

UNDERSTANDING SALVATION – Part 1

Titus 3:3-7

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July 24, 2017

The title of this sermon is “Understanding Salvation.”

The Greek word for salvation is **soteria**. That’s where we get our word “soteriology,” which is the study of salvation.

The word “salvation” means to cure, to provide recovery, to rescue, to deliver. It is often used in the Bible to refer to someone being rescued from physical danger, but most of the time, especially in the New Testament, the word “salvation” is used in a spiritual sense to refer to **deliverance or rescue from sin and all of its consequences and restoring us to a right relationship with Himself**.

The Bible is all about salvation.

It’s the main point of the Bible.

It’s all about Jesus, and Jesus said in **Luke 19:10** that the reason He came to earth was to “To seek and to save the lost.”

1 Timothy 1:15 says, “This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners....”

The very name of “Jesus” means “The Lord Saves,” or “The Lord is Salvation.”

In **Matthew 1:21** the angel of the Lord said to Joseph, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Throughout the New Testament Jesus is referred to as “Savior.”

Part of the greeting in Titus, Titus 1:4 says, “To Titus, my true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”

The story of the Bible is that we need salvation; it tells us who the Savior is; it tells us what He did to save us; and it tells us what we need to do receive salvation.

And so today we’re going to do an overview of the doctrine of salvation.

Why do we need to be saved? Or what do we need to be saved from?
What exactly is salvation? What all does it accomplish? What does it mean to be saved?

Turn with me to Titus 3:1-7.

Last week we looked at verses 1 and 2, which are a reminder of how Christians are to behave.

Let’s review those verses quickly. **Titus 3:1-2** says, “Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, 2 to slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people.”

This is a reminder of how Christians are to behave. Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs, but a way of life. Jesus is not merely the truth, but the way and the life.

Now let’s move on to Titus 3:3-7.

3 For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another.

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, 5 he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done,

but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. 6 He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.

In verse 3 Paul describes the state of man before salvation – foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved in sin, etc.

And then in verses 4-7 Paul goes into great detail about the meaning of salvation.

If you are taking notes, we can find at least eight truths about salvation in this passage. We are going to look at 4 today, and 4 next Sunday.

Eight Truths About Salvation

1. Salvation means deliverance from sinful living.

Let's go back and look at Titus 3:3 again.

“3 For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another.”

In verses 1 and 2 Paul said that we need to always be ready to do good works, and always be kind and gentle to all people.

But that can be hard, especially when it comes to unbelievers, but they are often mean to us because of our beliefs.

But then in verse 3 Paul says that we too were once like them.

In other words, show kindness and love to unbelievers, because God was kind to us when we used to be like them.

And so in verse 3 Paul is describing the state of mankind before salvation. He is describing what people are like before God saves them. He uses **seven words** or phrases.

First, we were **foolish** because we didn't fear the Lord, and Proverbs 9:10 says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We were foolish because we did not follow Christ, and 1 Corinthians 1:24 says that "Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Second we were **disobedient** because we did not obey all of God's commands. Romans 3:23 says that we are all sinners. Sure, we may have followed some of God's commands some of the time especially when it benefited us or someone we cared about, but we were not totally devoted to obeying God's commands out of love and respect for God.

Third, we were **deceived**. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 says that before Christ we are blind to the gospel; we can't understand it; and that our minds have been blinded by the god of this age – by Satan; and we can't see the light of the gospel. And so before Christ we believed what was not true, and we didn't believe what was true.

Fourth, we were **enslaved** by various passions and pleasures. In other words we were slaves to sin, according to Romans 6:20. We couldn't stop sinning. We couldn't stop living to please ourselves instead of God. We didn't have the desire to please God, or the power to please God.

Fifth, we were **living in malice**. Malice is the intention or desire to do evil against someone. It is the desire to hurt someone in some way. That's the way we were before we were saved. We wanted to hurt the people who hurt us, and who hurt the ones we love, and who interfered with our goals and happiness.

Sixth, we were **living in envy**. Envy is a synonym for jealousy. It means to be angry and unhappy and unfriendly to someone who has something that you want. That's the way we were before salvation. When someone got something we wanted, we were unhappy, and unfriendly, and angry.

Seventh, we were **hateful, detesting one another**. These two words go together. To hate is to feel intense or passionate dislike for someone (Google). And that's what it means to detest. It means to dislike someone intensely. We didn't love our neighbor; we hated our neighbor. We didn't love our enemy; we hated our enemy. We didn't love our competitors, we hated them.

