

The Truth About Salvation

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[0 : 00] Great job, Brian, and a great song. You know, that is our testimony as Christians, isn't it? I mean, I know it's mine. I am in so, just every day in great need of God's grace, His undeserved favor.

I love that. In 2013, Billy Graham concluded his long public ministries of 60 plus years at his 95th birthday party.

He was unable to preach. There was a video made instead that was distributed nationwide. But that night, he was able to give what I think is one of the best final statements that any Christian leader could give when he said this, with all my heart, I want to leave you with truth.

When I read that in the Greenville News the next day, I thought that's how I would like to conclude my ministry one day. Well, here it is almost eight years later, and that day has come.

I am concluding 25 years as your pastor next Sunday. As I've said three weeks ago, that is the theme for my final messages here as your pastor.

[1 : 30] We looked at the first week the truth about the Bible, then the truth about the church, and last week the truth about today's key cultural issues. Today I want us to look at the truth about salvation, which will also prepare us to observe the Lord's Supper together.

You know, whenever we come to a worship service like this, and you walk in the room, if you are a Christian, if you're familiar with what is on this table here, when you come in and you see these elements, the thought ought to come to your mind, that represents what Jesus did for me on the cross.

He died. He paid the penalty for my sins. To put it another way, the Lord's Supper should cause us to think about the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

One of the clearest expressions of the gospel found in the New Testament is 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and I want you to turn with me this morning and look at it. 1 Corinthians 15.

That's the great chapter on the resurrection of Jesus. Paul was dealing with a problem in the church, false teachers, some believing that some false teachers teaching the resurrection didn't really happen, denying its reality.

[2 : 52] And so Paul introduces the resurrection by talking about how it took place in the context of explaining the gospel, trying to set the record straight.

The resurrection is the key part of the Christian faith. Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity. There is no salvation. Let's read it together.

1 Corinthians 15, beginning in verse 1. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, that's Peter, then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. Now, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel, that he had preached to them, that he explains in basically three statements in verses three and four.

[4 : 27] I want you to look at them with me as we prepare the way for looking at the aspects of salvation. First, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.

The first statement of the gospel, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. Look at that first phrase, Christ died for our sins, points out that Jesus died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.

Jesus was sinless. He lived a perfect life. But he came into this world to go to the cross and become our substitute, to take our sins upon himself, to suffer the penalty, the punishment, the wrath of God that we deserve.

Christ died for our sins. It says, in accordance with the scriptures. That means the Lord's death was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic scriptures. This was always God's plan, and he had revealed it much in advance.

One of the best statements in the Old Testament, describing the death of Christ for our sins, is in Isaiah 53. I'd encourage you to read that later on. Second statement he makes about the gospel, that he was buried.

[5 : 38] Now that emphasizes that Jesus really did die. That was important in what he was trying to tell or convince the Corinthians of, refuting those who denied the reality of the resurrection.

Jesus was buried. He died. He was placed in a tomb. But three days later, that tomb became forever known as the empty tomb, because he arose.

Third statement, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. The gospel is good news, because Jesus was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

If Jesus did not arise from the grave, he would have just been another Jew executed by Romans. The gospel message, certainly the centrality of the cross, what Jesus has done for us through his death on our behalf, is vital.

But it would not be, if Jesus was not who he said he was, the Son of God. If he had not done what he said he would do, rise from the grave. And Paul is just emphasizing, this is true.

[6 : 47] Now, if you go on and read verses 5 through 8, that's the most detailed list in the New Testament, of who the resurrected Lord appeared to. All those people.

Now, let's look back at how the Corinthians responded to this gospel, in verses 1 and 2. That's where we're going to look at the truth about salvation. Look at this again.

Now, I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

Let's look first at the truth about salvation is that it is more than a transaction. Salvation is not a deal that you do.

Salvation does not involve checking a box of something that you have believed. Based on nearly 40 years of pastoral ministry, and by the way, I started when I was 10.

[7 : 57] But based on 40 years of pastoral ministry, excuse me, I think many, if not most, church members across this country don't fully understand the truth about salvation or the full meaning of the gospel.

Now, I'm hoping you do. I'm trusting that you do. But there are many church members in this county, in this state, in this country.

They don't really understand the truth about what salvation involves. They don't understand the real meaning of the gospel. Now, some Christians, many church members, think of the gospel simply as good news that, quote, Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins to save us from hell.

And some would probably add and to take us to heaven when we die. There's a problem of thinking just only that. That's not an incorrect statement.

But the problem of thinking of the gospel only like that is that it makes salvation more of that transaction. I believe it's over and done with, deals done, go on your merry way.

[9 : 26] Let me ask you a question. There can be two questions on the board. If you are a Christian, which best describes the way that you, right now, think about, understand salvation?

Now, don't, as you look at this, don't think about the words, have I ever said this? Think about what is being said there. Is that how you think? Is that what you believe about salvation?

First, look at this. Does this describe you? I believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. Therefore, I am now saved.

Everything is settled. That's all I need to be concerned about. I move on with life. Or, is this next statement more along the line of how you think and believe?

I believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. I also believe that He arose from the grave and I am following Him right now as my Savior and Lord. Jesus died to save me from sin and death and to enable me to have a relationship with Him and God as my Heavenly Father now and forever.

