

October 27, 2013 - Salvation 101

We are going to continue our series that we've been working on for the last month or so this morning. Our theme for the morning is 'Salvation 101'.

Couple months ago we were down in Iowa and we got to go to the State Fair. As you know, you've heard me talk about the State Fair before, the highlight is food on a stick. So I thought I would begin this morning by sharing a couple of the highlights of the food on a stick at the State Fair this year. The big seller, really was bacon wrapped ribs on a stick. They had the theme going because I also saw a sign, I didn't actually try this but they had, double bacon corn dogs on a stick. And I thought "Wow! I'm not sure if that's good or not." Anyways that got me thinking about bacon, which doesn't take much, so I started wondering about bacon throughout the years and I came across this story from 1104 A.D. in the town of Great Dunbo, Essex. In this town there was a married couple and the Prior of the town had observed this couple and had seen how they had lived together for so many years and how their marriage had been so strong. He decided to reward them and honour them and to do so, he gave them a side of bacon. Like half a pig. Like, here's what I'm going to give you to reward you for all your years of marital faithfulness....and I thought "Excellent, my next anniversary present...taken care of. I know that that's what I can do.. purchase a side of bacon on our next anniversary." I'm not sure how that will go over, but there it was.

In the 17th Century what would happen is that people would save up their money and when they had enough they would go and purchase a side of bacon, a half a pig, I guess, and they would bring it back to their house. When they did it was a very exciting time because everyone knew that once you had this side of bacon that you would have meat for awhile so that was a very exciting time. That's where we coined the phrase "bringing home the bacon". Around the same time, because you had saved up to buy this big chunk of meat and you had it in your house it became a very valuable thing. If anything went wrong, you wouldn't want that valuable side of bacon to get lost or stolen or if there was a fire you may want to yank it out of there before it got cooked. Everyone was very protective of that bacon so if anything was about to go wrong at your neighbour's house you were supposed to go over and one of the things you were supposed to do is take the bacon out of the house. That's where we came up with the phrase "save my bacon".

You may be wondering, what does any of that have to do with anything. Well, I wanted to start there this morning because this morning we're talking about salvation but salvation isn't a word that we typically use. When we want to convey the sentiments that come with salvation we'll typically use some other phrase like "you've really saved my bacon" or we'll say something like "Oh! You are such a life saver" or something like that. We don't really use this word "Salvation" in our normal everyday dialogue. When religious people start talking about salvation they kind of complicate the whole issue because we start using a lot of other big words that we never use, as well. We start using words like: atonement; and

expiation; and propitiation; and justification; and sanctification; and redemption, and all of these big long words that we really don't use anywhere else. It just kind of complicates the whole issue and we really don't really know what we are talking about when we start to use all of these big words.

If you look it up in the dictionary the word 'Salvation' means: A source or cause or means of being saved from harm or risk or loss or destruction, etc. Essentially, salvation means being saved or rescued from something that is evil or bad. That's what salvation is all about. When we talk about salvation in Christian terms, what we're really saying is: Salvation is being saved from the consequences of our sin. Which means, to really understand salvation, we first have to understand sin. And this is where God comes in and our understanding of sin because we said many weeks ago that God is eternal; He's unchanging; He's all powerful; He's all knowing; He's all present; He's all wise; He's the designer and the creator and the giver of life at the very centre and core of God's nature is the desire to have relationship with each other and to have relationship between others. Because that is who God is, He is motivated and you could even say He is obligated and you could even say He is leaps and bounds more qualified than anyone else around to give us instructions and directions on how we should live our life. On how we should protect and preserve our relationships. On how we can experience the very most and the very best of what this life has to offer. He does that, He gives us these instructions and these directions not because He's a big party pooper who doesn't want us to have any fun; but because He desperately wants what is best for us. Because He desperately wants to be in relationship with us. Because He wants us to have that abundant rich full life in this world and He wants us to spend eternity in His presence. Now, the problem is, we don't always follow God's instructions. There are people, even the very best of people, people who are far better than myself and we still make mistakes. We still make bad choices. We still go against God's directions. When that happens, when we go against God's directions, we call that 'Sin'. Sin always comes with consequences. The consequences of sin are not artificially and externally imposed. A penalty like human punishment tends to be but the consequences of sin are the direct and natural effect of our actions.

