

Salvation – What is It

The Bible has many ways of describing the kind of relationship he is wanting to draw people into with himself, but Jesus' response to Zacchaeus, after he had come down from the tree he had climbed to sneak a look at Jesus, sums it up very well:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Lu 19:10).

Salvation is the really big, all-encompassing word used in the Bible that describes the why and how God goes about giving us the opportunity to come back into relationship with him.

Through this process we are moved from the loss of separation from God because of sin that breaks relationship with God, back into the redemption that secures our reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus. And ultimately, this all leads to our resurrection into the eternal life with God for which we were originally created for but were, and are still, needing to grow into.

Some of the different words used to describe 'our salvation' include redemption, justification, regeneration, reconciliation, forgiveness, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. It really is a big, glorious word. And we will explore the meaning behind these words in this series.

Salvation in the Old Testament

Our understanding of salvation begins in the Old Testament, and the greatest example of God's salvation for Israel is seen in their dramatic rescue by God to escape from Egypt and out of the clutches of the Pharaoh's dictatorial rulership –

²⁹ But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. ³⁰ That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. (Ex 14:29-30)

As we think about what this 'salvation' meant for the Israelites at the time, it meant – **freedom** from slavery; release from oppression and the injustices of tyranny. It also meant the freedom and security to discover their true identity as God's people and the purpose God had for them as they eventually became the nation of Israel.

Salvation in the New Testament

While the main focus of salvation in the Old Testament revolved around Israel as a nation among other nations, there was a shift that took place in the New Testament with Jesus showing a greater interest in the individual, which involved challenging personal attitudes; healing sick bodies; freeing people from oppressing demonic bondages; and releasing people from institutional injustices.

Salvation in the New Testament derives from the Greek word *sōzō*, meaning, to deliver *out of danger* and be brought *into safety* – in short, to be rescued from danger.

It is used of God *rescuing* believers *from* the penalty and power of sin, sickness, and Satan. You see, sin breaks relationship with God – it is when we choose to go our own way rather than God's way. This commenced in the Garden of Eden and still continues today.

This is why Paul could say: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Rom 6:23)

Let me simplify what sin actually is – it's a lot like a child deciding to disobey their parents. It usually starts with a little 'I want' kindling a fire in the mind (we are all very familiar with this process). As that little 'I want' fire is starting to flame, if it is blown on with a breathe of 'self-desire', it will begin to flame up some more. Should we begin to fan up that flame with some stronger puffs of 'self-determination', it will quite likely flare up into a full-blown 'I will' decision to do our own thing.

So what started as a simple 'I want' can easily become a rebellious 'I will', if not careful.

But God is fully aware of these tendencies within us, and has made an avenue of escape for us; if we are willing to trust him and allow him access to transform our inner motivations.

And again, *"⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved."* (Eph 2:4-5)

Adam's sin, which resulted in our spiritual death, has been cancelled out through the provisions of God's grace in Jesus Christ, bringing us back into the ongoing development of our relationship with God.

As we mentioned earlier, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost – meaning, all those who had lost their direct connection with God that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden prior to seeking their own solutions, resulting in the loss of their direct connection with God.

A Great Example of Salvation at Work in a Person's Life

Luke gives us the account of Zacchaeus, who represents everyone who was trying to get on with life in their own strength.

Now Zacchaeus was a tax collector, and had made a lot of money from his tax collecting. Let's take a moment to understand his situation in life.

His problem was, he was a Jew, but he was working for the oppressive Roman government, and making his wealth at the expense of his own people by extorting from them more than he should have. He was not a liked man in his local community; in fact, he was despised by them. But neither was he accepted by his Roman overlords, who saw him as an outsider – not one of them – just someone who worked for them for his own benefit.

One day Jesus came to his town of Jericho, and Zacchaeus wanted to sneak a peek at this – man who he had heard about – maybe he had an answer for the dissatisfactions he was experiencing within his own life. Being a short man, he climbed a tree to get a better view

of Jesus above the crowd.

But, at the precise spot under the tree that Zacchaeus had climbed into, Jesus stopped, looked up, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down right now! I want to go to your house today!"

The people grumbled among themselves because they knew what a rotten apple he was, and could not believe that Jesus had gone to the house of such a bad man. But Jesus' action of meeting Zach exactly where he was at, and expecting no immediate change except a willingness to get down out of his tree and take Jesus to his house, had a dramatic effect within Zach's heart.

Having spent some time with Jesus, Zach announced to Jesus and to all who could hear him, that he was going donate all his wealth to the poor, and whatever he had cheated people of, he would pay back fourfold – what an amazing transformation; a total turn around!!!

Jesus' response is so beautiful:

⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost' (Lu 19:9-10).

This is exactly what Jesus is wanting to do in each of our lives. He will meet us exactly where we are at, and simply asks us to let him into our hearts; into our lives; into our homes.

If we are willing to do that, he will begin to spring clean our lives from the inside.

He will start to challenge our self-centred and self-serving attitudes, and begin to put a fresh sense of purpose in our minds. He will begin to change our sense of personal identity that will shift our focus off ourselves onto how we can serve others, restoring our relationships and enhancing our community. This is what salvation is all about!!!

To sum up here, the writer of the Book of Hebrews has this to say to us:

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ² For since the message spoken through angels was binding, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. (Heb 2:1-3)