

Title: Salvation Mountain
Date: January 29, 2023
Subject: Deliverance for the punishment for our sins comes only through Jesus Christ.
Scripture: Ephesians 2:1 - 10

The story is told of a lumberjack who went to a hardware store to replace his axe as the handle had broken. The proprietor told him he should get a chainsaw because he'd cut down 10 times as many trees in a day. That sounded appealing. The lumberjack bought one and left humming a happy tune.

The next day he returned to the store complaining the saw didn't work very well. It was okay in the morning but by the afternoon it hardly cut at all. The proprietor thought maybe the chain needed to be sharpened. He did and gave the chainsaw back to the lumberjack.

The next day he returned again and was in a worse mood. "I don't like it. It doesn't work. I want an axe." The store owner was very apologetic and perplexed. "I can't imagine what's wrong. Let me try it out."

He pulled the cord and it jumped to life. The lumberjack jumped too. "What's that noise?"

He didn't understand how a chainsaw worked. There are a lot of people in our world who are confused about how to get to heaven. This morning's scripture clears up any confusion.

In my search for mountains with names that summarize the scripture this morning, I discovered Salvation Peaks in Arizona, New Mexico and Washington. The mountains in Arizona and New Mexico are covered with sagebrush and cactus. Not what we'd call mountaineque. The one in Washington is a little over a mile high but at least the picture I saw had snow on it...and a dog.

There is a place called Salvation Mountain. It's not really a mountain. It's 50 foot high by 150 foot wide. Leonard Knight invested almost 30 years constructing the "mountain" from adobe bricks, discarded tires and windows, hay bales, chunks of cement, telephone poles, automobile parts and lots of paint, as much as a half million gallons. He built it as a witnessing tool. The central message is "God Is Love." Leonard included scripture like the Lord's Prayer and John 3:16. The Sinner's Prayer is prominent. It has a big red heart in the middle, a depiction of the Sea of Galilee at the bottom and a cross at the top.

Read Ephesians 2:1 - 10.

I. Where we were. Vv. 1-3

A. Spiritually dead. V. 1

This doesn't mean people don't have some nice qualities or aspects of goodness. It does mean they're separated from God, lack spiritual life, out of fellowship with him and don't understand spiritual matters.

We're familiar with what physical death means. The person doesn't have life in their lungs. They're not aware of their surroundings, the temperature, whether the lights are on or not.

The spiritually dead aren't able to understand what's going on around them. They can't comprehend spiritual truths. They're insensitive. There's nothing in and of themselves that could create life.

People are dead because of their sinful condition. They were born sinners, having inherited a sin nature from the first people, Adam and Eve. Because of that nature, they commit transgressions and sins.

B. Devilish. V. 2

Many versions use the word “walk” instead of “live.” Walk breaks life into steps. When the image of walking is combined with the image of a person who's dead, you could say people are spiritual zombies.

They are devilish. Their lives are patterned after his domain, the world, and him. He's portrayed as the ruler of the kingdom of the air and the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

The devil is a created being and can only be in one place at a time. His influence can be worldwide even as political leaders exert their influence through policies and associates. The devil exerts his influence through his associates, the demons and false teachers and those who are dead to God.

C. Disobedient. V. 3

This picks up the word from v. 2. It's expressed, according to v. 3, “gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.” Disobedience is shown through sin which is anything we say, anything we think and anything we do that displeases God.

If a person only sins one time a day that would be 365 sins a year. It's pretty easy to rack up at least one sin a day. It could be done as we're coming to church -- get really angry at somebody else's driving and wishing harm to come to them.

If a person lives for 80 years and sins three times per day, that's almost 30,000 sins. If a person should manage to do only one sin per month for 80 years that would still come to almost 1000 sins. Still not perfect as it only takes a small amount of imperfection to ruin an object.

Imagine you were hiking in the mountains and come to a 1000 foot chasm. There's no way to climb down it and up to the other side. Fortunately, a log spans the gap. The log is whole...except for several thin cuts through the diameter with Scotch tape holding the parts together. Would you walk across it?

