

Saving From Sin

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

2009-09-13 05:30Z

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Location: Clark Fork Seventh-day Adventist Church, ID, USA
Delivery: 2009-09-13 05:30Z
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2009-09-13 05:30Z
Type: Sermon

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God's Radical Claim

God wastes no time. Four hundred years after Malachi, the prophetic silence ends. The New Testament launches, promising that God is sending Jesus and that He will save His people *from* their sins.

Heaven's timing is always right.

At this time, the systems of heathenism were losing their hold upon the people. Men were weary of pageant and fable. They longed for a religion that could satisfy the heart (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32).

At the approach of Jesus' first coming, this is the way that it was. And here are we, at the approach of the Second. The world is in an increasing economic turmoil. The Papacy has again risen to become an influence on a world scale. People are worn out, frazzled by the intensity of life. Things move so fast. Are not our friends and neighbors today longing for that which can satisfy the heart?

The Ultimate Collision

But Satan has not been idle. The errors with which he has long bedeviled Christianity, he has clawed and scrapped and pried to get into the remnant church, and with some success. Satan is especially in opposition to the character of God and the character of God is illuminated especially by Jesus and by God's law. Therefore, Satan has especially sought to distort our understanding of Jesus and of His law. Indeed, God's most fundamental assertion of all, that Jesus will save His people *from* their sins, is Satan's special target. Satan instead proposes that God will accept us into eternity in spite of our sins, that overcoming is not necessary, and that at the root, God's character is as selfish and unjust as his (Satan's) own.

Whereas God has said that He will produce a people who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12), Satan, having come down with great wrath and quite aware that he has only a short time to accomplish his strategy, is bending his full attention to disproving God’s claim (Revelation 12:12). He especially focuses his machinations on one problem group:

He [Satan] numbers the world as his subjects; but the little company who keep the commandments of God are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete (*The Great Controversy*, p. 618).

He is on our track because it is through us that God intends to demonstrate what happens when men give themselves entirely to Jesus and follow Him wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4).

Jesus told Philip, “he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). And it needs to be true that when people have seen you and me, they will know that we have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13), that, in seeing us, they have seen in a fundamental way an accurate reproduction of God’s character.

So follow this now. Our lives, on public display before unbelievers—the sense they have about us, our spiritual credibility, the testimony that we have among those who are outside the church—becomes the pivot-point for the closing scenes of the Great Controversy War.

God’s Design for His Church

That’s all well and good. But what happens when we get together in church capacity? What happens when the individuals assemble together as a collective? It is relatively easy to think oneself holy hidden away somewhere all alone, praying and reading your Bible. But what

happens when one person rubs up against another? What happens when what we believe inside heads and hearts enters into the world through our external actions? Then it becomes apparent what we are actually made out of. Our relations with one another at church go a long way towards proving or disproving the reality of our claim to be followers of Jesus.

Consider these words:

Divine truth exerts little influence upon the world, when it should exert much influence through our practice. The mere profession of religion abounds, but it has little weight. We may claim to be followers of Christ, we may claim to believe every truth in the word of God; but this will do our neighbor no good unless our belief is carried into our daily life. Our profession may be as high as heaven, but it will save neither ourselves nor our fellow men unless we are Christians. A right example will do more to benefit the world than all our profession (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 383).

We will develop these themes further at a future time. For now, let us put our finger on the question of saving from sin. In the end, all of these things boil down to your life and mine, personally, individually. Is your Father in Heaven saving you from sin?

My Own Heart

Let there be no mistake; God has a decided purpose for us:

This is the will of God, even your sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:6-10).

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12, 13).

To sanctify is to make holy. Without holiness, we will not see God. If we want to be holy our behavior needs to be wrought out in Him.

But, some will argue, Jesus saved us at the cross. It would be more correct to say that Jesus at the cross made abundantly possible our salvation. The very thing that Jesus did not do at the cross was to remove from us our free will. The opposite is true; there, He returned to us our free will, and we remain free to exercise it to choose death or to choose life. He wants to save me, but that is much more than a legal transaction. True, He deals with our transgressions. Ezra, speaking of Israel, was speaking just as truly of us: "Our God has punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra 9:13).

But it is more than this. Salvation means making a man, a woman, holy through supernatural power. Listen:

Our condition through sin is unnatural, and the power that restores us must be supernatural, else it has no value. There is but one power that can break the hold of evil from the hearts of men, and that is the power of God in Jesus Christ. Only through the blood of the Crucified One is there cleansing from sin. His grace alone can enable us to resist and subdue the tendencies of our fallen nature (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 428).

