

# The Savior Who Seeks You

by Stewart Ruch

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*Jesus seeks us by disrupting our lives, and his message of salvation and rescue is the only hope for humanity.*

**Duration:** 19:45

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:7, Matthew 10:34, Luke 2:11, Luke 19:10, John 6:44

**Topics:** "Salvation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts a story of a mysterious man who asks his friend to meet him at his office. The man insists on secrecy and provides specific instructions for the meeting. The speaker then poses two questions: how does Jesus seek us and how can we seek him? The short answer is that Jesus seeks us by disrupting our lives. The speaker explains that although the angel announced peace on earth at Jesus' birth, true peace can only be achieved through the disruption of the violence and anxiety in our lives. The speaker concludes by offering various ways to seek Jesus and inviting the audience to respond spiritually.

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## Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. Today's sermon from our 2016 Christmas Eve service is by Bishop Stuart Ruck. Many many centuries ago, one of the great thinkers and philosophers of all time, one of the great Christian thinkers, Augustine, wrote this sentence.

He wrote it about Jesus. Jesus is the you in this sentence. Augustine said, you sought us when we were not seeking you, but you sought us that we might begin to seek you.

You sought us, Augustine said about Jesus, when we were not seeking you, but you sought us that we might begin seeking you. If you want a doorway into sort of the vastness of Christmas and at least an initial understanding of what is Christmas, Christmas is captured by that quote that Jesus sought us before we began to seek him, that we might begin to seek him. Let me tell you a story I heard, a remarkable story just a month ago, that illustrates this principle of Augustine's.

I was in Nigeria a month ago and with a pastor friend of mine. He pastors in the central part of Nigeria where many Christians and many Muslims live together. There is sometimes significant conflict in that regard.

He told me a story where he said that there was a day when a man came to his church and asked for him, but he wasn't there. So his secretary took a note and told my pastor friend that someone stopped, but they wouldn't leave their name. They left immediately after I told them that you weren't here.

He said a week later he was in his bath at home and a man came to the door, rang the doorbell and his wife answered it and he asked if he could see the pastor at his home. His wife said, hold on a moment. She went and told my friend that someone was there.

He thought maybe this is the same person that was there before. He said, please ask him to wait a minute. She went back, asked the man at the door, please wait just a moment.

With great nervousness and looking around the entire time, he waited, shifting his weight back and forth. My friend hurriedly came to the door and this man said, I cannot tell you my name. I cannot tell you who I am, but this is my address.

This is my office. Would you please come there in 20 minutes? Don't come in 15 because I'll arrive at my office in 15 minutes. Come in 20 and say that you want to see the supervisor.

So my friend did exactly as he was told, knowing that indeed this whole subterfuge might lead to great personal danger. It's not uncommon for pastors to be targeted in that part of the world. But he went.

He came to a civil office building, a government office building. He went to the front desk. He asked for the supervisor.

She said, yes, I'll take you to his office. She walked him back to an office. He walked in.

The man who he recognized shut the door, closed the blinds, leaned over his desk, and in a whisper said, I am a Muslim and I am having repeated dreams where Esau, Arabic for Jesus, said, I am a Muslim. Continues to appear to me. And I had to find someone and tell them, can you help me, he said.

Can you explain to me who this Jesus is and why he keeps appearing to me? My pastor friend said, well, tell me more. He said, well, he appears in my dreams and he teaches me, he said, from the Bible. But he said, what prompted me to come find you is that last week it wasn't a dream.

My wife and I were saying our Islamic prayers as we do several times a day. As we were doing so, a light literally came from under the door. And then through the door, like in my dreams, this same man who I knew to be Jesus literally appeared to us, he said.

And he taught us from the Bible. And then he said, I want you to find one of your co-workers and tell him, stop being so wicked to your wife. So the man said, I did what Jesus said.

He had a lot of authority. And I went to the office the next day and I went to this man who I know nothing about his personal life. And I leaned over at his desk and I said quietly, not to shame him, stop being wicked to your wife.

He got a look on his face where I knew he was being wicked to his wife. He's like, Jesus was right. This man was being wicked to his wife and Jesus wanted him to stop being cruel to his wife.

He said, do you know what Jesus is like? He said this to my pastor friend. Do you know, he said, that when you see him, this is a direct quote, that when you're with him, you never want to stop being with him

after that. This Muslim man became a Christian through the friendship of my pastor friend.