Dead, devilish, and disobedience leads to the fourth D.

D. Doomed. V. 3

Because of our moral corruption, spiritual bankruptcy and enslavement to the devil and sin - we're doomed. We were by nature objects of wrath.

The opening words of chapter 2 bring us back down to earth. Chapter 1 walks in the sunlit clouds gliding across the mountain heights as it describes the spiritual blessings found in Christ, the lofty prayer for illumination and the reminder Christ fills everything. Then we get another reminder that we were dead -- lifeless, unable to help ourselves, absolutely powerless, beyond hope, objects of wrath.

II. The turning point V. 4

This brings us to one of the greatest and most profound words in all of Scripture. But. 30 of the 31 translations I checked begin v. 4 with “but.” The other uses “and” which is also good. But. The entirety would be “but God.” V. 3 could be read “but God, because of his great love for us, who is rich in mercy.”

MercyMe expresses the situation in song: “Like a soldier with no armor, In the middle of the battle, I was broken...It was only getting darker, In the valley of the shadow. I was hopeless...I never thought that I would ever see the day, When every single chain would break, Or hear the voice of Heaven call my name. Then Christ came, Changing everything. He took my sin and shame away” (song Then Christ Came).

God is the change agent. He changes the course of the lives of people who put their trust in him. He's the difference maker.

You may have seen the commercial with kids on a playground basketball court. The captains are picking teams. The girl who has the first pick points to Charles Barkley - former pro basketball player, 11 time All-Star. He was known as “the round mound of rebound.” He dwarfs the kids. Barkley says, “I knew I'd go first.” Barkley would definitely be the difference in the game.

God makes the difference in the game of life which has more serious consequences.

III. Where we are Vv. 4 – 10

What did God do? Sometimes parents ask their kiddos - what did you do? It's usually because something negative happened. Certainly not the case when addressed to God. The Lord has done a lot.

A. God loved us. v. 4. It's not a teensy amount. It's his great love. He is rich in mercy. He doesn't give people what they deserve. His love is further described as kindness and grace. Grace is unmerited favor, getting what we don't deserve. It's God's condescending favor. He's stooped to meet people at their level.

Queen Elizabeth 2 reigned over the United Kingdom for 70 plus years. She was greatly revered and loved by her subjects though interactions were usually subdued and disconnected. However, there were times when she would pause to speak to an ordinary citizen. In that moment she stooped from her high position to touch someone who wasn't of her rank and privilege. She acted in grace toward one who was undeserving.

Commentator Donald Barnhouse, “Love that goes upward as worship; Love that goes outward is affection; Love that stoops is grace” (Romans, Man's Ruin, part 1, p. 72). God stooped when Jesus became human and then died on the cross for us.

B. God made us alive. V. 5. We had been dead but then God touched us. He breathed spiritual life into us. He granted eternal life. We've been transformed from the walking dead to the living. Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life...I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness” (John 5:24; 12:46).

C. God saved us. Vv. 5, 8. Saved is a broad ranging word. We can think in terms of being rescued and delivered. It includes being rescued from the clutches of sin and the devil. We're saved from the punishment we deserve for following the enemy of God. We're delivered from God's wrath. Impending doom no longer hangs over our heads. We've been saved to his kingdom and all his promises to those who are his.

D. God changed our position. V. 6

We no longer live our lives following the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. We've been raised with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms. Our position is due to our connection with Christ which is expressed six times in verses 1 through 10.

Did you know God is a show off? In the future, the coming ages as it says in V. 7, when we're fully present in the heavenly realms, God is going to exhibit the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. He'll put on display what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. There'll be things we'll be able to enjoy that we can't begin to understand here because of our limited understanding.

IV. How has God accomplished this? Vv. 5, 7 - 9

The key is grace. God gives us what we don't deserve. He extends the gift of salvation. People can either receive/accept this gift or reject it. Unlike the gifts offered by Nigerian princes, which are too good to be true, this offer from God is too good not to be true.

