

Brother, Are You Saved?

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of salvation, the sufficiency of Jesus Christ's saving work, and the importance of faith in receiving the blessings of the gospel.

Duration: 31:20

Scripture: Isaiah 53:6, John 3:3, John 14:6, Acts 16:16-17, Acts 16:30-31, Ephesians 2:8-9

Topics: "Salvation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the need for salvation and how it is only possible through Jesus Christ. He describes Jesus as the good shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep and the Son who sets us free from moral evil. The preacher highlights Jesus as the mediator who restores us to fellowship with God. He also emphasizes the importance of faith in receiving salvation, referencing the story of Paul and the jailer in Acts 16:16-34. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the joy and transformation that comes from believing in God.

Transcript

Reading from God's written word today from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 16, beginning to read at the 16th verse, and here the author speaks of an experience that came the way of Paul and the members of his missionary team soon after they had crossed over from Asia into Europe with the good news of the gospel. The 16th chapter of Acts at verse 16. Once when we were going to the place of prayer we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future.

She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us shouting, these men are servants of the Most High God who were telling you the way to be saved. She kept this up for many days.

Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her. At that moment the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

They brought them before the magistrates and said, these men are Jews and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice. The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had

been severely flogged they were thrown into prison and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

Upon receiving such orders he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken.

All at once the prison doors flew open, everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up and when he saw the prison doors open he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he had thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, don't harm yourself we are all here.

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, men what must I do to be saved? They replied, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.

At that hour of the night the jailer took them, washed their wounds and then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them and the whole family was filled with joy because they had come to believe in God. A fascinating story with many things worthy of comment but today we concentrate on just two.

The jailer asks out of desperation because he knows that he has been negligent in his duty, he has been asleep while supposedly guarding prisoners and now that they were loosed with the shaking of the foundations, he thought that he would be called to account and before being executed by the state he would take his own life. And out of desperation he comes and asks a question, men what must I do to be saved? And the missionaries who were in prison answered, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. Christianity is a religion of salvation, if it's not that it's just another expression of mere moralism.

The man asked the question in desperation, what must I do to be saved? And Paul and Silas gave him the answer that he needed to hear. Imagine if Paul and Silas had been humanists of the secular sort, how would they have answered that question? You ask us as to what you need to do in order to be saved? People who are preoccupied with the matter of their own salvation have a morbid sort of introspection from which they need to be spared. Don't trouble yourself about it, nobody's lost.

Why then are you inquiring on what has to be done in order to be saved? Had Paul and Silas been syncretists they would have said, Roman jailer you've got your religion, we Jewish converts to Christianity have our religion, let's dialogue a bit and see what deficiencies in our system you can meet and what deficiencies in your system we can meet and out of that will come a third amalgam which hopefully will be better than one we both hold separately. But they weren't syncretists any more than they were secular humanists and they didn't go that route. Or suppose Paul and Silas had been to a theological institution that taught them the deadly heresy of universalism.

Saved? Man don't you know that you will ultimately be saved because God is a God of love and even if you don't believe and even if you don't repent God is a God of love and at the last everybody will make it. They were not universalists, they were not syncretists, they were not secular humanists, they were evangelists and when the man out of the depth of a desperation wanted to know what he had to do to be saved they gave him an answer that comes straight from the heart of the God of the gospel. Believe on

the Lord Jesus and you will be saved and so also will to be the members of your household if they go that route.

Now there were three simple things that I would share with you today and underline on the basis of the Word of God and the first is that we need to be saved. Salvation is not an option it's a necessity. The Bible is very realistic in its diagnosis of the human situation.

Isaiah for example said that all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone with a foolish fatal kind of egocentricity to his own way and the Apostle Peter picks that up and in his first letter repeats the charge we have strayed like lost sheep from the appointed path and our Lord Jesus clinches the whole matter when he says that we are like sheep that have gone astray and are at the mercy of ravaging wolves doomed to die unless we be found. Scripture analyzing the human predicament from yet another angle says that we are subjected to the drives that are dominated by the evil one. No less an authority on human nature than Jesus said whosoever habitually commits sin is the slave or servant of sin.

Strayed, subjected to evil drives, and separated from the heart of God. In the second chapter of his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul describes the human condition as one of alienation, estrangement, separation from God. And writing to the Romans the Apostle Paul doubles the emphasis and says that the mind of man apart from the influence of the grace of God is at odds with the eternal, is at enmity, at war with God.

