

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 1 December 2002

No. T0242

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Four Great Things in the Bible: So Great Salvation - Hebrews 12:3

I like to explain the meaning of doctrinal subjects by the use of illustrations. The best illustrations are to be found in the Scriptures themselves. Today's subject, salvation, is first illustrated by Noah's ark, "in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" 1 Peter 3:20. But it is most comprehensively pictured in God's deliverance of the Children of Israel out of Egypt; then throughout their long wilderness journey, and finally when He took them into the promised land of Canaan. The term "salvation" is actually used in the Old Testament for their total deliverance out of Egypt and into the Land. Moses said to them as they approached the Red Sea: "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today..." Exodus 14:13. The Prophet Isaiah commented on their forty years of wanderings in the wilderness: "...So He became their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" Isaiah 63:8-9. Many Psalms recount these experiences, and express deep the longings for that ultimate national salvation that their Messiah will bring. For example Psalm 80, where Asaph three times cries: "Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" verses 3, 7 and 19. The hope of this salvation has kept them alive as a nation throughout their turbulent existence.

At the end of Hebrews 1, the writer picks up this theme of inheriting salvation. He opens chapter 2 by stating, that in comparison with the salvation from all their enemies that their fellow - Jews were expecting, Christians had obtained "a greater salvation". (The rest of the letter goes on to show, by contrast, it was also a much "better" salvation than the nation's escape out of Egypt!) In Hebrews 2:3 we have the title for today's talk: "how shall we escape if we neglect **so great a salvation**, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him."

When the Israelites arrived at the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit, and the hills hemming them in, they were in great danger. God saved them from perishing! Salvation, or being saved, means just this: being rescued from threatening dangers. The Christian gospel of salvation is about people being saved from all spiritual and moral dangers that afflict them because they are sinners of Adam's race. The Bible informs us that every one of us is lost in a spiritual sense due to disobeying, and sinning against, God. We are in danger of eternally perishing! We need a Saviour, and the New Testament opens with this good news: "...you shall call his name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" Matthew 1:21. When Jesus visited the house of Zaccheus, a man who was publicly known as a sinner, He said: "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" Luke 19:10.

I therefore ask you: are you lost? Or have you believed "the gospel of Christ"? "It is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"! Romans 1:16. If you are not saved, I must warn you that you are in danger of being eternally lost. 1 Corinthians 1:18 explains: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing". There is no other way of avoiding damnation: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" Acts 4:12. "For [God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. We...plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" 2 Corinthians 5:21-6:2.

Let me give seven reasons why this is "so great a salvation":

1. Sin is a massive problem.
2. God is the author of salvation.
3. The great cost of salvation.
4. The greatness of the Saviour.
5. Salvation completely answers man's plight.
6. It brings God's blessings.
7. Its eternal nature makes it so great.

Reason 1. It is so great because it answers the sin problem.

Sin is a world-wide, all-time problem, affecting every person who has ever lived - from the first man, Adam, until now, and onto the final generation of mankind. Paul describes their sorry history in the first three chapters of Romans to show that: "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23. The witness of creation, conscience and commandment render men without excuse - especially the law: "...that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" Romans 3:19.

Reason 2. God is its author

"...God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" 1 Timothy 2:4. It reveals His love and grace - that is His nature, character and disposition. All that God is comes out in the Gospel! He is also "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" 2 Peter 3:9. When we, through Christ, trust in the living God, we come to realise that He "is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe" 1 Timothy 4:9.

Reason 3. God provided it at great personal cost to Himself

He gave His best when He gave us His Son! "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" John 3:16-17, two of the most well-known Gospel verses. I once saved a little girl from certain harm when she ran behind me into a road as a car approached. Instinctively I put out my hand to stop her. It was a natural reaction, but it didn't cost me anything. But for lost and sinful man the hymn writer aptly comments:

*"We joy in our God, and we sing of that love,
So sovereign and free, which did His heart move,
When lost our condition, all ruined, undone,
He saw with compassion, and spared not His Son."*

Reason 4. The Greatness of our Salvation

It also involved God's Son giving His life, as the Good Shepherd, for His sheep. He is both "...our great God and Saviour!" Titus 2:13. Hebrews 1 presents the greatness of God the Son, in whom God has finally and fully spoken, before He is introduced as "the captain of salvation" in 2:10.

Reason 5. It is "so great a salvation" because it fully and completely answers mankind's predicament.

We are sinners, who are not only guilty, but also condemned, captive to and corrupted by sin, far away from God in spiritual death; and facing many dangers, including that of eternal punishment.

Although we are guilty before God, the great news is "...that through [Jesus] is preached...the forgiveness of sins" Acts 13:38. God can forgive us because: "... [Jesus], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God", enabling God to say: "...Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" Hebrews 10:12 and 17. Jesus was our substitute, who took the punishment for our sins when He died upon the cross.

The law of God has caused the righteous verdict that the whole world is "guilty before God". But by Jesus "everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" Acts 13:39. God also counts the believer righteous: "[Righteousness] shall be imputed to us who believe in [God] who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences, and raised because of our justification" Romans 4:24-25.

