



## **A Time for Salvation**

### **Begin with Power Point**

Hollywood has given us many examples of people, animals, and even toys that have saved Christmas. But the reality is that people don't need Christmas to be saved - **people need a Savior at Christmas.**

Last week we talked about why we have a reason to celebrate at Christmas. Today we're going to continue that theme and talk about the reason for that celebration – Jesus.

I mentioned last week that we can't just think about Jesus the baby in the manger that we also instantaneously have to think about Jesus the Savior. Because there is no celebration without salvation; the two go hand in hand.

Salvation is typically defined as deliverance from sin, self, and hell. It definitely includes all that, but it also embraces much more. We are not only saved from something, bad, we are saved for something good. The Bible says:

***“In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.” Ephesians 2:10***

God has a great purpose and a good plan for your life. Salvation also means being given the freedom and power to fulfill God's purpose for your life.

The announcement of salvation for anyone in the world who'd accept it was the angel's second declaration of good news to the shepherds of Bethlehem at the first Christmas:

***“For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11***

Notice that this savior is “for you”! He came for your benefit. Jesus is a Personal savior.

When people think of spiritual salvation, they often have a very narrow concept of it: they think that salvation is being saved from hell. But God had so much more in mind than just fire insurance when he sent Jesus to be our savior. God's gift of true salvation is freedom, purpose, and life.

We all love Christmas gifts: Salvation is a free gift that God gives to those that trust in Him. I wanted this morning to open two particular gifts of salvation.

## **The First Gift I wanted to open of Salvation is – Salvation from Sin and Ourselves**

Let me be blunt: you/me are the source of most of our problems. Even when other people cause us problems, our natural response often makes them worse. We trip ourselves up far more often than we realize or would like to admit. If we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that we have habits we can't break, thoughts we don't want, emotions we don't like, insecurities and fears we can't hide, and regrets and resentments we can't let go of, and we say things we later wish we never said. Did I touch everybody there!! Frankly, we are the problem with us. For change to happen, it must start in our heart.

We're all born with an "I" problem. We are, by nature self-centered. Just ask any parent who has raised a child. We don't have to be taught to be selfish. It comes naturally. If people were naturally unselfish, there'd never be any conflict, divorce, abuse, greed, crime, gossip, or war on earth.

Our natural inclination is to want our own way instead of God's way.

Sin is our greatest problem, and it is universal. You and I sin every day-with our words, our thoughts, and our actions. No one has a perfect record.

The Bible says:

***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23***

I don't measure up to my own imperfect standards, much less God's perfect ones!

In Isaiah 59:2:

***"The trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God."***

On a personal level sin causes worry, fear, anxiety, confusion, depression, conflict, discouragement, and emptiness. It causes us to act in ways that create guilt, shame, resentment, and regret. We weren't meant to live disconnected from God, so when we do, we feel the tension. We feel spiritually empty.

On a global level, we see the effect of sin all around us: war (we'll talk about this next week), injustice, corruption, prejudice, poverty, sex trafficking, and all our other social problems. Even many diseases are caused by our refusal to live by God's standards for healthy living. Who can save us? Not government. Not business. Not academics. These can only deal with the visible symptoms and results of sin. But any lasting solution must start in the heart, and only God can transform hearts.

## **The Second gift of salvation is: Freedom**

I couldn't imagine what it would be like to have been a slave during the early part of our country's history. What I have read about slavery almost turns my stomach. But I almost can't imagine the other side of that when during the end of the Civil War when slaves were set free. How that must have felt to have your freedom.

Well that's what Salvation can do - it can set you free.

The Bible says:

***"I was in trouble, so I called to the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me free." Psalm 118:5***

From what does Jesus offer to set us free?

### **Free from guilt over the past.**

Guilt is the mental price we pay for violating our God-given consciences. We know that if we break a law, we have to pay a penalty. When we break God's universal moral laws, someone has to pay for that too. But God, out of his deep love for us, sent Jesus to solve that problem.

***"The reward for sin is death, but the gift that God freely gives is everlasting life found in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23***

When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for everything you've ever done wrong or ever will do wrong in the future. How great is that! It has been called the Great Exchange, and you and I get the better end of the deal.

***"God took the sinless Christ and poured into Him our sins. Then, in exchange, he poured God's goodness into us!" 2 Corinthians 5:21***

God's forgiveness is far more powerful than all of our mistakes and sins put together, so we get a clean slate. That's freedom. Even if there were no heaven or hell (there are), the gift of not having to carry the load of a guilty conscience every day is wonderful.

### **Free from bitterness and resentment.**

Undoubtedly, you've been hurt by what others have said or done to you in the past. We can't control what others do to us, but we can choose how we respond. Resentment is a cancer of our emotions. Unless we allow Jesus to free us from it, it will eventually destroy our happiness.

### **Free from the expectations of others.**

How often have you said or done things you didn't want to do simply because you wanted to avoid the disapproval of others? The Bible says,

***"The fear of human opinion disables." Proverbs 29:25***

Constantly worrying about what other people think about you is a dangerous trap. It will rob you of confidence, limit your potential, drain your energy, and keep you from becoming all God intends for you to be.

The antidote to fearing disapproval is to build your life on the foundation of God's unconditional love (we talked last week about this) for you. Love liberates/sets you free. It is a confidence builder.

The bible says: (I also told a joke a couple of Wednesday night's using this verse)

***"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." 1 John 4:18***

Also

***"Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes". Ephesians 1:4***

God has loved you even before the world was made.

It doesn't matter what people say or think. It doesn't matter if you have someone's approval or not. The good news is that we don't need any human approval to be happy!

In order to be set free from living for the approval of others, you need to refocus on how much you matter to God and his unconditional love for you.

### **We are also: Free from addictive habits**

You've probably figured out by now that good intentions and New Year's resolutions are not enough to break out of self-destructive patterns and routines. You tried to change, but inevitably reverted back to old ways. With each cycle of best intentions, failure, and remorse, you feel more trapped and hopeless. You need a power greater than yourself. You need a savior! Jesus said:

***"If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free." John 8:36***

God never intended for you to go through life on your own power. He wants you to trust him and depend on him. That's why he allows problems in your life that you have no possible chance of solving on your own. Actually, he had the solution to your problem in mind long before you even knew it was a problem. He's been waiting for you to stop trying and start trusting.

**The last freedom is: Free from the fear of death.**

The acid test of what you believe is not how you act at weddings and births and graduations. You can pretty much believe anything you want when things are going great. But when the emotional storms of life beat down your dreams, when relational earthquakes rip apart your relationships, when financial fires turn your assets to ashes, when physical pain pummels your body, and when the eventual deaths of loved ones leave you lonely and lost, what will uphold and empower you then? It is foolish to live in denial, unprepared for what everyone knows is inevitable.

As a pastor, I have participated in countless funerals, so I know well the difference that a personal relationship with Jesus makes in how death is handled. I've looked into the eyes of people who have no hope or assurance of heaven, and I've sensed the terror and despair in their hearts at the gravesides. Knowing Jesus makes all the difference in the world when you face death.

If you accept what Jesus did for you on the cross, your eternal destiny will be secured, and you'll no longer fear death. The Bible says,

***"Since we, God's children, are human beings-made of flesh and blood-he (Jesus) became flesh and blood too by being born in human form; for only as a human being could he die and in dying break the power of the devil who had the power of death. Only in that way could he deliver those who through fear of death have been living all their lives as slaves to constant dread." Hebrews 2: 14-15***

Now that's what Christmas is all about. It is a time of celebration, but it is also a time for salvation.

Will you open the free gifts of salvation today?