Brothers and sisters, the power that restores us, that makes us truly human, must be more than human. Only the power of God in Jesus Christ can break the hold of evil from the hearts of men. He wants us to have it, and we must have it to overcome. And what is overcoming? It is experiencing saving from sin. Jesus is our only hope. He does not just paint over sin, He cleanses from it. So let's work now on these two ideas: resisting our tendencies, and subduing our tendencies.

Resisting and Subduing the Tendencies

Included in saving from sin is empowerment to resist the tendencies of our fallen nature. But what are those tendencies? There is a tendency to usurp to oneself the sovereignty that is God's. We make ourselves sovereign, at least in imagination. When we say, Not *Thy* will but *my* will, we place ourselves in the position of God. We begin to depend upon human power. But the human will, unaided, has no true power to resist and overcome evil. It must fail.

We must have more than human will power, or we will fail. Jesus in the wilderness of temptation overcame. How? Through the will power that was in His humanity? No. Immediately after His return from the wilderness temptations, Jesus opened His public ministry, stating "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me" (Luke 4:18). This is how He overcame. Do you think that Jesus overcame in His own power? Think again. Look at John 14:10.

The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.

The Father indwelt Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus. This is how He overcame. And so, we open our eyes and see Revelation 3:21 in a fresh light:

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.

Jesus is the pattern. We are to overcome as Jesus overcame. And maybe that is why we are given so many recollections of the life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). Because we are to learn to overcome in the same way as Jesus.

And so we are back to tendencies. Jesus is made our example for overcoming the tendencies of the fallen nature.

We are born bent, subject to a disordered humanity. So was Jesus. His humanity was impacted by sin. And yet, Ellen White says this:

Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 664).

With reference to this part of the message, we may say then that inborn tendencies are not irresistible. Through faith, I may reveal the same qualities as Jesus. Through faith, I may exercise the same powers as Jesus. The bottom-line question is, Am I willing to be subject to the Father as He was?

This brings us to two means of resisting our tendencies. The first is to resist them through the Holy Spirit. Because God has intervened, we may provide the choice, we may turn to God. For us to be free moral agents, He has to give us the choice, and He does. But while we may desire freedom from bondage to our bad tendencies, we have not in ourselves the power. So He provides the strength for overcoming. The Spirit of the Lord may be upon us. Rather, the Spirit of the Lord *must* be upon us, if we are to overcome as Jesus overcame.

The second means of resisting is through the vigilant exercise of the will. This is really the same as the previous item, but here we want to emphasize the seeking out of God's counsel and then our intelligent choosing of it. There is a reason why the Bible has so many hundreds of pages. There is a reason why the writings of Ellen White run so many, many pages. While we are not saved directly by knowledge, God designed us, He knows what our situation has blinded us to, and what He must reveal to us more directly via inspired writings. So we should be studying our Bibles diligently, and with a settled purpose, after rightly dividing the Word, to apply Heaven's counsel to ourselves personally.

Conclusion

And so, some heart searching here as we conclude. Does God save us in sin? Would that be attractive to people? Not if we begin to understand how offensive sin is in His sight. To be saved in sin would be to be saved in character disarray. Does the Gospel change lives? Does the particularity of teachings matter? If we gave them the full scale Presbyterian theological understanding of say 200 years ago, would that be enough? We must humbly say No. There is a reason God gives Present Truth. Present Truth is the only way to get to Revelation 3:21.

And so, God is saving from sin. Not just ministers and not just deaconesses and not just evangelists; anyone should be able to reach into the collective whole of the church with forceps, and lay hold of any single member of the church, and get an accurate sample of the whole. More than that, they should be able to reach in with those forceps and every time they should come up with a disciple who is a recognizable echo of what Jesus is like.

Is that a high enough calling for you? Do you see how important it is that each and every one of us be living examples of Christianity? So who is glorified by this? Not us. Never. After we have done all that we have done in the pursuit of holiness, it remains true:

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do (Luke 17:10).

And

All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee (1 Chronicles 29:14).

We get no gold stars from God for overcoming. In the end, Jesus was all in all. *That* has power to move hearts. The Lord we serve is named Jesus, and He saves His people from sin.

Biographical note: Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the Bonners Ferry and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.