

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Bible Speaks Today: What the Bible Teaches about Salvation

Introduction

When I was a boy, I heard a story of a soldier whose life had been saved in a war by a Bible. Apparently, it had been his habit to carry a Bible in a breast pocket of his uniform. According to the story, a bullet was stopped by the Bible - instead of piercing the soldier's heart, it had become lodged in the pages of the book he carried in his breast pocket. You can imagine someone's reactions and feelings after an incident like that!

Things like this make for a good story - but did it really happen? Possibly, possibly not. I have not verified it. However, our subject today is about something deeper and more important than a book acting as a bullet shield. We're not going to be concerned about the average thickness of a pocket Bible, and wondering whether it is possible for a certain number of pages and a leather cover to stop a bullet or not, but rather we are going to look at the message *within* the Bible, and consider what it says about salvation.

As many of you will know, 2011 is the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible. It is a wonderful privilege to have the Bible translated into our own language, so that we can easily read the Word of God. Today I will be quoting from the New King James Version, which is close to the King James Version, but in updated English. We will see that the Word of God has a good deal to say about our subject of salvation. For today's talk, we will be looking at this subject under four headings.

- Firstly, I want to consider what it is that we need to be saved from. As you will hear, this thing that we need to be saved from is *sin*;
- For the second part of this talk I will speak in a bit more detail about sin;
- For the third part, we will look at how we can be saved, and to understand that salvation is in a Person;
- Fourthly, we will consider salvation in its past, present and future aspects.

1. What do we need to be saved from?

So, starting with the first section of this talk - what is the most important thing that we need to be saved from?

There are actually quite a number of situations that we might wish to be saved from. If we look at the history of the Israelites in the Old Testament, we can see that they needed to be saved from slavery, when Moses and Aaron led them out of Egypt. They needed to be saved from their enemies, such as the Philistines. Indeed, we see this need to be saved from their enemies throughout all of their history in the Old Testament. Certain individuals in the Old Testament needed to be saved from specific problems, for example Naaman, the Syrian army commander, who needed to be saved from his dreadful disease of leprosy. (2 Kings 5:1-19) Ultimately, just like us, just like everyone in this world, they needed to be saved from their sins. What I mean by that is, that they needed to be saved from the guilt and the punishment from God that sins necessarily bring with them.

The prayers of David the King, as recorded for us in the Psalms, are good Bible examples showing the great need to be saved from sin. Psalm 51 is a very well known so-called "penitential psalm", which, we are told, David wrote after Nathan the prophet had confronted David over his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. (2 Samuel 11:1-12:25) You can hear David's longing for forgiveness and cleansing in Psalm 51:1-3, when he says, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me." David wanted God's mercy, he wanted to be cleansed, and he wanted to be free from a guilty conscience. In Psalm 51:9 he says, "Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities", and in Psalm 51:12 he says, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit." David really wanted, and he needed, to be saved from his sin. God did forgive David, and in Psalm 32:1-2, David says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." In Psalm 32:5 David says, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

2. What does the Bible mean by “sin”?

The story of David and the forgiveness of his sin bring us into the second part of this talk, which is where we will consider what sin really is. That way, we will have a good understanding of what the Bible teaches about salvation from sin.

The word “sin” may seem like a rather old-fashioned word. What does it actually mean when it is used in the Bible? As many people know, the Old Testament of the Bible was originally written mostly in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek. In the Hebrew Old Testament, there is quite a variety of words that are used for “sin”. I looked them up in a Bible dictionary called *Vine’s Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, and it gave quite a few different shades of meaning: for example, moral worthlessness, the painful burden of sin, the condition of guilt caused by wrongdoing, trouble and suffering caused by sin, perversion and twisting out of the right way, missing the mark, and transgression, which means going beyond boundaries. In the New Testament, interestingly, there is one Greek word used for sin. The word is ‘*hamartia*’, and it literally means “missing the mark”.

The idea of “missing the mark” is interesting - it implies that one way in which we can understand the idea of ‘sin’ is to think of failing to reach an appointed standard. This fits in with a passage in the New Testament, in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In simple terms, Romans 3:23 tells us that we have all “missed the mark” as far as God is concerned, and therefore we do not reach the standard of God’s glory and holiness. In other words, the Bible tells me that I, along with everyone else, fall short of God’s standard. I might think that there are plenty of people who are worse than me, but God cuts out that kind of comparison and tells me that I have missed the mark. It’s a bit like doing an exam with a certain cut-off for the pass mark. If the pass mark is 75%, it doesn’t matter if my score is 22% or 72% - in either case, I have not made the grade.

Now if I have sinned and therefore “missed the mark”, and if I do not reach the standard of God’s glory, as Romans 3:23 tells me, then I have a problem. How can I be in any kind of relationship with God, without Him condemning me? Eventually, I will have to face judgment. If God is fair, and consistent, and true to His character and nature, He can’t simply ignore my sin. He will have to deal with my sin.

There are plenty of verses in the Bible that teach us that sin is indeed a great and serious problem. For example, Romans 6:23 states that “The wages of sin is death”. Hebrews 9:27 informs us that “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” - so that God will deal with sins. If we have a look at a description of heaven in Revelation 21:27, we see that “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.” So sin shuts us out from the presence of God forever. (see Genesis 3:24) The idea of eternal punishment as taught in the Bible is neither pleasant nor popular, but it demonstrates the seriousness of sin, and also the wonderful good news of the Gospel.

