

THE NATURE OF TRUE SALVATION

Acts 8: 26-40

Every Sunday when the people of God gather to worship it is a great day. But along with the Sunday before Christmas, there's just something special about Easter Sunday. Because on Easter we rejoice in the foundation of our faith – God's Son, Jesus Christ, has stepped off His throne in Heaven, condescended to earth, and without giving up any of His Deity became human flesh. And as the sinless Son of God He willingly went to the cross and died there, paying the sin debt of every living human being. And then three days later He conquered death by bodily rising from the dead - not just His spirit, but His body as well. And Paul writes that Jesus' resurrection is 100% proof that our sin debt was paid in full. Romans 4:25 literally that Jesus "was raised because of our justification".

Beloved, this is the capstone of our faith. Without the resurrection Christianity crumbles to a pile of dust. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:17, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins". But praise God he goes on in v. 20 and declares, "But now Christ IS risen from the dead...." And for the Christian there is nothing on God's green earth to get happier about than that.

So today churches all across America are filled with worshippers celebrating the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And not only in our country, but all the way around the world. In fact, worldwide there are around 2.2 billion people who claim to follow Jesus. And polestars say it will be 2.6 billion by 2020. That's about 31.5% of the world's population and more than a half billion more than 2nd place Islam. And that's a lot of people who say, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ".

But friends, the sobering fact is that many of those 2.2 billion who claim to be Christians are not Christians at all. Jesus said in Matt. 7:21-23,

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Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!

Think about that for a moment. Jesus said that there are going to be some who performed miracles in His name who will not make it into Heaven. Some who cast out demons in His name will be rejected. And others will even preach in Jesus' name, but they, too, will miss heaven. Friends, these are some pretty good people in the eyes of the world! But every one of them has a false faith.

I don't have to tell you that we live in an age of deception. The number of scam artists out there working to rob all of us blind would astound us. And they are all on contract working for the Devil. John writes in Rev. 12:9 that the Devil is the deceiver of the whole world.

Now let me ask you something. If the Devil is the deceiver of the whole world, and he certainly is, then what is the one thing that he would want to deceive people about more than anything else? Well, the answer is simple. He would want to deceive them about the condition of their souls. He would want to deceive them into believing that they are on the road to Heaven when they are not.

Friends, this is one matter that we cannot afford to be wrong about. For to miss Heaven is to go to Hell. And ten trillion years from now you and I will be either in Heaven or Hell, and it will only be the first second of an endless eternity. So today I want to show you as plainly as I can the nature of true salvation, and I pray that every one of us will leave this morning saying, “I know that I have the real thing”.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Acts 8:26-28. These verses introduce us to the two characters of our story this morning. Philip was one of the first seven men chosen in the first church of Jerusalem to be official servants of the church, and by whom we have our prototype for Baptist deacons. And Philip had gone to Samaria to preach Christ, and multitudes had been saved. And then the Lord suddenly gave him another assignment. He told Philip to leave Samaria and go down to the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza. And with no further instructions other than to just go, Philip obeyed.

But not long after he began to travel that lonely road he found out why God had sent him there. He came upon a man from Ethiopia riding in a chariot. But he was not just an ordinary man. This man was a high ranking official under Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. He was equivalent in our nation to the Secretary of the Treasury. He had been to Jerusalem to worship and was now returning home. And as he was riding in the back of his chariot he was reading from the OT book of Isaiah. And here we see the first thing that is necessary for true salvation, and that is, it is **reliant upon conviction**, the conviction of the Holy Spirit God.

You see, this man was not a Jew. The Ethiopians were worshippers of false gods, idols. And he was an idol worshipper, too, but his religion left him cold and empty. And God put a hunger in his heart for more, and by some way which we are not told he had heard about the God of the Jews, Jehovah. He had

heard about Jehovah's power and the good things that He had done for His people, and this eunuch's heart was touched. And he thought to himself, "I must learn more about this God of Israel". And so he made the journey of around 700 miles from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, the center of Judaism. But whatever he may have learned about Jehovah, he left Jerusalem with a hunger still in his heart, but he did have one good thing going for him. He had acquired a copy of the book of Isaiah and was devouring it as he traveled back home. But here's what I want you to see. He would have never even traveled to Jerusalem in the first place, seeking God, had God not put it in his heart to go there.