And because man is a sinner, because man breaks the commands of God by doing what God forbids and failing to do what God requires, he is under the sentence of death. He has broken God's law and now God's law will proceed to break him and he is under condemnation. This then is the biblical diagnosis of the human condition apart from God's saving grace.

Sheep that have strayed and need to be found, slaves to sin who need to be set free, separated from God who need to be restored to fellowship with God, sentenced as lawbreakers in desperate need of forgiveness from God on the basis of Holy Scripture, confirmed in our most humble and honest moments, we need to be saved. The second thing that we must stress is not merely that we need to be saved but that we are saved by Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Jesus Christ came to save. Now there are many other things that Jesus Christ accomplished while he was on this planet. He came, for example, to reveal the character of God.

God is invisible just as he is immortal and yet God becomes visible and tangible to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He is God manifested in the flesh. He is God made visible to our sight.

He is God put within our reach. He that has seen me, says Jesus, has seen the Father. He came to reveal the invisible God so that we might know what God is really like by looking at the character of Jesus.

He came not only to reveal but to teach. He was a masterful teacher. There was clarity and charity as well as authority in the teaching of Jesus and his priceless parables are still models of communication today.

He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes who depended on somebody else's authority to make themselves look plausible. He came to reveal, he came to teach, he came to heal. He dealt with all manner of sickness in his day in order to demonstrate the validity of his claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

The victims of leprosy, the blind, the lame, they received from Jesus a healing touch. But he came to do more than reveal the invisible God. He came to do more than teach us truth.

He came to do more than heal the body. He came to save. As the angel told Joseph the carpenter of Nazareth, call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.

As Jesus himself was to say, the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. As Paul acknowledged this is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world sinners to save. As Paul put it in his first letter to Timothy, there is but one mediator between God and men and his name is Jesus Christ who gave himself to loose us and liberate us from our sins.

The Apostle Peter confronting the power structure of his day made up of enemies of Jesus told it like it is and he put it plainly to them that only in Jesus Christ could there be salvation for anyone. There is no other name given among men under heaven whereby we may be saved but the name of Jesus. And the people of Samaria realized the truth of it all when they said, the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

We need to be saved and we are saved by Jesus Christ. He is the one who is the Good Shepherd in search of that lost sheep. He is the Son who sets us free from the bondage of moral evil for if the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed.

He is the one who sees us in our state of separation and draws us back to God as the mediator, the go between, the sure way back to the Father's heart and restores us to fellowship. He is the one who lifts the sentence that we deserve and takes it upon himself willing to be condemned that there might be no more condemnation for us who trust in him. We need to be saved, that's the bad news, but we are saved by Christ, that's the good news and that's where the accent has to be.

But one thing more, and here it becomes intensely personal for us, we not only need to be saved and we are saved by Christ but we are saved through faith. And there are four R's that are related to this. We speak of elementary education as involving the three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Well here are four R's related to this matter of being saved through faith. First, we need to rely on the person of Jesus Christ. In French Equatorial Africa or what used to be French Equatorial Africa, there is a tribe called the Kabbalakus and in the course of Bible translation they came through with this flash of insight that makes the matter real.

And they said the Savior is one who takes us by the hand. That's exactly what he does. He takes us by the hand and leads us back to the God from whom we have fled and from whom we use a thousand disguises to continue hiding.

He is the one who takes us by the hand and leads us back into fellowship with the Heavenly Father's heart. And we need to rely on the person of Jesus. We need to lean on him.

We need to rely on him to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. That is what faith involves, relying on the person of Jesus Christ. Second, it means resting on the sufficiency of his saving work.

It means resting on the sufficiency of what he did to atone for my sin. In that memorable allegory, Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan put it in great simplicity like this. He says the pilgrim is going uphill.

That would be hard enough. But on his back he bears a crushing load, the load of his guilt on account of sin. And he tries to climb and climb and the exertion is getting the best of him until he comes to a place where there is a cross and beneath and beyond that cross an open grave yawning wide.

And when he comes to the cross, when he realizes that the penalty for his sin has been paid in full by Jesus who took his place, the burden of sin aggravated by guilt and judgment rolls from his shoulder, tumbles to the ground, keeps on rolling until it comes to that open sepulcher and there is lodged to be seen no more. That's faith. Relying on the person of Jesus and resting on the sufficiency of his saving work that Jesus paid it all in full when he gave himself to atone for our sin.

Rely on his person, rest in the sufficiency of his saving work, and renounce any idea whatsoever of human merit. That is not easy to do because of human pride. Some people think that they can accumulate merit by passing a resolution.

