

### *Missing Out on Salvation*

**Psalm 85:7-10 CEB** Show us your faithful love, LORD! Give us your salvation! <sup>8</sup> Let me hear what the LORD God says, because he speaks peace to his people and to his faithful ones. Don't let them return to foolish ways. <sup>9</sup> God's salvation is very close to those who honor him so that his glory can live in our land. <sup>10</sup> Faithful love and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed.

**CEB 2 Corinthians 6:1** Since we work together with him, we are also begging you not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> He says, I listened to you at the right time, and I helped you on the day of salvation. Look, now is the right time! Look, now is the day of salvation!

**CEB Luke 19:1** Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. <sup>2</sup> A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. <sup>3</sup> He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today." <sup>6</sup> So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." <sup>8</sup> Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much." <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> The Human One came to seek and save the lost."

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There's a large category of jokes that begin with the phrase, "You know you're getting old when. . ." I suspect that's why some old gospel songs from my childhood have been going through my mind. For a long time, I cringed whenever I remembered some of those old songs because I learned many of them in a church of bad singers with voices long past their prime, searching for the right pitch without any musical instruments to support their efforts. It was a painful experience that was a joyful noise to God, but in my lack of grace it reminded me of fingernails on blackboards. These days, I focus more on the theology of the lyrics than on the musicianship.

A great many of us grew up singing old gospel songs in a wide variety of denominations before we came to be Presbyterians. And no matter what church you did or didn't grow up in, you were probably exposed to gospel songs as part of the Bible Belt culture. A prominent theme in those songs is salvation or being saved, which was short hand for going to heaven when you die. A lot of arguments were about when that saving took place. Some argued that it happened when Jesus died on the cross. Others claim that it takes place when one is properly baptized. Still others declare that salvation only happens at the last judgment when the sheep are separated from the goats as portrayed in Matthew 25. But no matter when you're saved, it's about determining that you will go to heaven. And so we sang about gathering "at the river that flows by the throne of God." We sang about meeting "on that beautiful shore" "in the sweet by and by."

Unfortunately, when we understand salvation in that limited way, our God is too small and our life is deprived. All through the Old Testament, salvation is about rescue from trouble and living in times of *shalom*. Salvation was being saved from slavery in Egypt. Salvation was rescue from conflict and war with Philistines in Palestine. Salvation was release from captivity in Babylon. Salvation was being saved from flood, pestilence, or drought. Salvation was being saved from bad kings and corrupt

government. Salvation was about life here and now. In our reading today from Psalm 85, the writer implores God, "Give us your salvation!" Don't let your people return to foolish ways of living. Salvation is near when God's glory can be alive in the land, where love and truth exist side by side, where righteousness and peace are intertwined. When these conditions exist, then salvation is present in the lives of the people!

When we start reading New Testament scriptures, it's like we put on filters that make salvation seem like "the sweet by and by." But when we read without that presupposition, we find a broader understanding of salvation. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul says that God helped them on the day of salvation. Helped. Past tense. They have experienced salvation. What's more, the present, right now, is also the right time for salvation. You receive God's grace. Don't let it be in vain! Live in salvation, Paul says.

Our gospel lesson today is the story of Zacchaeus. It is a favorite story to tell children. We expect children to like the story because they can relate to being too short to see over a crowd. And children like to climb trees to get a better view of the world around them. The story is unusual because Jesus invites himself to be a guest at Zacchaeus' house. Not only does Jesus invite himself, but Zacchaeus is a tax collector, he collects taxes for the oppressive occupying Roman army. This man is detested by his fellow Jews. And yet, the story concludes with Jesus saying that, "Today, salvation has come to this household." Jesus doesn't say that Zacchaeus will be saved, but that salvation has come. Jesus makes this declaration in response to two things. Zacchaeus has set his charitable giving at the extraordinary level of 50%, and if he has overcharged anyone, he repays with a refund four times the amount that was overcharged. Meticulous honesty has saved him from sloppy bookkeeping, and generosity has saved him from greed.

When we read with eyes open to salvation as a present condition, we begin to see this thought on other passages. In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, he writes about behavior that makes salvation more present in one's life. In chapter thirteen, verses 9-14, Paul urges the reader to wake up from living life on autopilot, wake up from bad and selfish habits. Don't steal, covet, or murder. Don't be consumed with selfish indulgence, committing adultery, drinking too much, and partying too hard. Love your neighbor and do not wrong them. The time has come for you to wake up and fly right and you will find yourself drawing nearer and nearer to salvation.