Consider it this way. This is the way human law works. Human law gives us an instruction and says: You're not allowed to drive through an intersection when the light is red. If a policeman catches you driving through the intersection when the light is red, he will give you a ticket and you will have to pay some amount of money as punishment for having broken the law. This is some arbitrary amount and really the goal of this penalty is to first of all make you regret having broken the rule in the first place and secondly, deter you from ever breaking the rule again. But that's not how God works. The way God works is like this: His instruction is: Do not run red lights because you will cause damage and destruction to yourself and others. And the consequence of not following that instruction is, if you run a red light you will crash into another car. Now, this is not about God catching you. It's not about God getting mad and punishing you, basically what's happening is, God says: "Don't do it because it will hurt you." And when we ignore God's instructions and we do it anyway,

well guess what? We get hurt. Now sin always has consequences and those consequences end up being things that destroy life and damage relationships. So when we talk about salvation, what we're really talking about is a way to undo the destruction and fix the damage the damage that has been caused when we fail to follow God's instructions. There are always consequences for our actions. There is always a cost to make wrong things right. There is always a price that has to be paid. That is really the core of every religion that there has ever been is trying to answer that question: How do we offset the mistakes that we make and the wrong things that we do. Different people and different religions try to answer that question in different ways. Some people will say: Well the answer to that question, is we just live a good life. We do good things and you be a good person and hopefully, you do enough good things to offset the bad things and that's how it all balances out. Some people would go further and say: You need to live a life of penance. Which is just basically saying, I can't do enough good things to offset my bad things so what I'm going to do is a little extra credit work here to work off some of the bad things I have done. So I will make myself do some more unpleasant tasks; some repetitive rituals maybe even some physical punishment; something unpleasant to help work off some of the bad things that I might have done.

Other people say: Well, you rely on the goodness of others, so you make requests of your ancestors or maybe other really godly or saintly people and you ask them to help offset some of your bad. You borrow some of their good and apply it to your bad. Really, that's salvation by credit....so you hope in some way they can help you even out the scales a little bit.

Some people will take this whole principle and say: Well, live a good life is a good start but really what you need to do is live good lives. You can't do enough good in one life and so what you need to do is live a good life and if you live a good life and the good kind of out-weighs the bad, you will move up the scale. And if you live a bad life, you will move down the scale. And so, what you need to do is live enough good lives in a row that somehow you gradually make your way to the top.

Other people will say, the path to salvation comes through conquering the world. Sometimes that's figurative and sometimes that has been literal. People believe that the way to salvation is by conquering the world for God, almost every religion out there has tried this path at one point or another. Probably the quickest example that comes to mind are the things like the Crusades.

Other people say: You know what you need to do? The path to salvation lies in seeing through the illusions. It's time to ignore everything around you and try and somehow ascend to a higher philosophical plain. Free your mind and rise above it all.

Other people will say: The path to salvation comes through knowledge. You've just got to know enough; you've got to figure out enough; you've got to understand enough. And if

we can get a grasp on enough things, if we can figure enough things out, if we can know enough things then we will find the way to our own salvation. The problem with all of those things is that we can never be good enough, or smart enough, or wise enough, to cancel out the consequences of our sin.

According to the Bible there is only one source of salvation and that's Jesus Christ. John 14:6 says: "Jesus told them, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." A couple weeks ago we looked at this and we examined Jesus' purpose and his mission earth which was, to give full and abundant and meaningful and rich life. To give the absolute best life there is to have, to help us live life as God designed it to be from the beginning. Through his teaching and through his ministry, Jesus helped people to know God. He helped people restore their relationship with God. He helped people restore their relationships with one another. He helped people experience eternal life, eternal life that was abundant both in quantity and in quality. He was literally a window into Heaven so people could see who God is. He taught people God's instructions. He showed people God's heart by healing and caring for others. And as incredible as it is that God became flesh and dwelt among us; incredible as it is that God became tangible for us. As John writes in his letter that we saw Him with our own eyes; we touched Him with our own hands; we heard Him with our own ears; as incredible as all that is, the story is incomplete until we arrive at the cross.

You've heard the saying that "All roads lead to Rome"? Well, in the Bible, all roads lead to the cross. Every story, every page, every chapter, every verse, is meant to lead us towards, or lead us back, to the cross. In Christianity, all roads should lead to the cross. Every sermon, every song, every activity, every ministry, should lead ourselves and those around us, back to the cross. You see, the cross is the pivotal point of the Christian faith. Without the cross, Christianity is nothing. But because of the cross, Christianity is like nothing else. Because of the cross the price was paid. Now, you may say: That sounds impossible. That sounds crazy. That sounds unbelievable. And in some cases, it really is. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:18, he says: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."

Don't know if you've noticed this but old game shows seem to be coming back into vogue. The price is right has kind of had a resurgence. On this show, people come down and they try to guess the retail value of different products. The climax of the show is that the two biggest winners of the day face-off in the Showcase Showdown. In the Showcase Showdown they offer these guys these magnificent prize packages and they have to bid on how much they think that particular prize package is worth. Now, imagine that you are on the show and your Showcase Showdown is made up of priceless artefacts. Here are the articles that are in your Showcase Showdown: The ashes of the Mona Lisa; shards of a Ming vase; a completely water damaged and mouldy copy of the Gutenberg Bible; Michael Angelo's statue of David, broken down into gravel. How much would you bid? Now, if those were in their original state, that would be an incredibly valuable package. If they were

somehow able to be restored you might bid something on them in that hope. But like this, when they are damaged, when they are destroyed? How much would you bid for that?