This is what I will do. I will try to be better. I will try to shape up.

I will try to improve. And we think that we can accumulate merit merely by wishing that it were so. There are others who feel that if they undergo a particular kind of ritual, their sins will be taken away and they will enter the kingdom of God.

But ritual only is external, and ritual only has saving significance if it's related to an internal reality. What good is it to be baptized with water if we are not baptized with the Holy Spirit who, like holy fire, burns away the moral rubbish that is in our personalities? What good is it for us to partake of the Lord's Supper if we do not have faith, which is the mouth of the soul, to feed on the virtues of Jesus Christ and internalize them for our benefit? What good is it for us to be in church if we are not also in Christ, related to him, plugged into him, so that all our liabilities are transferred to him and all his assets are transferred to us? Mere external religion can be something that insulates us against considering our relationship to Jesus Christ. And some people, believe it or not, have thought that they could use their resources and buy their way into God's favor.

That cannot be done. If you and I would be saved by Jesus, we must give up every effort to save ourselves in order that we may rely on his person and rest in the sufficiency of his work. For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

A famous pair of brothers in the Scotland of the last century were the Bonner brothers. One is largely known today because he wrote a marvelous biography of a saint of God named Robert Murray McShane, and the other has attained a deserved measure of fame as a poet whose hymns put into verse the teaching of the Word of God. And precisely on this matter of renouncing any idea of accumulating merit, he wrote these words, Not what these hands have done can save this guilty soul.

Not what this toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole. Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God. Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.

Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin. Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within. Thy love to me, O God, not mine, O Lord, to thee, can rid me of this dark unrest and set my spirit free.

Thy grace alone, O God, to me can pardon speak. Thy power alone, O Son of God, can this sore bondage break. I bless the Christ of God.

I rest on love divine. And with unfaltering lip and heart, I call this Savior mine. That's what it's about.

Years ago, I was taught that the meaning of the word faith was locked up in the very letters that make up the word. F-A-I-T-H. Forsaking all, I take him.

Relying on his person, resting in the sufficiency of his work for me at the cross, renouncing any idea of human merit that I may crave divine mercy, and one thing more, receive the blessings of the gospel. For this is what faith does, and the Puritans were right when they said that faith is the apprehending organ of the soul. By faith, we see God's truth.

By faith, we hear God's voice. By faith, we taste and see that the Lord is good. By faith, we reach out and grasp the things which God offers us in the gospel.

Faith not only relies and rests and renounces, but it receives. Receive what? The forgiveness of God. Receive what? Peace of conscience.

Receive what? The joy of sins forgiven and an account with God that has finally been squared. Receive what? A sense of purpose for life in a world of meaninglessness. Receive what? The hope of the eventual perfection of my spirit and the resurrection of my body when Jesus comes again in power and glory.

These are blessings that we receive when we turn from any idea of human merit, of trying to earn favor with God, and we receive, rest, and rely on Jesus Christ alone. Have you ever had the urge to write your own epitaph for your tombstone? I've thought about that occasionally. As the years go on, you think about it a little more often.

Well, there's a tombstone in Britain that bears this epitaph written by the man who is buried in that grave, and all but the last sentence came from his mind and pen. Here's the way it reads. Here lie the earthly remains of John Berridge, late vicar of Everton, servant of Jesus Christ, who loved his master and his work, and after running his master's errand for many years, was called to wait on him above.

Reader, art thou born again? No salvation without new birth. I was born in sin February 1716. I remained ignorant of my fallen state till 1730.

I fled to Jesus alone for refuge in 1756, and I fell asleep in Jesus January 22nd, 1793. Have you fled to Jesus alone for refuge? Have you turned from self to him to let him do for you what you could never do for yourself? This is what it means to find forgiveness. This is what it means to be free from the penalty of sin.

This is what it means to be reconciled with God. It's like being born all over again with a clean, fresh start. All the world's religions are based on man's supposed ability to earn standing with God and are doomed to fail.

Only Christianity is a redemptive and saving religion, where it is not man who clammers up to God, but God who reaches down and lifts man up into the nearness of his presence. What must I do to be saved? The answer for your need and mine is found in this. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

And that same way of salvation is open to those who belong to your family and to others if they will but enter in with a single step of saving faith. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, how can we thank you for sending Jesus to be our Savior? Forbid that we should cling to the slightest shred of merit.

Enable us by faith to receive your mercy and rejoice in your grace. And then, as sinners who have been forgiven and restored to fellowship, help us to live for the honor and glory of our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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