Friends, the Bible tells us that before any of us comes to Jesus and are saved we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We have no spiritual hunger, no desire for God. How can we, if we are dead? What would you think if you were at a visitation for a deceased friend one night, and just before the family left to go home one of the family members comes in with a Big Mac and an order of fries, sets it on the chest of their loved one and says, "I just thought they might get hungry in the night." You'd think, somebody call a shrink! Dead men don't get hungry. And you and I can no more give ourselves a hunger for God than a dead man can give himself hunger for a Big Mac or even a tender, juicy sirloin steak. Our hunger for God must come from God Himself.

Jesus said in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father... draws him..." Have you ever felt your spirit being pulled toward Jesus? Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock", speaking of the door of our hearts. And then He says, "I anyone hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him..". I ask you, have you ever been hungry for God? Have you ever heard Jesus' knocking at your heart's door? Have you ever heard His voice saying, "I want to come into your life? Friends,

the very first thing necessary for true salvation is being drawn to Jesus by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

And let me also ask, do you have a hunger for God now? Friends, one sign of life is hunger. If you are alive, six hours or so after a meal you're ready to eat something again. And for some of you it is six minutes. But just as hunger is proof of physical life, so is hunger proof of spiritual life. The psalmist said, "Whom have I in heaven but You?" In other words, who in Heaven do I want to see but you? And then he adds, "There is none upon earth that I desire besides You". Now, certainly it is not wrong to long to see our deceased loved ones, nor is it wrong to seek intimacy with family and friends. But if we have no hunger for God in our lives, it is time for a spiritual checkup.

But not only is true salvation **reliant upon conviction**, but it is also **rooted in Scripture**. The eunuch was not being drawn to God by reading the Jerusalem Daily News, he was drawn by reading the book of Isaiah, which was a part of the Hebrew Scriptures, which was the Bible of the early church.

Friends, the Bible is the most masterful compilation of writings in history. Sixty-six books, around 40 authors, with every author charged with the same duty; give their readers the truth about God. But get this. The Bible was written over a period of 1500 hundred years sharing the message of God's salvation. Now, if you could go back in time 1500 years to the year 514 and tell someone to write a book about sports, how similar would it be with a book someone wrote about sports today? Or how would books on engineering, or cooking, or medicine compare? All of those books would be radically different, because of the quantum leap in knowledge that mankind has made in 1500 years. But not so with the Bible.

The Bible is a beautiful, tightly woven tapestry begun by Moses and finished by the apostle John with the same basic

message throughout. It is a perfect telling of what God is like, how man fell away from God and how to find the way back to God. And it **is perfect**, for Peter says that those who wrote the Bible were holy men of God who were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Every writer had the hand of God upon him, guiding him to say exactly what God wanted said without error. And friends, that's why there is no true salvation without the message of the Bible. For God was not guiding the authors of the holy books of other religions. They were totally on their own. Now, their books may have some of God's truth in them. The Devil sees to that, just to make that book seem like it is really God's Word. But on the matter of salvation they always give man's opinion and they are always wrong. What we must have is God's opinion, and you can find that in only one place, the Bible. That's the reason that Paul wrote, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God".

So I ask you, what are you basing your salvation on today? Is it what the Bible says about salvation? Or some talk show host or pop psychologist? I'm telling you, there are countless ideas on TV and the internet and in classrooms all over America about the way to eternal life, and even in churches! But friend, the message of true salvation comes from only one source, and that is the Bible.

But there is a third element of true salvation that we see in our story. And that is, true salvation is **realized in Jesus**. Let's read again beginning v. 29-35. Friends, God's true salvation is not in a merit system, it is in a Man, Jesus Christ. Paul writes in 1 Tim. 2:4, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus". So if true salvation can't be by the merit system, the question that practically the entire human race is screaming is, "Why not?" And the answer is, not a single person alive can measure up. You see, the heart of man is hard-wired to believe that Heaven is for good people and hell is for bad people.