In Philippians 2: 12-15, we are urged to carry out our salvation, to show the results of our salvation, by desiring to and living in obedience to God. We will, the writer says, shine in contrast to others around us. The same theme is picked up in Titus 2:11-14. God's grace has come and it brings salvation to all people. God's grace teaches us, educates us to live sensible, ethical, and godly lives, to be people who are eager to do good things.

At first glance, this sort of salvation doesn't seem very exciting. It isn't spectacular. Salvation in the present time doesn't involve marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God, there's no gathering at the river that flows by the throne of God, no promise of continuous joy in a land that is fairer than day, and it's life in the here and now, not the sweet by and by. On the other hand, there's a lot that is deeply rich, satisfying, and joyful about living in salvation now.

When we live in obedience to God's will, there's a lot of grief and worry that disappears from our life. When we don't lie, we don't have to remember what we told

who. We don't worry about a random review of our tax return. When we avoid adultery, there's a lot of complication, hurt, and guilt that we don't have to deal with. When we don't covet, there's less frustration and debt in our life. When we don't steal, there's no worry about being caught. So, when we don't behave badly, we don't have to deal with the consequences.

More than that, there are the wonderful consequences that come from the actions of a righteous life. Do you want friends? Be a friend to others. Do you want to be loved? Love others as you love yourself. Do you want to be respected, treated generously, and accepted? Do to others as you wish they would do to you! Do you long for a community of warm, caring friends people you can depend on, folks who share similar values? Be an active part of this faith community, not just an attendee. Jesus declared that he came so that we might have an abundant life, life lived to the fullest.

If your faith is focused on avoiding Hell and getting to Heaven, you're cheating yourself and missing the point. When Heaven and Hell are your motivation, you're focused on yourself. You can't determine whether someone else goes to heaven, you can only worry about yourself. It's the ultimate selfishness. But we are offered and called to live for others, to treat them as we would like to be treated, to love them as we love ourselves, more than that to love others as we are loved by Christ. Our vision is turned outward. Our hands are open, not clenched. And the odd, beautiful thing is, the more attention we give others, the more generously we love others, the more we give, the more we receive. It is life abundant. It is salvation. And if we experience salvation here and now, eternity will take care of itself. Don't miss out on salvation here and now. Amen.

God calls us to live in salvation here and now.  
Take hold of that and live life abundantly!

<sup>9</sup> The commandments, Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't desire what others have, and any other commandments, are all summed up in one word: You must love your neighbor as yourself.

<sup>10</sup> Love doesn't do anything wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is what fulfills the Law.

<sup>11</sup> As you do all this, you know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep. Now our salvation is nearer than when we first had faith.

<sup>12</sup> The night is almost over, and the day is near. So let's get rid of the actions that belong to the darkness and put on the weapons of light.

<sup>13</sup> Let's behave appropriately as people who live in the day, not in partying and getting drunk, not in sleeping around and obscene behavior, not in fighting and obsession.

<sup>14</sup> Instead, dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't plan to indulge your selfish desires. (Rom 13:9-14 CEB)

<sup>NLT</sup> **Philippians 2:12** Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. (Phi 2:12 NLT) "work out or produce"

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my loved ones, just as you always obey me, not just when I am present but now even more while I am away, carry out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

<sup>13</sup> God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good purposes.

<sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling and arguing

<sup>15</sup> so that you may be blameless and pure, innocent children of God surrounded by people who are crooked and corrupt. Among these people you shine like stars in the world (Phi 2:12-15 CEB)

<sup>11</sup> The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people.

<sup>12</sup> It educates us so that we can live sensible, ethical, and godly lives right now by rejecting ungodly lives and the desires of this world.

<sup>13</sup> At the same time we wait for the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.

<sup>14</sup> He gave himself for us in order to rescue us from every kind of lawless behavior, and cleanse a special people for himself who are eager to do good actions. (Tit 2:11-14 CEB)

<sup>9</sup> I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.

<sup>10</sup> The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life--indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.

(Joh 10:9-10 CEB)