That's what people are like without Christ. And that's what we were like. And so we need to be kind to unbelievers because God was kind to us when we were like that.

But I want you to notice that Paul says, "For we too were once that way...." Past tense. And then he goes on in the rest of the passage to describe how God saved us from that way of life. We used to live sinful lives before salvation. But then after God saved us we no longer live sinful lives.

The point is that salvation delivers from sinful living.

Here's the distinction that I want to point out. It is true that salvation delivers us from the consequences of sin, or the wrath of God, which is eternal torment. **1 Thessalonians 5:9** says, "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." So Christ died to save us from the coming wrath, or God's punishment of sinners at the final judgment. He died to save us from hell. Yes.

But this passage says that Christ also died to save us from sinful living. Not just the consequences of sin, but a life of sinful living. When God saves you, He saves you from the power of sin.

Romans 6:17-18 puts this beautifully. "17 But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, 18 and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness."

Before salvation we were slaves of sin. We were under the rule and power of sin. We couldn't stop sinning.

But when we obeyed the teaching, or believed the gospel, resulting in salvation, we were set free from sin and became slaves to righteousness.

We were given the power to stop sinning and start living a life that pleases God.

I remember when God saved me in middle school. I remember that it changed my "want-to." I suddenly had this strong desire to please God in every area of my life. My life completely changed. From personal experience I can tell you that salvation means deliverance from sinful living.

2. Salvation is accomplished by the death of Jesus Christ.

To understand why Jesus died on the cross you have to understand the punishment for sin. What is the punishment for sin?

Look at **Colossians 3:5-6**. "5 Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God's wrath is coming upon the disobedient." The punishment for sin is God's coming wrath.

What is God's coming wrath? Look at **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**. "9 Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, 10 no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom." This passage does the same as the Colossians passage with one distinction. It lists a series of sins, and then it states the punishment. In Colossians the punishment was God's coming wrath. In this passage the punishment for sin is that you do not get to inherit God's kingdom, or heaven.

That leads us to the next logical question. Is the punishment for sin merely the loss of heaven? Is God's coming wrath simply the loss of heaven?

Look at **Matthew 25:31-34**. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

When Jesus comes back He will judge everyone. And everyone will be separated into two groups – those on the right, and those on the left. Those on the right get to inherit His kingdom, or the new heaven and earth.

What about those on the left? A few verse later, in **Matthew 25:41**, it tells us, “Then he will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!’ So the punishment for sin is God’s wrath, or hell, the place of eternal torment.”

If hell is the punishment for sin, what do we do, because all of us in this room are sinners? How can we be saved from God’s wrath?

That’s why God sent Jesus. Look at **Titus 3:4-5**. “4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, 5 he saved us....”

Remember verse 3 talks about us being lost in our sins. But then something happened. The kindness of our God and Savior and His love for mankind appeared.

What’s that talking about? What’s this appearing? It’s talking about the incarnation. The appearing of Jesus Christ to save us from our sins.

How did Jesus save us? He removed God’s wrath from us by taking it upon Himself.

That's what it means when it says that Christ died for us. It means that Christ died instead of us; in our place; He was punished so that we could be saved.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God."

This is why Jesus is called "Savior" over and over in the Bible.

By His death He saved us from sin, or from God's wrath against sinners.

3. Salvation is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for mankind.

Look again at **Titus 3:4-5**. "But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, 5 he saved us."

Salvation is a demonstration of God's love. God saved us because of His love. And God's saving work through Christ is the ultimate demonstration of His love for us.

The Bible says in 1 John 4:8 that God is love. That means that God only ever always loves. He does everything in love. He cannot not love. Even in His judgment, He loves. Even in His discipline, He loves.

But how do we know that God loves us? By His saving work through Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:16 says, "This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us."

1 John 4:10 says, "Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

John 3:16 says, “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Theologians have pointed out that that the atonement, or Christ’s saving work on the cross, is the perfect demonstration of God’s justice and love.

On the one hand, God is just, and therefore He must punish us for our sins.

On the other hand, God is love, and He wants to save us.

That’s the where the cross comes in. Christ’s death demonstrated God’s justice and wrath against sin, and it also demonstrated God’s love for us.

