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“SAVED” - - - FROM WHAT?

You and I want to be right with God. How do we do that? The New Testament is very clear: Jesus is our Savior, and “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) Wow! That's strong!

But what are we saved from? Well, we're saved from hell, from eternal judgment. Correct? Yes, that's true, thank the Lord! But that's not where the emphasis is in the New Testament. It says again and again that we are saved “from our sins.”

Joseph was engaged to Mary, but then he learned that she was pregnant. Oops! We can guess how he was feeling. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and explained her pregnancy. Then the angel said, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name, ‘Jesus’ (which means ‘Savior’), because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

Sin, rebellion against God, ruins us. “The wages of sin is death.” Jesus came to give us a “birth from above” so that we would change our minds about the way we are living and run to God.

One time I saw one of those big church signs with the words, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Good question.

The Bible says that we are “saved by faith,” but, as you know, that means more than head faith - it's more like falling in love. Let me illustrate by telling my personal story:

79 years ago I served a stint in the US Navy during World War II. When I was discharged and came home, I attended college under the G.I. Bill. During that period, one afternoon I went into Byas's Drugstore in north Fort Worth for a chocolate milkshake. A gal named Doris Ruth Luksa was behind the counter, and she was the cutest thing I had ever seen. I got Doris on my mind. Several milkshakes later I asked her for a date. (Reminds me of Swift and Kelce.)

The point I want to make is that we fell in love. Oh, my gosh! I thought about Doris day and night. I dreamed about her. I either saw her or phoned her every day (landline). Why, a year or so later we even got married. Oh Happy Day! But the reality of marriage was different than the rose-colored version. I thought she was created to make me happy, but she wanted me to make her happy. But we persevered and our love affair lasted for 53 years - until 2002 when she got an invitation from above that she couldn't refuse.

When I was 30 years old, I had run my life into a ditch. It was bad. Then I met Jesus and he told me that he loved me and would help me out of the ditch. I fell in love again. It was the most surprising thing. I thought about him day and night, dreamed about him, and read biographies about him in his Book. Many nights I could feel my heart burning and I would lie awake for hours as I thought about him and felt him near me. So I committed myself to him and, in a sense, we got married.

Sure enough, he started helping me overcome all the dark things that were destroying me - the deep anxiety, anger, self-hatred, and addictions. But I had no idea that it would be such hard work and take so long. It's not finished yet. But we persevered, for 67 years and counting. He has always been faithful to me, even when I was not faithful to him. He has been so good to me. I love him, even when my life doesn't show much evidence of it.

Jesus said that the Greatest Commandment of all is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength - and, second, to love our neighbor. Have you fallen in love with him? If you have, then your deepest desire is to please him, and you will start obeying him even if it is done fitfully. But the central issue is not obedience, it's love. “Well,” you might say, “I have never felt the kind of love for God that you described.” My friends, love is not a feeling, it's a choice. You have to choose to love God and stay committed to him.

Robert Morris said that people sometimes ask him, “Why did God put two trees in the garden, the

tree of life and the tree of death,” as if God did something wrong. The answer of course is - to give us a choice. There is no love without choice. We have to choose again and again to love God, which means to stay committed to him. Eventually the feelings will come, but even if they do not come we must still choose to love him and to obey him.

The same is true, of course, regarding our marriages. We make a vow when we get married: I will love you even if you get sick or poor or if you make my life worse - - “in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, until death do us part.” (Most of us failed to read the fine print.)

My friends, I can tell you based on the holy Bible, that unless your life changes and you “repent of your sins,” then you are not “saved,” no matter what you believe about Jesus. James says, “Faith without works is dead!”

WHY KINDNESS IS SO IMPORTANT

The second part of the Great Commandment is to love others. Easier said than done, right?

Bobby Schuler said something very wise and obvious in one of his messages. He said that the problem with blaming and criticizing other people is that IT DOESN'T WORK! When was the last time someone criticized you? Did it help you? Did you say, “Oh, thank you. I didn't realize that. I am going to try to change and do better.” Probably not.