And all I have to do go to Heaven is make sure that on Judgment Day if I have two million sins on this side of the balance scales that I have two million and one good works on the other.

But friend, it just doesn't work that way. For the same Book the eunuch was reading from also says, "But we are **all** as an **unclean thing**, and all our righteousness are as **filthy rags**. We all **do fade** as a leaf, and our **iniquities**, like the wind, have **taken us away**". And Paul writes, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God". You may be a saint compared to your neighbor, but it is not God's standard for living. This holy Book is God's standard, and its judgment on all us is "guilty!" And it also declares our sentence – the Bible says, "the wages of sin is death". So you see, that's the reason salvation can't be by merit, by your good works. There is a rotten core of sin in the depths of each of our souls, and it is breeding new sins day after day that must be punished, and the punishment is eternal death.

What kind of sins are being bred in our souls? Well, the first of the Ten Commandments is to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Do any of us keep that one? Really? The fifth commandment is to honor our father and mother. Have we all always done that? Commandment number six is not to murder. But don't think that you're off the hook so quickly. Jesus said that if you have anger in your heart for someone without just cause you've committed murder. Who is not guilty? Commandment number seven is not to commit adultery, which is any have any type of sexual relationship apart from your husband or wife. But Jesus said that lust in our hearts is just the same. Anyone here who's never lusted?

So there's no doubt about it. We've all sinned, and the penalty of our sin is eternal death. And friends, there's no free pardon and no plea bargain for a lesser sentence in the court of Heaven. Unforgiven sinners spend eternity paying for their sins in

Hell. And that's why salvation must be through a man, someone who can rescue us from our hopeless, lost, damned condition.

And, hallelujah, that is the good news of Easter! The good news is that a Savior has come from Heaven to save us all, and His name is Jesus. That's who the Holy Spirit led the eunuch to be reading about when Philip ran up to his chariot. Look at v. 32-33a. That is a direct prophesy of the crucifixion. We read from the NT how Jesus was led up Calvary's hill to be crucified, and to be slaughtered is a good way to describe it. He had already been whipped, and the lacerations on His back sometimes killed other men. He had already been slapped and hit with fists on His face, and he had already had parts of His beard ripped off His cheeks and a crown of thorns shoved down upon His brow. And now He was about to be nailed to a cross and raised up to hang naked before the world until He died. And all this was the worst travesty of justice in history. For Jesus had never committed one single sin. He was the only perfect Man Who has ever lived.

But the wonderful, miraculous message of the cross for you and me is, it was there **our** sin debt was paid and **our** salvation was purchased. For in the same passage the eunuch was reading God says, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, but the Lord has laid on Him (on Jesus), the iniquity of us all". Jesus' death was the death we all deserved; it was my death, it was your death. And friends, that's good news!

But that's only half of the good news, and without the other half it's no good news at all. The rest is that three days after Jesus was buried He rose up from the grave and is alive forever more! And friends, the death, burial, and resurrection is the very hub of our salvation. Take away the hub of a wheel and what do you have? You have a wheel that will collapse with any weight on it at all. And the weight of just one sin will **collapse** your salvation wagon unless Jesus is the hub.

So we see that true salvation is **realized in Jesus**. But it is not enough just to agree with the facts about Jesus. True salvation must also be **received by faith**. Look at v. 36-37. If you are a Bible marker, circle the word “believe”. “Believe” and “trust” are the two NT words for “receive by faith”. And Philip told the eunuch that if he believed with all of his heart he could be baptized. So just what does it mean to believe?

Well, the end of v. 37 tells us. So to believe means that you believe all the facts about Jesus that we’ve just talked about. You believe that He was God’s perfect Son and that He died in your place and rose again. But it means more than just believing the facts. First, it means **trusting in Jesus alone** to save you. You understand that you can’t save yourself, and you place your faith in Jesus alone to do what you cannot do. Paul writes in Galatians 3:26, “For you are all sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ”. So we believe the facts about Jesus to be saved, and we trust in Him alone to save us, with not one good work attached. But to believe in Jesus means one more thing. It means committing yourself to follow Jesus. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”.