3. How we can be saved

This is where we come to the third part of this talk - how we can be saved. God does not leave us in the dark, but on the contrary, He has provided a wonderful way in which we can be saved. This is a great subject, and a great deal could be said about it, but an important and fundamental fact is that we are saved by a *Person*. God has provided a Saviour. That Saviour, as we know, is our Lord Jesus Christ. This is brought out very clearly when He was about to be born. The angel who spoke to Joseph told him about the baby that Mary was expecting, and he said, “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The name ‘Jesus’ means ‘Jehovah the Saviour’, and that is what Jesus was and is - He is our God and Saviour.

But how does He save us from our sins? John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” We read this in John 1:29: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” In the Old Testament, we read about many lambs that were sacrificed as sin offerings. These sacrifices did not really completely deal with the problem of sin, but they showed graphically that a sacrifice was needed - punishment and judgment for sin needed to be carried out, and if judgment was not performed on the sinner himself or herself, there needed to be a substitute. Jesus is that wonderful substitute. When He died on the cross, He suffered the penalty of our sins. This is explained very clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures”. In Hebrews, 1:1-3, we read about Jesus, God’s Son, through whom God made the world, and it says of Him that “by Himself” He “purged our sins”. To “purge” means to make clean, generally by removing something. When Jesus purged our sins, our sins were completely dealt with.

The Lord Jesus is therefore our Saviour because He saves us from our sins. He saves us from the penalty of our sins, because He has suffered the penalty instead of us. That is why the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

In order to benefit from this salvation we need, of course, to receive it. The Bible tells us that it is the only way, because in Acts 4:12 we read part of Peter's sermon, and Peter says "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." We can't be saved by our own ideas, or our good works. The verse I have just quoted emphasises that we are saved by a *Person* - which is why Peter says "there is no other *name*" by which we are saved. This, of course, agrees with the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" in John 14:6. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 10:9-13, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'"

4. The past, present and future aspects of salvation

So far we have considered what is the most important thing that we need to be saved from, which is sin. We then considered in some more detail what sin actually is, and then we looked at how we can be saved from sin. Now, in this fourth and last part of the talk, I want to think about what the Bible teaches about the past, present and future aspects of salvation.

In terms of the past aspect, we can be sure that the Lord Jesus' work is done, and if we have received it, that we are both *saved* and *safe*. As far as salvation from the penalty of sin is concerned, the Lord Jesus' work is finished. He said so Himself, when He was on the cross - He cried out "It is finished" (John 19:30). In Hebrews, 1:3, it says of Jesus that "when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high". Our sins are purged, and figuratively, the fact that the Lord Jesus sat down shows that the work is done. This is repeated in Hebrews 10:12: "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God," and again in Hebrews 10:14: "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

This means that we are indeed saved and safe. The Lord Jesus Himself says in John 10:27-29, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." Earlier, I read part of Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death," and this verse continues with "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We have seen how the Lord Jesus delivers us from the penalty of our sins, but many Christians will readily admit that they still do sin from time to time, even after receiving the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. They know that salvation is true in its past aspect - they are free from the *penalty* of sin - but they would like to be saved from the *power* of sin right now, here in the present. Indeed, the Apostle John says in 1 John 1:8, that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us", so he knew that Christians still do sin from time to time. Sometimes, this can make us miserable. The Apostle Paul struggled with this in Romans 7. If you read Romans 7, you will see how Paul wanted to do the right thing, but he found that he had no power within himself to do it, and instead he was doing the wrong things that he hated! He ends up crying out in Romans 7:24: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

The same Person who saved us from the penalty of our sins is the One who can save us from the power of a sinful nature. Paul carries on in the Romans 7:25: "I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!" We need Jesus in every case - He is truly "Jehovah the Saviour", as His name means. I have to say that this is something I often struggle with. But in terms of what the Bible teaches, it's simple - we need the Lord Jesus - we cannot do it by ourselves. One set of verses that I find most encouraging is in Hebrews, 12:1-3: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." The phrase "looking unto Jesus" is the key here - let's not look at ourselves, but let's look at Jesus. If we look at ourselves, then we have to agree with the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:18: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." But if we look at the Lord Jesus, and rely on Him, we can be encouraged by the words of Philippians 1:6: "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ".

What about salvation in its future aspect? So far we have been thinking about salvation and being saved in terms of being delivered, and not having to undergo the unpleasant consequences of our sins. We will not face eternal judgment for our sins, if we know that the Lord Jesus is our Saviour. If we have believed in Him, and have accepted His salvation, we are free from condemnation. (Romans 8:1) There is another way we could look at the word "saved". We can save something from danger, but we can also save something in the sense of keeping it back for something special. When we talk about our savings, we usually mean money or other resources that we have kept somewhere safe, to be used at a later date, perhaps for something special. It is also true that God saves us in that way. Why does God save us? Why did He send the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Saviour? It is because of His great love, and because He wants us for Himself. It seems incredible that God should be bothered with us, and should want to save us for Himself, but He does. God speaks with great affection about His own people. In the Old Testament, in Malachi 3:16-17, we read about a few people who feared the LORD, and thought about Him. God says of them "They shall be Mine on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." God delighted in these people; He would "spare" or "save" them for Himself, and He considered them precious like jewels.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus speaks about those who belong to Him. We have already read those beautiful words in John 10:27-28, where the Lord Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." Right at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 21:3-4, we read some wonderful words: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'" This will be the final phase of our salvation, when all of God's plans and promises will have been fulfilled.

So in this brief look, we have considered what the Bible teaches about salvation. Firstly, we considered what is the most important thing that we need to be saved from, which is sin. Secondly, we thought some more about what sin is. Thirdly, we looked at what the Bible teaches about how to be saved, and to understand that salvation is in a Person. Finally, we considered salvation in its past, present and future aspects.

When we think about the wonderful plan of grace that God has for us all, it is no wonder that the Gospel message of the Bible is called "Good news"!

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