, we must draw this to a conclusion. Listen, my friend, tonight, this wonderful salvation that God offers is not what a lot of people think it is.

Maybe you are here tonight, and you're not a Christian. You say, well, preacher, I always had the idea that becoming a Christian was like getting into a straitjacket, was like entering a prison. You had to do it in order to get to heaven, but you just had to say farewell to all the joys of life.

You're wrong, my friend. You're utterly wrong. Because when a man finds Christ, he's out of the prison, he's out of the straitjacket, he's in the joy of a wedding.

And the bridegroom is with him all the time, dwelling in here, and not only that, but he experiences the cure of the grave physician, that cure which is the only match for the passion and the pride that sit so deeply within man's heart. Oh, how he delivers. How wonderfully he can strike off the shackles.

How completely he can cure a man of all the things that he tries so hard in his own power to give up. When it comes to Christ, it happens. And then in the last place, we're now done.

He daily lives in the newness of the divine life, clothing new garments, expressing in many different ways the new life within him, which is so different than anything he's experienced before. Now let me tell you just a little story, and then I shall be done. James Gardner was a British soldier.

He lived a life of moral rotteness. He knew it was wrong. He swore off again and again, but never successfully.

And then one day he met Christ in a real experience of conversion. Now listen to what he said. Here's a quote from his own testimony.

He says, I was effectively cured of all inclination to that sin I was so strongly addicted to. He said, I thought nothing but shooting me through the head would have cured it. And all desire and inclination to it was removed as entirely as if I had been a little child.

What God did in that, let's buy our hearts in prayer.

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