People, including your husband or wife, don't want to be shown that they are wrong, they want to be respected and loved. So you can't win by arguing. Angry, accusing words may win a battle, but they never win a war. We need to be kind and gentle and learn to listen. This is true even if your opponent is hostile and mean. An old Texas saying is: “Don't wrestle with a pig. You will both get dirty, and the pig will enjoy it.”

Everybody is sensitive and emotional. Hurtful words, sarcastic words, are like being stabbed with a sword. The Bible says that. Words can cut and wound, and they are not easily forgiven. You are like that, aren't you? So are he and she and they.

This doesn't mean that we let people run over us. If we swallow insults and rudeness and stuff our feelings, we will get bitter and miserable. We can

learn how to confront people, but not in anger and by attacking their character. Be friendly and show respect for their opinion. Go easy on people. Listen. Say, “I understand what you are saying.” Smile. Be kind. Remember that angry, accusing words DON'T WORK.

Decide to see people, even your political enemies, through the eyes of love. “Love your enemies.” Isn't that what he said? Can you do it? No, that is not the right question. Will you do it?

“IN THIS WORLD, YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE” (JOHN 16:33)

Everything that Jesus said was true, and this is one of the things he said that was truer than true. Ha! “In this world you will have trouble or tribulation.” Yes, indeed.

Our troubles seem to be centered in three areas: our provision, relationships, and health.

- (1) Provision: Groceries, restaurants and clothing have become very expensive, while the price of houses and rent have become astronomical. Many people are just one bump in the road away from being homeless.
- (2) Relationships: misunderstandings, hurt feelings, miscommunication, anger, harsh words, alienation, divorce, war. Relationships are our greatest blessing and greatest problem. How are you getting along with your parents, siblings, spouse, children, friends, boss, the people in your church?
- (3) Health: Is your body still your friend or has it turned against you? I have congestive heart failure and my breathing has become more and more difficult. As I look at the future, sometimes I struggle to trust God and not to be afraid. (A spiritual SuperMan, I'm not. AntMan, maybe.) But since I will be 97 this month I know that I'm very blessed. I have outstanding medical care, my children are nearby and love me, and most of the time I can remember that Jesus is near and has promised to not give me more than I can handle. Although at times I feel that he has overestimated my capacity.

MIND GAMES

Yes, life is a series of problems and troubles. And where is the field of battle? It's primarily in our minds, our thoughts. The serpent came to Eve in that beautiful garden and put a thought into her mind. (I don't think it was a literal snake but that it symbolized a literal devil.) The thought was, "You can't really trust what God says. You can do better in control of your own life." When Eve and Adam yielded to that thought it brought trouble and tribulation to them. When we yield to that thought, it brings trouble and tribulation to us.

Many times a day, every day, thoughts clamor in our minds that tempt and torment us. This is not an imaginary battle, it is a real battle against real evil, and it's universal. Threatening thoughts come to our minds about our provision, relationships, and health.

Thoughts can come like: "Your father or mother got dementia, and you are going to get dementia." "Your father or mother died before they were 50, and you are going to die before you are 50." "Your father shot himself, and you are going to shoot yourself." "You are going to get cancer like your mother." "You will never be able to overcome your addiction to alcohol or gambling." "Divorce runs in your family for generations, and you will get divorced." "I have committed the unforgivable sin, and God hates me." "I am going to lose my job and be out in the street." "Something terrible is going to happen to my son or daughter."

There is a devil and he attacks our thoughts. They are called "fiery darts" or "flaming arrows" in the Bible. Ephesians 6:16 tells us to "Take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." That's really good. In fact, the 6th chapter of Ephesians tells us that as believers we have armor that God has provided to protect us: "The helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God...and prayer."