He remains a Christian. It's kept hidden at this point. He's hoping to move cities so he can be more public about his Christian faith, but it'd be highly endangered where he lives to be overt about his Christian faith with this particular background.

Jesus began to seek us, Augustine said, so that we might begin to seek him. And the story of Christmas, a story that Father Brett just read so beautifully from one of the writers of the New Testament, a man named Luke, who came to know Jesus spiritually. He didn't necessarily know Jesus personally as other writers of the Bible did.

In this story that Luke tells about Jesus's birth, about what we as Christians call the incarnation, simply meaning the embodiment, the enfleshment of God on earth, where we actually and literally believe that God became a human being in Jesus Christ and interrupted and dislodged and disrupted human history in a way that could, if we are to seek him after he's begun to seek us, provide salvation for any who, like this Muslim man, would come to say, I just want to be with him as much as I possibly can. Two questions, two short questions for tonight. How is it that Jesus seeks us and how can we then seek him? How does Jesus seek us and how can we then seek him? For the first part, the short answer is that Jesus seeks us by disrupting our lives.

That's the short answer. Jesus seeks us by disrupting our lives. Yes, if you know anything about the Bible, you're thinking, didn't the angel say peace on earth when he announced Jesus's birth? He did.

The problem is there isn't peace on earth. So for there to be peace on earth or peace in our own lives, there has to be a disruption of the profound violence of the earth and the violence and emotional anxiety of our own lives. So we get to the peace, but only through the disruption of Jesus.

That's the short answer to how did Jesus come and how can you seek him. In several minutes, I will provide actually an opportunity for you not only to listen to me, but I'll provide an opportunity this evening for you to give a very brief but very significant spiritual response in terms of how to seek him. Seeking Jesus is not theoretical.

I can't just kind of put it out there and say, this is what it is. I actually invite you into a way of seeking Jesus. And I'll give a few options tonight for however you decide you may want to seek Jesus.

We read and we hear this announcement in verse 11, which is there in your order of service in your bulletin. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior. Well-known phrase, often heard if you have any background or hear any carols, perhaps fresh to you tonight, that phrase.

But when he's announced as a Savior, what is being said is that there is a saving needed. When Jesus is called Savior as the infant, what is understood behind that is that we as human beings and this world are in incredible need of salvation. This is an instantaneously humbling title for us, for Jesus to be given.

Indeed, we hear of many lords or kings prior to Jesus in this text. We hear of Caesar Augustus, who had been called Lord, who had been understood as a Savior. In the context of the day when that would be read, to call someone else Savior, someone else Lord, is a revolutionary kind of disruptive throw-everything-over kind of comment.

Savior. There was a 20th century philosopher, a man named Ernest Becker, not an explicit Christian or Christian thinker, but he argued that every person's life is an attempt to save themselves. That basically every human being, this was his philosophy, has a kind of salvation project that they're enacting and that they are trying in some way, somehow, in different ways, based on their culture and their background and their personalities, to save themselves.

He called it an immortality project. They were somehow trying to save ourselves from death, save ourselves from disease, save ourselves from dismay, save ourselves from depression, that every human being is actually energized around this. It's a fascinating paradigm and one that I would encourage you to reflect on.

I find Becker's comment, as somebody who's studying the Bible and as a student of the Bible and a follower of Jesus, to be very, very perceptive. Indeed, I think this goes to the heart of what it means to have a sinful nature, is that we are indeed about the work of saving ourselves. There's a myriad of ways that this can happen.

Let me just suggest a few this evening in which we attempt the work of self-salvation. The first would be salvation by right living. This is a salvation by living life perfectly.

This is often appealing to high-achieving individuals, type A++ individuals who actually are really good at doing things right. And so the thought that if I actually perfectly use my money and I perfectly keep my lawn green, not a dandelion is seen come April, and I perfectly handle my relationships in a way that's respectful, that if I somehow or another live life right, and note that right is your own definition of right, but if I live life right, then I will somehow save myself from death, from destruction, from some kind of misery. Salvation by right living.

Indeed, some people confuse this with Christianity. They think Christianity says you have to live rightly. You have to live by a kind of strict certain way.

And it is true that Christians do live by a particular code, but we do so for a very different reason than trying to save ourselves. Second, salvation by self. Salvation by science.