Sin also entangles people in all kinds of spiritual and moral bondage, from which they cannot free themselves. In Romans 3:9 "both Jews and Gentiles" are proved "that they are all under sin", that is, they are controlled by it. The Gospel brings "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" to free us from its power, and also from the curse of the law. Jesus paid the price: "...you were...redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" 1 Peter 1:18-19.

Worst of all, sin has alienated mankind from God. The full tragedy is described by Paul in Ephesians 4:17-19: "...Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." They are at enmity with God. When the Lord Jesus came into the world, "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to

them” 2 Corinthians 5:19. However, it was necessary for Christ to die to bring us back to God: “...By Him to reconcile ... [you] ... through the blood of His cross” Colossians 1:20.

The passage in Ephesians 4 shows that sin has polluted the minds of men, overrunning them with every kind of evil. Therefore sanctification, or making people holy in God’s sight, comes to us in the Gospel: “...we have been sanctified though the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” Hebrews 10:10. Corinth was a city that epitomised the abominations of the then heathen world, but, after listing most of the different types of gross sins people have committed, Paul was able to write to the church there: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” 1 Corinthians 6:11.

Men sin because they have inherited a corrupt nature from Adam. Corruption has affected every part of our lives. We need a new nature by being born again. The Lord Jesus introduced this theme of the Gospel when He said: “...Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” John 3:5-6. This work of moral cleansing, which is by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, complements the cleansing from sins by the blood of Christ.

The state of spiritual death is expressed in Ephesians 2:1-2 as being: “...dead in trespasses and sins”. But at the same time “the children of disobedience” are very much alive “...to the course of this world” and to the “the prince of the power of the air”, the devil. God has acted in the Gospel to bring new life in Christ. Jesus said: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the [spiritually] dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” John 5:25.

To summarise point 5: God has fully answered the complete havoc caused by sin with “the gospel of salvation”.

- Sin brought guilt, but the Gospel brings forgiveness;
- Sin brought condemnation, but the Gospel brings justification;
- Sin brought bondage, but the Gospel brings redemption;
- Sin brought alienation from God, but the Gospel brings reconciliation;
- Sin brought perils of every kind, but the Gospel brings salvation;
- Sin brought pollution, but the Gospel brings sanctification;
- Sin brought corruption, but the Gospel brings new birth;
- Sin brought spiritual death, but the Gospel brings new life in Christ.

The phrase “so great a salvation” adequately describes all of these Gospel truths added together.

Reason 6. It is also “so great a salvation” because of the many blessings it confers upon believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Some of these are stated in Titus 3:4-7: “But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” The blessing of mercy means that we are not given what we deserve as sinners. By grace we receive special blessings: the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of eternal life, which is possessed now but consummated in heaven. As heirs, believers are the children and the sons of God, blessed by Him “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” Ephesians 1:3.

Reason 7. Salvation is eternal in its character and in its effect. It saves, it keeps, and it takes us to heaven.

Once we are saved, we are saved forever because we look back to what Christ has done through His death and resurrection. The Lord Jesus guarantees our safekeeping: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” John 10:28-30.

But what about all the dangers of this present life? Let’s go back to the example of the Children of Israel in their wilderness journey, where they encountered many difficulties, out of which “the Angel of His Presence” saved them. This reminds us of the indwelling Spirit of God, who guards and guides us, just like the cloud-by-day and the fire-by-night did for Israel. He is present with us because Jesus has gone into heaven, where He, our great High Priest, “is able to save [completely] ... since He always lives to make intercession for [us]” Hebrews 7:25.

At present, then, we are being “saved by His life”, but there is a future aspect of salvation. In our illustration, the Children of Israel eventually arrived safely in Canaan. Paul explains in Philippians 3:20-21 that we will be taken safely

home to heaven by a final act of the Lord Jesus as Saviour: "...Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

To conclude: We have been saved from the penalty of our sins. We are being saved, preserved from the power and practice of sin. We shall be saved when we are perfected from the presence of sin. A text we could use for salvation is 2 Corinthians 1:10: "God delivered us...and does deliver us...He will...deliver us".

In closing, let me challenge you with the question in Hebrews 2:3: "...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" My career has been in the chemical industry where safety is always paramount. I recall seeing a safety film about confined spaces. It featured several workers who saw a colleague collapsed inside a chemical reactor and yet who all ignored the evidences of danger. They all climbed in, one after another, were all overcome with fumes, and collapsed into a pile on the base of the vessel! It reminded me of the broad road to destruction, with many on it. It is also so easy to let the Gospel, after hearing it, slip away; or even to ignore its warnings. "For if God...did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly...then the Lord knows how to...reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgement." 2 Peter 2:4-5 and 9. It was only when the Philippian jailer was faced with reality of certain death and of judgement that he cried out: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? The reply was clear and precise: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" Acts 16:30-31.

Let's pray. Gracious God, we pray that everyone who hears the message of the Gospel today will believe it. Then they, along with us, will be able to thank You that "we have not been appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ", the Saviour who died for us. Amen.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.