

# Talk Notes

Title: Perspective on Salvation

Meeting: Freshwaters

Date: 11/12/16

## Introduction

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Over recent months I have been considering how our perspectives on what we understand by 'salvation' can skew our understanding of what it is to be a follower or disciple of Jesus. I believe that God is reminding us of Jesus main way of teaching His disciples – discipleship through relationship. This morning I want to examine how some of our perspectives on salvation can help or hinder that discipleship through relationship.

I have carefully used the word 'perspective' this morning, because it is a good description of the mainstream views of salvation. We are all looking at the same thing, but from different angles, emphasising different things. So I am not talking so much about right or wrong this morning so much as **to show how the different perspectives can help or hinder our call to discipleship through relationship with Jesus.**

## What is salvation?

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'What is 'salvation' from a Christian perspective?

- Saved from sin?
- Saved from hell?
- Saved from separation?
- Saved for heaven?
- Saved for eternal life
- Saved for relationship
- Saved through Jesus

It is interesting to hear your perspectives – you will have come to them through your own study and prayer, through what you have heard others say and to a certain extent the type of church you have belonged to.

If you look at the verses which speak about how people are saved then you can recognise a number of elements to salvation. We won't look at all of them because of time, but will take one as an example, others can be found in my notes.

**Acts 2:37-41**; (See also **Acts 16:31, 19:4-6; John 20:31**). David Pawson in his book the 'Normal Christian Birth' lists 4 elements of salvation – repentance, belief (or faith), baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Let me ask you the question for each one of these elements – is it an event or a process?

Repentance – a process

Believe – a process

Baptised – An event which testifies to a process

Receive – a number of events and a process

We like to think of these things primarily as events, so we can tick them off and then move on – but our experience and the teaching of much of the New Testament tells us that they are a process, a journey.

Now an event has the advantage of certainty, we can say its done, I'm safe, but it can undermine the need for ongoing relationship with God – in fact it can mitigate against relationship.

Viewing salvation as a process encourages a greater dependency upon God but can give us a sense of insecurity – what if I don't make it? However the thing to bear in mind here is that our security is not in what as happened, but in what will surely happen as a result of our relationship. **We have insecurities in human relationships because we fear that someone may stop loving us, may reject us and leave us. We do not need to fear that in our relationship with God for He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb 13:5)**

I believe that salvation comes into a recurring concept in the bible. That something **has come, is coming and is yet to come**. The biggest of these is the Kingdom of God, something we are going to explore much more about next year. John the Baptist declared it is coming, Jesus declared it is here, we know the kingdom of God has continued to grow from that day to this, but we also know that it is yet to come in all its fullness.

Jesus Himself came to live amongst us – is with us today and yet is still to come back in all of His glory.

My perspective on salvation views it in a similar light – I believe that as followers of Christ **we are saved** (Luke 7:50; Rom 8:24; Eph 2:5, 8; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5) **are being saved** (Matt 10:22, 24:13; Mark 13:13; Acts 2:47; Rom 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15-16) and **are yet to be saved**. (1 Cor 5:5; Eph 4:30; Phil 1:28; Heb 10:39) (Ambiguous Mark 16:16; John 10:9; Acts 4:12, 11:14; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 3:15; 2 Peter 3:15)

This next passage sums up well what I want to emphasise about salvation. **Romans 5:6-11**. Here the NLT puts it beautifully, Jesus through His sacrifice restored friendship with God which we can now rejoice in.

## Three Perspectives on Salvation

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I am going to go through 3 different perspectives on Salvation this morning. Remember what I said about perspective, it is not a matter of right or wrong but about viewing things from a different angle. I will be explaining how that perspective has a real **truth to be**

**embraced, a distortion of the truth to be avoided and the danger that such a perspective can pose to us continuing to grow in discipleship through relationship with Jesus.**

## Faith emphasis

The first perspective I want to look at emphasises faith, it takes the apostle Paul as it's champion and refers to scriptures such as:-

**Ephesians 2:8-9 'God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.'** (NLT).

**Romans 3:28 'So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law'.**

### Truth to be embraced

The great thing about this emphasis is that it reminds us that **we cannot earn our salvation** but must instead receive it by faith as **God gives it to us freely by His grace.** It also highlights the **need to believe in what Jesus has done for us.**

### Distortion to be avoided

By it's very nature faith is difficult to measure, at least difficult for us. However in order to be able to show who is saved or not saved then the 'prayer of salvation' was created. The reason I say 'created' is that there is no such prayer in the bible, nowhere do you see the gospel being proclaimed, the people responding with such a prayer and then being accepted as 'Christians'.

In it's various forms 'the prayer' neatly addresses some or all of the elements of salvation we mentioned above and handily produces an event. Say the prayer and your in – if you haven't yet said the prayer you're out.

