

*Storytellers: What Does It Mean To Be Saved?*

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*Psalm 80; Matthew 19:23-29; Romans 5:1-11;10:8-10*

Our final Scripture reading tonight is from Romans 5:1-11; 10:8-10. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy word. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. 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 man, though for a good man 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. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation...but what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

We are storytellers. As we learned last week, stories shape cultures. They appeal to us. We remember stories long after we've forgotten facts and figures. God has been at work throughout history shaping His story and our own, and He sent His son Jesus as a storyteller. Jesus asks us to tell God's story to our families, friends, and neighbors. Sometimes we are afraid to tell the story because we might offend someone, but we often skip telling the story of Jesus because we aren't sure we understand it ourselves. Over the next two months, we'll build our ability to tell the story of Jesus so that we become confident storytellers.

Last week, we learned the story's dilemma, what gives it tension: we are lost. Everyone in the world is either lost spiritually and apart from God, or we were at one time lost. That separation from God is not something we can fix, and it's eternally permanent if we aren't found during our lifetime. Believers are called to find the lost and present the story of Jesus to them. If we believe the story deeply, when we look around us, our hearts are moved to reach out to those who are lost just like we might be moved to help a lost child at the playground or the store.

That brings us to the next part of the story. We need to learn the answer to the dilemma, the solution to the problem of our lost-ness. We need to be found. We need to be saved out of our lost state. And that's precisely what Scripture tells us – we do not have to stay lost. God has already cleared the way for us to be found. If and when we have faith in Jesus Christ, we are saved.

But what does that mean exactly, to be saved? Being “saved” gets thrown around a lot in churches; someone might ask you, “Are you saved?” But what does that mean? It’s helpful to look at it this way: when we are saved, there are things we are saved from, and things we are saved for. In the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, a squad goes on a mission to save a young man whose three brothers have been killed. Many squad members are killed trying to reach Private Ryan. As they finally find him and get him out of danger, the commander tells Ryan, “Earn this.” Those words stayed with Ryan all his life. The commander wasn’t just saving the private from death – he was encouraging Ryan, once he got back home, to truly live. In the same way, while we are spiritually saved through faith in Jesus from a host of bad things, we are saved for a bunch of great things, and we’re going to explore both sides today.

*The first thing we’re saved from is God’s wrath and the fear of God’s wrath.* A few weeks ago, we discussed how God’s wrath, His judgment on all those who sin, is perfectly just, perfectly good, and perfectly right. We all want God’s good judgment to come. But we fear it falling on us. We know we’re guilty too, that we deserve punishment for defiantly disobeying God’s commands and repeatedly refusing to acknowledge Him. Our only hope is salvation.

When we are saved, as Paul says in tonight’s passage, we have peace with God. We are reconciled to God through the death of His Son and saved through His ongoing resurrected life. Through Jesus, God sets aside His righteous wrath and punishment is no longer in the cards. As Peter says in his first letter, “Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” Wrath came upon Jesus so that it might not come upon us.

That we’re saved from the fear of wrath is also important. So often, even after we are saved, we look at God like we look at the traffic cop with his radar detector, seeing if he can catch us doing something wrong. We assume He is out to get us, looking for any infraction so that He can bring down His righteous anger on us. But that’s not the case at all.

We may shrink back from God because we are still burdened by the weight of the sins we’ve committed; we are embarrassed and ashamed. But when we are saved, we don’t need to fear God’s wrath. We can draw close to Him – not because we are perfect, but because God accepts us as His children. Fear keeps us apart from Him. The apostle John tells us in his first letter, “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.” That doesn’t mean we haven’t been saved. It means we haven’t let God fully work in our hearts. When we do, we realize we do not need to be fearful. Jesus took our punishment, and He is not going to take back that gift.

*The second thing we are saved from is the power of death and the fear of death.* Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, “The saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” Death is our enemy, Paul says, the last one to be destroyed. Hebrews 2 says the power of death currently resides with the devil – because the devil accuses us and wants to make sure the curse on humanity is fulfilled. But God has the final word over death. When God saves us, He takes away our sins – not just the punishment for them but the sins themselves, so we can no longer be accused. We will die, but we will not die eternally – there is nothing to accuse us of any longer.

If death has no power over us, we no longer need to fear it. Now that doesn't mean that we're all going to leave tonight and take skydiving lessons! But it means we no longer have to live in fear of what is to come. Paul says to the Philippians, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." The life Paul had, he lived for Jesus – while he lived, he could share Jesus' story, train new believers, and grow them in faith. But when he died, he would be with Jesus, a far greater thing!

We avoid death. We don't talk about it. We try to stay away from it. When the youth on the worktrip to Indy and I helped in a senior care facility, we realized just how few people came to visit. Being around the sick and infirm reminds us that death is coming, and we don't like it. We distract ourselves from death because we fear it. Even our horror movies have a lone survivor, somebody who makes it out of the woods.

But death in God's timing is welcome to the Christian. We finally get to be in the presence of our Lord forever! And there will be no second death for those who are saved. Once we see the face of Christ, we will never need to fear being separated from Him again, by death or anything else. Salvation means the sting of death is gone. We need not fear, because what lies beyond death is the One who saves us.

*The third thing we're saved from is sin and its power.* In Romans 6:4, Paul says, "Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." Sin is powerful. It rules over everyone who is lost. We can't escape it. We displease God, and we actually enjoy doing so. There is pleasure in sin for the lost. But it's a horrible pleasure; it brings shame and guilt, punishment and loss, and there's little we can do to stop it, even when we want to. Noble people, people the world classifies as "good" who are lost, still sin because it is our nature to sin. Sin led to both death and God's wrath! In Romans 7, Paul says the unsaved are enslaved to sin.