Somehow the Western world has put a spin on that verse. Many who claim to be Christians read it this: “If any man come after Me, let him join the church and be baptized”. Others read it, “If any man come after me, let repeat a prayer with a preacher”. But that is not what Jesus said. Jesus said, “Follow Me”. And to believe in Jesus means that you turn from your sins, trust Jesus to forgive yours sins, and you purpose to obey and serve Him for the rest of your life. Will you be perfect after making this commitment? Certainly not. Will you stumble and fall occasionally? You bet you will. But to believe in Jesus with all of your heart means you come

to Him and say to Him, “Lord, please come into my life, save me from eternal destruction, and be the absolute Ruler every day”.

Every one of us is on a spiritual journey toward eternity. We began the day we were born. I ask you, somewhere on the road of your spiritual journey, do you remember a time that you believed in Jesus with all of your heart? By turning from your sins, trusting Him alone to save you, and by **sincerely** pledging to follow Him the rest of your life?

Well, we are almost done, but there are two more evidences of true salvation that we need to see just briefly. Not only is true salvation **received by faith**, it also is **reflected in baptism**. Look at v. 38. Philip was convinced that the eunuch had made a sincere commitment to trust and follow Jesus, so when the eunuch asked to be baptized, he said, “Sure, stop the chariot”. And they both went down into the stream next to road and the eunuch took the plunge.

Now, let me say three quick words about baptism. First of all, NT baptism was always by immersion. Philip and the eunuch went “down into” the water, and in v. 39 they “came up out of” the water. So it’s clear that the eunuch got dunked all the way under. And also, that’s what the Greek word “baptize” means. It means “to dip”. So that’s why we Baptists are sticklers about immersion. It’s the NT way.

And secondly, in the NT baptism always followed salvation. Never do we read where infants or young who were not saved were baptized. And finally, in the NT baptism was not an option. It does not save. Only Jesus saves. But baptism is the NT way of a new believer declaring his faith to the world. Just before He died Jesus told His disciples, “You go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...” And every single time we read of someone being saved in the book of Acts they were immediately baptized.

Let me say that there are many believers who have never been obedient to Christ in the matter of baptism. They may have been saved for years, but for some reason they still hold out. Or they may have been recently saved, but say to themselves that their baptism prior to their salvation was good enough. But that's just not true. True baptism is an outward sign of an inward experience, and if you were baptized before you met Jesus, your baptism was a sign of nothing. And if a true believer understands the truth about baptism and refuses to be baptized they will never, ever grow in their walk with Christ. They will forever be dwarfed and weak in their faith, and when they get inside the gates of Heaven they'll have a lot of explaining to do when Jesus said, "I died for you. Why were you ashamed of Me?"

There is a final evidence of true salvation I want you to see. And that is, true salvation **results in rejoicing**. Look at v. 39. I suppose one of the happiest moments of my life occurred when I was a senior in high school. We had a decent basketball team that year, and wound up being seeded 2nd in the area tournament. We played two good games in the quarterfinals and semifinals and made it to the region championships. And I can still remember some of the details of that game. I remember scoring my two measly points of the night on a buzzer beater to end the first quarter, and I remember the rush it gave me from head to toe. I remember at the end of the first overtime one of my teammates saying in our huddle, "I don't know how we're going to do it, but we're going to win this game". And do you know he was right! We knocked off number one seeded Childersburg by two points to win the area and go on to the region final the next night. And I'm not going to tell you how that game came out.

But I cannot tell you how thrilled we were to win that area championship. It was definitely the highest point of joy in my twelve years of going to school. But do you know, though it lasted

a few years, the thrill of winning that game has long since dissipated in my heart. And now it doesn't matter at all. But I want to tell you about a thrill that I had just four years after that that I haven't lost yet. It was the night that I finally realized that I was a lost, hell bound sinner, and then looking to Jesus and believing on Him with all of my heart, He washed all of my sins away. And I can tell you, the joy of sins forgiven and being Heaven bound was a million times better than winning an area championship, and it is better than any other joy you may have, too. Would you please bow your heads.