

The Way of Salvation
Salvation
Romans 5:6-15; Matthew 14:25-30
August 13, 2017

Welcome to worship again today.

If you have been paying attention to the news within the United Methodist Church, you know that our denomination is in crisis. We are at a crossroads and potentially going to split. And folks, no matter what people say, this is not about human sexuality. That is merely the symptom. Focusing only on that would be like a doctor treating a patient for fatigue when the root cause is that they have cancer, or giving a patient Tums when they have appendicitis, or giving Mary Ann Price pain relievers when she has a broken wrist. In the United Methodist Church, the issue is not about sexuality; it is about vastly different views of three key tenants of Christianity: namely, one's view of Scripture, of Jesus, and of salvation. Is Scripture the authoritative Word of God or just some suggestions? Is Jesus the divine Son of God and author of salvation, or simply a good teacher, one of many? And what is salvation, and do we even need it?

It is this last one that we will deal with in a short 3 week series called "Salvation."

Today, I want to talk about the misconceptions of Salvation, so I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin. Now, I must admit that Thursday morning, I realized that I was not going to work through Romans 5 like is printed in your bulletin. That morning, I had an Emmaus meeting and was going to text Melody to hold the bulletin until I got into the office, but I got distracted as people were coming to the meeting, and by the time I remembered again, she had already begun printing the bulletin. So, while the Romans 5 passage is a good passage for the edification of your soul, let's put it aside this morning and focus on the misconceptions of salvation.

First: Salvation by heritage or by church affiliation.

These popular misconceptions are prevalent in every belief system in existence. For example, the Jews in Jesus day said, "We have Abraham as our father,"¹ which they believed made them saved. Humanity likes to believe that because you are a cultural descendant of a faith that has some great man at its head or was started by a notorious leader, that this somehow grants salvation. All the hard work was done when you were born, so just sit back and enjoy the free ride. Just don't change your ethnicity along the way and you're good. This error strikes at the character of God, making Him a racist who offers salvation based on DNA instead of personal choice and surrender.

Believing salvation is based on what church you are a member of is almost the same error as the first, but with a slight difference. Instead of the saving merit coming through a physical bloodline, the twist is that it comes through a religious organization – as if claims to be of a particular organization brings heaven. It's placing confidence in the institutions of people more than the efficacy of God.

CHURCH SIGN

The truth is this: God is no respecter of persons.

¹ See Luke 3:8

Acts 10:34 says, "... God shows no favoritism."² Isn't that wonderful? He respects the poor just as much as the rich, the sharp as much as the dull, and the Jew as much as the Gentile. God's offer of salvation is for all, not just a few.

Second, Salvation by works.

This is the great umbrella term that encompasses almost every false path of salvation, whether it be Judaism, Islam, or other world religions. It's all about what you do that gets you to heaven with 70 virgins or favor with God. But this isn't just in other religions. The belief in salvation by works is found in places that call themselves Christian.

This misconception about salvation is all about control. We hate being out of control. If salvation comes by my own works, whether it be though praying the right prayers, making a pilgrimage to a holy place or being faithful in church attendance, then I'm in control of my salvation not God. Works.

The truth is this: we are saved only by God's grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9:

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*³

We become Christians through God's unmerited favor, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice, or act of service on our part. As a matter of fact, you can say that there really are only two religions in the world – salvation by works and salvation by grace through faith. Think about it. Every false path fits into the first category, and only one path fits into the second.

Now, along with this is our third misconception of salvation: Salvation by Law and no Grace.

You won't find this in many circles as an official theological doctrine, but it's a way some people try to live out their faith. It's a mindset that has lots of accountability with no mercy. It's constantly feeling guilty and depressed over your sins regardless of any effort to confess them to Jesus or not. This view highlights the law of God without the mercy and grace of God. Pretty depressing.

The truth is this: There is more grace in God than sin in you.

Listen to what the Bible says in 1 John 1:9:

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*⁴

Or Isaiah 1:18:

*"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*⁵

We must believe that as bad as our sins may be, God loves us enough to cover them with His blood when we confess them to Him.

The fourth misconception is the flip side: Salvation by Grace and no Law.