Now just to be clear that we understand the depth of God’s love for us, Romans 5:6-8 explains it. “6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

In other words, it’s not like we were really good people, and by our sheer goodness we motivated Christ to die for us. No. We were really bad. We were God’s enemies. We were sinners. Titus 3:3 described what we were like. But even though we were sinners, God’s enemies, God’s love for us motivated Him to save us. That’s great love.

But that’s not all. It’s not just that God loved us so much that He saved us even though we were His enemies. God loved us so much that He saved us by sending His Son to die the most painful, torturous death of all – crucifixion.

It’s not like God saved us by jumping into the water and rescuing us from drowning. God was crucified for us to save us. Salvation is the ultimate demonstration of God’s love for us.

Author John Piper wrote, “The measure of God's love for us is shown by two things. One is the degree of his sacrifice in saving us from the penalty of our sin. The other is the degree of unworthiness that we had when he saved us.”

4. Salvation is not by works, but by God’s mercy.

Look at **Titus 3:4**. “He saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy.”

What does it mean that salvation is not by works? It means that God does not save us because we are good; He does not save us because of our performance; He does not save us because we are religious; He does not save us because we are generous and compassionate and moral.

Why not? Because the Bible says that the punishment for sin is hell, and we are all sinners.

You might think that’s not fair; that even though you are a sinner, you don’t deserve hell.

But your sins are more serious that you think.

The seriousness of your sin is not measured just by the act, but by the importance of the person that you sin against.

For example, if you kill a bug nobody will care. But if you kill a human being, people will be upset. It’s the same act in both instances – killing. But one is much more serious than the other because of who the act is against.

When you sin against God, you are sinning against the Creator of the Universe. It’s a serious crime, and the punishment is eternal torment in hell.

You might think that you're not as bad as someone like Hitler.

I'd agree with you. And God is fair; there are degrees of punishment in hell.
Some will have it worse than others.

In **Luke 10:13-15** Jesus said, "13 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14 But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you."

Chorazin and Bethsaid were towns where Jesus performed many miracles to prove that He was the Son of God, but they still rejected Him. And so He told them that they will receive greater punishment than the towns that rejected Him where He didn't perform as many miracles. So there will be degrees of punishment.

But that's why God doesn't save us according to works.

If God were to treat us according to our works, then we would all go hell.

Therefore there's only one way for God to save us. Mercy.

Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy."

What is mercy? Mercy is forgiveness. It is not giving someone what they deserve.

In other words, salvation is not based on our goodness, it is based on God's forgiveness.

Good people don't go to heaven, forgiven people do.

God does not withhold His wrath from us because we are good; He withholds His wrath from us because He forgives us.

But how can God forgive us? Isn't that unjust? Doesn't He have to punish us for our sins?

That brings us back to an earlier point. God can forgive us, He can withhold His wrath from us, because He satisfied His wrath through the sacrifice of Christ.

Look at **Ephesians 1:7**. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."

In Christ, we have redemption, or freedom from sin and its consequences, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace.

So our forgiveness is made possible because of the blood of Christ.

So once again. Good people don't go heaven, forgiven people do.

The question is not Are you good enough to get into heaven? You are not.

The question is Are you forgiven?

How do you get forgiveness?

Look at **Acts 10:43**. "All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins."

This verse is about Jesus. And it says that forgiveness must be received. And the way to receive it is by believing in Him. In other words faith.

We receive God's forgiveness and salvation by faith, or by believing in Jesus Christ – that He is the Son of God, who paid for our sins, and rose again, and who deserves your full devotion.

So we're not saved by good works, but by believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

CONCLUSION

That's a good place for us to close today. Next week we'll look at four more truths about salvation.

But for now, I want to encourage you to think about your own salvation.

Are you saved?

Have you been delivered from sinful living?

Have you had your sins forgiven? If you are not sure, then you can get saved today.

Remember, the way to get saved is to believe in Jesus.

Believing in Jesus means trusting that He is the Son of God, who paid for our sins, and rose again, and that He deserves your full devotion.

Believing in Jesus is a decision to stop trusting in good works to save you and to start trusting in Christ's work on the cross to save you. And it is a decision to stop living in sin and start living in full devotion to Christ.

If you make that decision today, then Christ will deliver you from sin and give you the power to live for Him; and Christ will forgive your sins so that you can go to heaven when you die.

Let's bow for prayer.