Now there is nothing wrong with these prayers in themselves, but I believe that the way we use them and depend on them as a 'measure' of who is saved and who isn't has brought a distortion and easily leads to error.

### Danger to 'discipleship through relationship'

By creating an event based upon a prayer we say, we have are in danger of removing the very point of salvation, which is to do with relationship with God. We have encouraged those who are happy to have said a prayer, believe they are safe from hell and then get on with the rest of their lives with little or no relationship with the God who died that they might have relationship with Him. They may or may not go to church, they may or may not read the bible or pray – but that's OK – they have said the prayer, they must be OK.

Now of course this is a caricature of the prayer of salvation and most who believe it is important recognise that it is not the prayer that saves us, but the faith in Jesus that it professes and the relationship it declares – but it is good to recognise **if we do use the prayer it is as part of a process that began perhaps many years before it was spoken and will continue throughout their lives.**

## Works emphasis

The next perspective I want to look at emphasises what we do rather than what we believe, it takes James as it's champion a favourite scripture would be **James 2:14-19**.

### Truth to be embraced

The importance of how we live and serve the Lord and one another is of course vitally important for our lives as Christians. As James rightly says, our faith is demonstrated by the good that we do for others – it should be the natural result.

### Distortion to be avoided

The emphasis on works can lead us to believing salvation is through the things that we do rather than through the grace of God received through faith – often referred to as 'salvation by works'. **It can lead to a striving to constantly do more to gain God's approval but somehow never feeling quite good enough.**

### Danger to 'discipleship through relationship'

The difficulty in terms of a focus on discipleship through relationship is that **it is possible to do many good works without a relationship with God** – and in fact there are many people from different faiths and no faith at all that put us to shame in the good that they do.

**Works should flow naturally from our relationship with God because loving and serving others is fundamental to His nature** and as we get to know His heart and become more like Him, we will want to serve others. However works are not a means of salvation or a substitute for relationship with God.

## Community Emphasis

The next perspective I want to look at is one which emphasises community. It draws upon the Jewish emphasis on the community you are born into and grow up within. A favourite scripture would be **1 Cor 12:12-30** which talks about the body of Christ.

### Truth to be embraced

Being part of a community of believers is a vital part of being a follower of Christ and provides support and encouragement, so the writer of Hebrews tells us **'let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near'**. (**Hebrews 10:25**).

### Distortion to be avoided

The distortion that can creep in is that we are saved by membership of the church – e.g. christening instead of being seen as a commitment of parents to bring their children up to know Christ and to confirm their own faith when they are old enough – becomes you're 'in' if you are part of the church (signified by Christening, baptism etc) and 'out' if you are not. Unfortunately this wasn't helped by Constantine who also equated Christianity with the state. So if you were christened you were not only a part of the church, but a citizen of the nation.

Danger to 'discipleship through relationship'

The danger to discipleship through relationship is that we can be members of the church without necessarily having a relationship with God. We can feel that attending meetings and taking part in religious activities are all we need.

## Can we 'loose our salvation'?

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Then there is the question about whether we can 'loose our salvation'. To a certain extent this question only arises if we see salvation as an event rather than a process, a destination rather than a journey.

Again I want to make clear that I am viewing perspectives and that there are different perspectives on this subject that can be backed up with scripture.

My perspective emphasises salvation as a process and journey rather than an event. It explains for me those that appear to have a genuine relationship with God, who are filled with His Holy Spirit but then turn away from God and abandon their faith. Saying that they were never 'real' Christians doesn't quite ring true for me. I also think there are plenty of scriptures which talk about this turning away and the implication for our salvation – here are the main one's – **Heb 3:12-4:13, 6:4-7, 10:26-39; Rom 11:17-24; I Tim 1:19-20, 4:16, 6:21 & 2 Peter 2:20-22.**

If we think of salvation as a journey rather than thinking of it as something that we 'have' and might 'loose' we can see the possibility that along the journey we might 'loose our way'. The reason for 'losing our way' is because we have stopped following the One who is the way – Jesus.

Some people feel an insecurity in this – even a fear, but I see a security that is based upon my relationship with Jesus and that I want to follow Him and He wants me to follow. Even though sometimes I get distracted, my eyes are diverted and I loose site of Jesus for a while – then I hear Him calling and my heart responds and I find Him again.

Being open to the possibility that I might lose my way spurs me on to follow more closely, to listen more carefully for His voice, to run back to Him more swiftly when I recognise I have wandered. I also know a saviour who will leave 99 other sheep to search for me and bring me back.

So if we look at salvation as a journey – where does it begin? When I first became aware of God? When I first confessed my faith in Jesus or declared Him my Lord? When I was baptised? When I was christened?

The truth is that we don't know exactly where the journey began for us or for others – what is important is that we know and trust who we are following.