Some take the view of law and grace to the other extreme and have very little care or conviction of sin. They feel very confident that no matter what a horrible witness

² Acts 10:34 (NLT)

³ Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

⁴ 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

⁵ Isaiah 1:18 (NIV)

they are being, that Jesus is merciful and forgives me anyways. It's all "grace" and no law. I say "grace" in quotes because this version of grace is actually not grace. This is based on a misconception of what true grace is. Grace is the character of God; it's His power and glory. Grace is a double-edged sword. On one side, there is forgiving grace which is God's mercy, and on the other side there is transforming grace which is His power. When someone truly experiences God's great mercy and power it transforms them! When you know you are guilty and deserve to be punished but, God mercifully pardons you, that is grace, and it has a changing impact on your heart.

The truth is this: We are called to live holy lives.

Paul says this in Romans 6:

*What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!*⁶

1 Peter 1:15-16:

*Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*⁷

James writes:

*Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.*⁸

The Christian life is both faith and works: faith in the salvation part, works in the sanctification part.

And grace is the power to be righteous, not the excuse to be careless and indifferent. Grace is what makes us able to keep the law, not the excuse to break it.

The fifth misconception is that Salvation is Universal.

This doctrine teaches that God is so loving that He won't punish anybody. Everyone gets off the hook; everyone goes to heaven.

First of all, if everyone goes to heaven, then what's the difference between heaven and earth? Just a prettier landscape!

Second, if everyone goes to heaven, then Christ never needed to die on the cross to save believers; everyone was going anyway.

And third, you have to neglect a host of witnesses in the Bible to buy this point of view. Let's just look at a few of the things Jesus said. Matthew 5:29:

*If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*⁹

Matthew 23:33 speaks of the hypocritical religious leaders:

*"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"*¹⁰

The truth is this: The Bible teaches that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

How fair would God be to allow Jezebel and Elijah the same reward? Or Paul and the persecuting Jews, or Cain and Able? Or Hitler and Mother Theresa? This idea

⁶ Romans 6:1-2 (NRSV)

⁷ 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NRSV)

⁸ James 2:26 (NLT)

⁹ Matthew 5:29 (NIV)

¹⁰ Matthew 23:33 (NIV)

also destroys the character of God by showing Him to be completely unfair with no sense of justice.

Our final misconception is this: Salvation by the goodness of humanity.

There are people who believe that humanity is good. I mean, we were created in the image of God, and when God created us, He said we were very good.

The truth is this: God created us good; we made ourselves evil.

Scripture does not present a glowing report about the nature of humanity. The entire idea of salvation is based upon the fact that humanity is in a fallen condition and needs to be lifted up or else we will perish. All you have to do is spend a few minutes looking at the headlines to find that people are evil — every one of us. Notice the testimony of Scripture.

Jeremiah 17:9:

*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.*¹¹

Romans 3:10-12:

*As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous— not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”*¹²

Of course Romans 3:23:

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.*¹³

With all the past and current human history of war, torture, rape, child-abuse and misery, it’s hard to fathom any persons who haven’t realized the ridiculousness of the idea that humanity is inherently good.

The way of salvation can only be found through faith in Christ’s salvation.

Every funeral I have ever done, and as of yesterday, I have done 278 (69 since coming to Germantown), at every funeral, I read 2 things. I read Psalm 23 because it is so comforting. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Psalm 23 comforts those who remain with the promises of the Lord.

I also read John 14:1-7: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me.” Then Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” I read that passage so that people will know, as they are staring at the reality of death laying right in front of them, that salvation is not by birth or what church you are a member of, or by works, or solely by the law or solely by grace, or salvation is universal or because we are good. Salvation comes only through Jesus and belief in His way.

Romans 10:9 reads:

*... 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.*¹⁴

Let me close with this story from the Bible:

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them

¹¹ Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

¹² Romans 3:10-12 (NLT)

¹³ Romans 3:23 (NLT)

¹⁴ Romans 10:9 (NIV)

home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!" Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.¹⁵

That's what we need to do: cry out to Jesus, "Save me."

¹⁵ Matthew 14:22-30 (NLT)