But that's exactly what happened at the cross. Romans 5:6-8 says: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Did you get that? "While we were still sinners" before the cross we were sinners both in status and in action. On the one hand we were carrying the debt of all our past mistakes, and on the other hand we continued to disregard God's instructions and caused further damage. But when Jesus went to the cross, as the old devo. Song said, "he paid a debt he did not owe and I owed a debt I could not pay." On the cross, Jesus paid our debt. He paid the price for us all and therefore as Christians, we live in response to what was accomplished at the cross. At the cross, Jesus did what I could never accomplish, what I could never do for myself. And that is why Christianity is unique, because as a Christian I do not follow certain rules, do certain things, not do certain things; attend church; give my money; help other people; all to earn my salvation. No! As a Christian, I do everything in response to the salvation I have already been given.

You may have seen the sign in the store something like this, that says: "You break it--You buy it!" Seen several different variations on that sign and I think the most clever one I saw looks something like this. It's a shelf of eggs and says: "You buy it--You break it." That's a pretty neat idea. But, the message of the cross, when it comes to my life is this: I broke it but He bought it. Second Corinthians 5:21: "God made him, who had no sin, to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Let me make that just a little more personal. God made him who had no sin to be sin for me, so that in him, I might become the righteousness of God. The sinless son of God died on the cross to pay the price for our sins so that we might be made right with God, to rebuild the destroyed and fix the damaged; to restore our relationships with God; to heal our relationships with one another and three days later he rose from the grave, conquering death, proving once and for all that the price of sin might be death and destruction and damage, but God's gift is eternal life through Christ Jesus. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

Salvation is a gift from God but there is an important distinction to be made. There's a difference between a gift purchased and a gift received. Early this week my wife bought me a gift. She bought me a pair of gloves because I lost the last pair of gloves that she purchased for me. She went out and she went to the store and she found some gloves and she picked them out and she went up to the counter and she paid for them and she purchased them. The price was paid; they were intended for me and she even presented them and offered them to me. But to enjoy the benefits of that gift, to enjoy the benefit of those gloves, at some point, I still had to receive them. At some point I still had to pick them up and put them on. In doing so it in no way earned me the gift or made me deserving of the

gift but I still had to reach out and take hold of it. Well, the same is true of salvation. Jesus has done the work and he has paid the price. Salvation is offered as the free gift of God to each and every one of us. It is set aside for us; it is reserved for us; it is offered to us. But to enjoy the benefits of that gift, we have to receive it. Well, how does that happen? We can't physically reach out and grab it like a pair of gloves. Well, you could make this list in several different ways, but here are a few of the steps that I would outline to the process.

First of all, acceptance. Acceptance is just saying, I don't fully understand it, I can't 100% prove it; and on one level it seems crazy that the God of the Universe would become human and allow Himself to be tortured and killed and even more crazy that the God of the Universe wants have a relationship with ME, so badly that He would go through all that...but nonetheless, I am going to accept in my heart that this is true.

The next step is repentance. Repentance is simply saying "I regret not following God's directions in the past and I commit to following them here on out."

The next step: Baptism. Baptism is a public acknowledgment of my faith in Jesus and my decision to give God control of my life. And if you want to talk more about any of these steps, we'd love to have this conversation with you.

But that's not where the journey ends, that is just the beginning. Because that step is followed by obedience. You see, part of my acceptance of God's gift is my acceptance of His instructions on how to live. I can't accept salvation but continue living a life of damage and destruction. Paul addresses this in Romans 6 when he says: "Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of His wonderful grace? Of course not. We have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?" Salvation through Christ, provides us with a new life and you can't have a new life and keep living your old life at the same time. You see, salvation is, in some ways, a bit of a paradox. And like many things with God it doesn't really fit into our preconceived boxes. Salvation isn't a point, it is a process. 2Corinthians 2:15 says: "For we are to God the aroma to Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." In Phil. 3:12-14, Paul says: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." You see, it's a little bit complicated but salvation is at the same time both immediate, and ongoing. It is at the same time present and future. It is at the same time a state of being and a process. It is something that I have and something that I am experiencing. Salvation is the undoing of sins consequences; the destruction of life and the damaging of relationships and that takes time, in fact, it takes a lifetime to be exact. When we receive the gift, we take hold of salvation but salvation continues it's work every day of our life, redeeming the life that was restored; restoring the relationships that were damaged; reforming us into the person that God designed us to be from the start. And that process

continues until we arrive in Heaven, in the very presence of God. Only then, will we be the person we were meant to be. Only then will my relationship with God be what it was meant to be. Only then, will full, rich, abundant life, be ours . Only then will our salvation be complete.