But not only are our sins forgiven when we are saved, they are removed from us and remembered no more. And not only that, we are freed from having to sin. Paul says in Romans 6, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." We do not have to sin any longer!

God is creating us to be people who no longer sin. In this life, we may stumble into sin; we might even find ourselves struggling with a persistent sin. But the apostle John says in 1 John 2:1, "My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who pleases God completely." How amazing is it that when we are saved, we can truly be free of sin and all its entanglements! Even when we stumble, God accepts Jesus' plea on our behalf! That is the true blessing of being found by God and redeemed by Him!

But if those are the things we are saved from, then even greater are the things we are saved for. When we tell the story of Jesus, some people will want to be saved from those negative things. But others will want the positives Jesus offers us in salvation. We should give them the full picture of what we receive in our redemption.

Because we typically stress what we're saved from, we often don't find ourselves developing the things we are saved for. I don't want you to think that if these things aren't strongly evident in your life, you haven't been saved through faith in Christ. It means that you have so much more to look forward to! The positive benefits of Christ are waiting for you, and the Holy Spirit is already working in your heart to make them a reality as you turn to Him daily.

*First, Jesus saves us for new life.* When we are saved, Paul says in Ephesians 4, we put off our former way of life and put on our new self, created after the likeness of God Himself. As he says in 2 Corinthians 5, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" We are made completely new in our salvation. We are not just rescued from lost-ness; we are renewed, remade, and reworked from the inside out.

The Christian, the person who has been saved, sees a considerable change in their lives when they come to know Christ as Savior and Lord. For those of us who became believers early in life, the change may be more subtle. For those who did not sin much outwardly, the change might not be as easy to spot as that of an alcoholic who no longer drinks or a cruel person who becomes kind. But the change is still there, and it is remarkable.

Believing Christians grow strangely less and less attracted to the things of this world. They grow more interested in studying the Scripture and finding God within its pages. Prayer stops being a last resort in peril or pain and becomes a means by which we touch Jesus and know Him better; our requests are important, but only because we are requesting His Kingdom's reign above all things. Church is not just a place to see friends, but a place where we find ourselves filled and challenged and readied to go back again into this world that is not our home. Our occupations, our hobbies, our moods, our actions – they all begin to change towards God.

*Second, Jesus saves us for love.* We know loving people in our world, some of whom aren't Christians. But the love that Jesus saves us for is so much more. The Christian becomes more and more empathetic to the concerns of the poor, the friendless, and the despondent, having greater compassion on those in need. The love they have for family and friends begins to reflect the values of God's Kingdom, becoming concerned about friends' spiritual health and salvation.

Perhaps most of all, Christians begin to love those who are hard to love. Jesus said, "They will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." We have gotten that wrong sometimes, but when we're functioning as God intended, we love our enemies; we love those who have hurt and wronged us. We forgive over and over again, not just slights but sins. We don't become enablers; we stand up for what is right. But forgiveness, the key of love, is evident in us. The world loves those who love them and breaks relationship with anyone who thinks differently from them. The Christian loves through all of that.

*Finally, Jesus saves us for righteousness.* 1 Peter 2:9 tells us, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

God made us to be holy. In the Old Testament era, God established the Jewish nation as His holy people, set apart for Him, to live like Him. But in the New Testament era, Jesus opens the door for all people to come into the Kingdom, not just the Israelites – “once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.” We are set apart for Him. And what sets us particularly apart is righteousness.

What righteousness is could be its own topic. But simply, we are saved to be set apart, becoming like God in His actions, attitudes, and heart. Righteousness is to walk rightly with God. Believers come to reject their old behaviors and sins. They want to grow in godliness. Slowly but surely, what we do begins to mirror what we now believe. They stand for truth. They reject sinful choices. They become more and more aware of God's rule over every part of their lives. They trust Him. They walk with Him. They serve Him.

Righteousness is an extension of the new life we have. Our life is not just filled with church and Bible study and praise team and discipleship and evangelism. Many people fill their lives with church stuff and never actually live like Jesus. The saved person who is growing in the salvation God provides starts to reflect the life of Jesus.

This righteousness is not self-oriented. We are not saved to be impressed with ourselves. When righteousness begins to appear, we realize it is a gift from the Holy Spirit, not from us. When we minister to the poor or teach Sunday school or stand up for someone who is picked on, we don't think we are all that and a bag of chips. We come with the attitude Jesus said was truly justified by God, the attitude of the tax collector who in humility called out to God, “Have mercy on me, a sinner.” We know we are unworthy servants who have merely done our duty. That attitude keeps us from pride and self-righteousness that the world rightfully hates.

Salvation is incredible. It affects every corner of our lives and our eternity. We are released from guilt, shame, sin, death, and punishment, and we gain the ability to truly live, love, and become like our Savior. It is wonderful to be saved. It is the resolution to the story; it's the end result, and it's better than any happy ending to any novel ever written.

So how can it be the resolution to our stories? How can we be saved? We are saved through faith in Christ, lived out in the command from Jesus to repent and believe the gospel. How do we repent and believe? That's what we'll cover next week. For now, if you are saved, rejoice! And if you aren't sure, turn to Christ, and He will not refuse you. Return and learn more about how God has made the wonder of salvation possible for me and you.