And 2nd Corinthians 10:4-5 tells us to "Take every thought captive." So we don't have to lose, we can win this thought-battle. But we have to recognize that these are demonic thoughts: thoughts of fear and worry about our health, about our children, about our finances, about our country,

about death. We can't be passive, we have to "Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

How do you do that? How do you take those thoughts captive? First, you have to recognize what's going on. Then quote a scripture from memory or read it from the Bible. One that I use is 2nd Timothy 1:7 - "God has not given us a spirit of timidity or fear but a spirit of power and love and a sound mind." And Matthew 16:19 says, "Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven...."

So when evil thoughts pop into my mind (thoughts of fear, sickness, suffering, blasphemy, immorality, envy, resentmentment, revenge, hopelessness, etc), I say, "I renounce those thoughts, I bind them and cast them down. Lord, you have not given me a spirit of fear, but a Spirit of power and love and a sound mind. I don't have to be tormented with these thoughts. Thank you, Lord."

This is a very real fight. Don't be a passive victim, don't lay down, get up and fight the good fight.

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BOMBO JOA

Many years ago I read a story that I loved, so sometimes I retold it when I preached in prisons or wherever. It goes like this:

Some wealthy men went on a safari to Africa. Each of them had the desire to shoot the biggest prize of all, a lion, and they were willing to spend the money and take the time to go far into Africa in that quest. Their head guide was a huge African named Bombo Joa who had learned to speak basic English.

One day one of the men wasn't feeling well and decided to return to camp. He thought it was a short distance and that he knew the way. He struck out on his own,,,,,,and soon realized that he was lost. He tried to return to the others, but there were no landmarks and he was disoriented. Hours passed. Sunset drew near. He was very hot, nauseated, and confused. Then he heard lions roaring. He was frightened in a way he had never been before. He drove himself on and on until he became so exhausted that he gave up and fell to the ground. And just then, out of the jungle came Bombo Joa.

After the man rested up, Bombo Joa led him

back to camp. The next morning the man said to him, “Bombo Joa, that was the worst experience in my life. I was completely lost and helpless. I went off by myself without a map. Please get me a map.”

Bombo Joa said, “Sir, in this place, there is no map. I am the map.”

My friends, I want to say something and hope you will never forget it: Jesus is the map.

You may be certain that you know your way in this world, but when you get lost remember that Jesus is the map. If you get weak, confused, disoriented, remember that Jesus is the map. When you feel absolutely hopeless, remember that Jesus is the map. There are no landmarks to show you the way in this life, but Jesus said “I am the way.” “I am the map.”

I'm very serious when I challenge you to remember this little message and don't ever forget it: Jesus is the map.

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THE EYE IN THE SKY

On the physical level, the story about Bombo Joa is anachronistic because now we have GPS, the Global Positioning System.

There are 28 satellites up in space, each in its own orbit, 11,000 miles above the earth. There are five ground control stations around the world. The federal government provides GPS on a worldwide basis free of charge, thanks to President Clinton. Thank you, President Bill. Everyone has access to the GPS in their cars, boats, planes, computers, tablets, smartphones, and wrist watches.

We don't ever have to worry about getting lost because we have GPS. Right? No, that's not right because GPS can only guide us in superficial ways. Jesus is still the only map we can trust. And he has promised to guide us:

- “He guides me along right paths.” (Psalm 23:3)
- “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105.)
- “Your own ears will hear him, right behind you a voice will say, ‘This is the way you should go,’ whether to the right or to the left” (Isaiah 30:21)

- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- “I am the Lord, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow.” (Isaiah 48:17)
- “Bless the Lord who guides me.” (Psalm 16:7)
- “I will guide you along.” (Psalm 32:8)
- “Your hand will guide me.” (Psalm 139:10)
- “He will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:13)
- “Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.” (Galatians 5:16)
- “I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you.” (John 14:18)
- Jesus said to them, “Follow me. “ (Matthew 4, 8, 9 10, 16, 19; Mark 1, 8, 10, 14; Luke 5, 9, 18; John 1, 10, 12, 13, 21, 22; Acts 12)

Jesus promised to never leave us, and he commanded again and again - in all the chapters listed above - “Follow me.”

He is saying, “I am your map. But you need to listen to me, and you must choose to follow me.”

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God bless,

Glenn