And I mean this in particular, a certain view of science, because there are so many broad applications of the scientific method and ways of thinking about science. But by this I mean salvation by hard analysis. Salvation by data.

Salvation by facts. Salvation by saying, I don't believe anything I can't see, I can't prove, I can't know, I can't compute, I can't algorithm. That somehow when I know that I have those things, and I know that I can prove those things, and I can lay it all out there, then that's something, whatever it might be, that I can trust.

And never mind that great scientists themselves compare what they work. They work more to the work of humanities and more to the work of imagination than often to the work of facts and data. So I use that term loosely, but it's a salvation by having everything clearly laid out.

Here's the third. Salvation by staging. I didn't know that staging meant something other than simply a stage until we tried to sell our house.

And when you sell a house, you learn about staging, because someone comes to your house and they tell you, here's how you have to stage your house to sell it. And you might find it absolutely hilarious to invite someone like this, a stager, into your house when you're like Catherine and me, we have six kids, eight of us in a 1,600 square foot house. It was actually like a half an hour sitcom having a stager come into our house.

So she comes to the porch and she's like, whoa, whoa, those are a lot of shoes. Okay. She said, you got to live for the next, you know, months until you sell your house as if you were a family of four.

We said four kids. No, she said two kids, two adults. She's like, these are just tons of shoes.

How about at least you have one pair of shoes for every kid? I said, that's what we've done. No appliances in the kitchen, but we cook in the kitchen. No, you don't.

Not anymore. Salvation by staging is staging a life through your social media presence, through your appearance. It's salvation by image.

You can't actually live that way in the same way that you can't live in a kitchen without appliances. So you actually live two different lives. You have your own life that you live that's got all kinds of stuff going on and hiddenness and secrets and shame.

And you live your life staged. And you think that somehow, just maybe, salvation by staging might forestall miseries and pain. The fourth category to me is the most poignant.

It's the salvation is impossible category. That's the category for those who tried salvation by self and have totally given up. They just don't believe in salvation at all.

It's a hopelessness. It's a grim, depressed place to be. It often comes after several years or a crisis, a deep disappointment with what you view was the act of God, a lack of act of God in your life.

Salvation is impossible. I remember seeing something in Brazil where I was traveling that, to me, captures the picture of what it feels like to live salvation is impossible. It was a toddler about four years old.

It was in the midst of Rio's busy, busy streets. And the toddler was wearing just a pair of shorts, no shoes, no shirt. The toddler was completely by himself.

There were no parents anywhere around. And I watched him cross this extremely busy street in the center of Rio completely by himself. And that's what salvation is impossible is like living.

Danger and cars whizzing all around, vulnerable and exposed. It's completely by yourself. Jesus basically said, outside of salvation and me, there are two kinds of people.

There are those who are seeking salvation by themselves, from themselves. They're like folks who are sick and don't know it, so they don't think they need a physician. And then there are those who have given up.

There are those who just think it's impossible. They know they're sick. They know they need a physician, but they don't believe the doctor will ever come.

And he said, I love both. I've come for both. But it's the latter group that my heart especially breaks for.

It's the latter group. It's those like that four-year-old toddler in the middle of Rio all by himself that I came as an infant, that I came vulnerable, that I came exposed, that I came absolutely accessible, that I came by supernatural power alone. Jesus was not born of male and female like every other human being was born.

He was absolutely and completely human, and yet his birth was utterly and completely supernatural. As I often say to folks at res, if you believe this, you're out of your minds. Because it was the most profound and supernatural event.

Out of nothing came a full human being where male and female did not come together. But indeed we read that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary. The presence of God enveloped Mary.

And God's presence has the power to bring life where there's no life. God's presence has the power to bring salvation where there's no salvation. God's presence has the power to bring rescue where there appears to be no rescue.

That's the incarnation. That's the message of Christmas and oh how it disrupts our salvation projects. Oh, it overturns our life by staging or our life by science or our life by right living.

There is no way to be saved according to the Scriptures, according to Christmas, but by the saving power of Jesus who was born with our nature that he may overcome as a human being the power of sin. He would go to the cross as a human being. He would take the sin of the world upon him on that Roman instrument of execution, and he would vanquish sin in and through himself, in and through his body.

He would save us from saving ourselves. Transcription by CastingWords

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