Christmas is a time for gift giving. A person has a gift for us. They bring it to us. It has our name on it. They hold it out to us. They try to entice us by describing the gift. They're kind so they don't throw it on our lap but wait for us to do something. We understand the gift is really nice and something we really, really like...but as long as it's in the hands of the other person, it doesn't really do us any good. We have to take the gift, receive it, accept it, appropriate as ours.

The same is true with the gift God has. He extends the gift of salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of sins. People can know about the gift, think it's really cool and be something that would be nice to have. However, in order for it to become theirs, they need to accept the gift, receive it, appropriate it as theirs.

This is done through faith. Faith is expressing trust in what God says and acting upon it. It's a response. Faith isn't the cause but the channel through which the gift is received.

We don't bring about our own salvation. It's not because of our works. Nobody can work or earn their way to heaven because that would mean they are trusting in themselves. Nobody can boast in what they've done or have their confidence in themselves.

People try all sorts of methods of working their way to heaven. An elderly woman told a pastor (Herbert Vander Lugt) she loved Jesus, prayed regularly, read the Bible daily, and confessed her sins every evening. But she was afraid to die. She wasn't sure God would accept her. She also said she was so eager to earn God's favor that she gave a large sum of money to her church without her husband's knowledge. She knew this was wrong, but said, "I did it for my salvation."

Like the woman, many people figure if they do enough good deeds - read the Bible, pray, attend church, help those in need - they'll make it to heaven. Their dependence is upon what they do. Those things are nice, but aren't able to earn a place in heaven. Paying for a Christmas gift somebody gave you would make it no longer a gift. People want to do something.

An instant cake mix failed miserably. The instructions were to just add water and bake. The company couldn't understand why it didn't sell—until their research discovered people felt a mix that required only water

was too easy. The company altered the mix formula so the recipe required adding water and an egg. The idea worked, and sales jumped dramatically. People liked having to do something.

The Bible is extremely clear salvation is only through Christ Jesus doing the work of salvation. He died on the cross as a perfect punishment for the sins of humanity, for your sins and my sins. He rose to life to show that he conquered sin, death and the devil. People can either accept or reject what Jesus has done. It's only Jesus, all Jesus, Jesus alone. It's through faith alone, trusting only in what Jesus has done, through which a person can be saved. People can't add anything.

Could we improve on the masterpiece Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci? Pick up some paints and brushes to put more color in her cheeks, change her nose a little, give her a toothy grin? Absurd to think we could add anything to one of the greatest paintings.

The same is true with Christ's masterpiece of salvation. There's nothing we can do to improve on it.

A conference was discussing what makes Christianity different from all other belief systems. Participants contended Christianity is unique with the teaching that God became man. Someone objected saying other religions teach a similar doctrine. The issue of the resurrection was raised. It was countered that other faiths believe the dead rise again. The discussion grew heated. C. S. Lewis came in late, sat down, and asked, "What's the rumpus about?" When he learned it was a debate about the uniqueness of Christianity, he immediately commented, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

V. What God wants from us now. V. 10

God is a master artist. Those who come to Christ for salvation are his workmanship. They're his masterpiece, his work of art. The background of the original word is poem. God writes poetry and we're it.

Good works don't make any difference in a person being saved. Afterwards they're to be done out of appreciation and thankfulness to God. They showcase how people are to live their lives. Another Scripture tells us "we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). We're to be eager to do what is good. We're to be engaged in living lives of service that would draw other people to Jesus Christ.

Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan told of a coalminer who came to him, "I would give anything to believe that God would forgive my sins, but I cannot believe that He will forgive them if I just ask Him. It is too cheap." Morgan said, "My dear friend, have you been working today?" "Yes, I was down in the mine." "How did you get out of the pit? Did you pay?" "Of course not. I just got into the cage and was pulled to the top." "Were you not afraid to entrust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?" Morgan asked. "Oh, no," said the miner, "it was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink the shaft." The truth struck him. Salvation cost him nothing, but it wasn't cheap for God who paid a tremendous price to send His Son to rescue fallen humanity. He realized all anyone had to do was to "get into the cage" by faith.