[10 : 42] You see the difference? That first statement is more like that transaction. You jump through the hoops, so to speak.

You've got a profession of faith. In some churches, you walk down an aisle. In some churches, you get baptized. It's a done deal. I go on with my life.

Or, do you think of salvation in terms of, yes, you put your faith and trust in Jesus, but He is the living Lord Jesus Christ. And you love Him and serve Him and seek to follow Him.

And in this way, you think of salvation more in terms, not a transaction, but a relationship that begins when you trust Jesus, but it continues throughout your life.

The second statement, I hope, is what you think, how you believe. Now, let's move on and look at what Paul actually says about this salvation.

[11 : 44] Number two, the truth about salvation is that it involves an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the fact. This is the truth. These verses describe salvation as a past, present, and future experience.

Look at it quickly. Salvation is a past experience. He says, now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received. Paul uses that word in terms of which you believed.

You embraced the good news that Jesus had died for your sins. He's talking about people who truly did trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior. He's talking about people who initially when a person initially believes the gospel.

If you have received the gospel this way, if you are truly trusting Jesus, then you can say with confidence, I have been saved.

The New Testament word for that is justification. Justification means when you put your faith and trust in Jesus, God looks at you and declares you by virtue of your faith in Jesus, your union with Jesus, God declares you righteous or right with Him.

[13 : 02] It's a declaration God makes right then and there because of what Jesus has done and you trust Him, you are declared right with Him. The Bible makes this clear in many places.

Here's a good example. Paul wrote, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, declared right with God by faith, we have peace with God. We're no more enemies. We're no more strangers.

We have a relationship. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When you trusted Christ for your salvation, I want you to think, God declared you at that moment not guilty of all your sins.

When you put your faith and trust in Jesus for your salvation, at that moment, God forgave you. He wiped the slate clean. He gave you a fresh start. You think, how could God do that when I, I've still done those things.

They're still on my record. Well, I want you to think of it this way. When you put your trust in Jesus, you became one with Him in faith. Paul likes to talk about, if we're Christians, we are in Christ.

[14 : 14] We are united to Jesus. We are one with Him through faith in Him. Now, when that happens, we become one with Christ through faith. From that point on, when God looks at you, He doesn't just see you, He sees you united to Jesus.

And what that means is, He sees you united to Jesus, and He sees that Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life, and so the Lord's righteousness is credited to you.

When He looks at you, you're united to Jesus, He sees Jesus paid the penalty for His sins. You're forgiven. It's all because of your union with Jesus.

You're united to Him. You are one with Him. Here's a way to think about it. Suppose you have a daughter who marries a man that you consider unworthy of her.

Some of you are saying, I do. Some of you are saying it's the man, but I'm not going to use it. I've got boys. I've got two daughters-in-law sitting here right now.

[15 : 27] And I don't want to use it to talk about man that other way because I don't want them to think that I just accept them only because of who they married. See, I've got wonderful, loving, sweet, kind daughters-in-law.

And I say all that to lay the groundwork for them to take care of me when I'm old. You know? But let's use the way I said it.

Suppose you have a daughter who marries a man that you consider unworthy of her. Even though he is unworthy, you know him. You don't like him.

You would never have chosen him to be your son-in-law. But you receive him into your family because of your daughter.

He's married to her. And because he's married to her, you start looking at him, not that unworthy guy I don't like, you start looking at him as your daughter's husband.

[16 : 27] Here's a little parenthetical statement. That's a smart thing to do. Whoever your son or daughter married, it wasn't your choice.

You gotta live with it. Why not make the best of it and just embrace them because they're married to your son or daughter. Love them like they are. It'll make life a whole lot better in your family, in your family gatherings.

But going back to the point, you start looking at this guy you consider unworthy as your daughter's husband. Your focus then becomes on your daughter. The guy is not accepted because of who he is or what he's done.

He's still not worthy. He is accepted because he is united to your daughter. She makes him worthy. As Christians, we're not worthy to be called children of God.

But we are accepted as God's children. We are right with God. Not because of who we are or what we've done, but because of who Jesus is and what he's done. And by trusting him, we're one with him.

[17 : 39] That makes us acceptable to God. But this is just a part of salvation. Here's what I want you to understand. What we're looking at now, this is the first part of the salvation experience.

Number two, salvation is a continuing experience. Look back in the verse one. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand.

Talking about where they are now. This is a description of the way Christians continue to believe the gospel. A true Christian continues.

They stand firm in their trust of Jesus as their Savior and the Lord of their life. You know, if you've received the gospel, you truly have trusted Jesus.

And you're standing firm in that belief, that commitment to Jesus right now. You can say, I am in the process of being saved.

[18 : 43] I mean, the process of being saved from the power of sin so that I can become more like Jesus, my Savior. The New Testament uses the word sanctification to describe this process as we are growing in our salvation.

Sanctification is a lifelong process in which God works in us to make us more like Jesus. You know, I hope I hope you can illustrate that for yourself with at least two verses of Scripture that we have looked at many, many times over the last 25 years.

I want to look at them one more time. Romans 8, 29. Here's what God's doing in every person He has saved. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

In order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Salvation is the work of God. God chooses us. God regenerates us.

God puts His Spirit within us. God gives us the ability to see our sin, repent of our sin, trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Well, when God begins this work, He's going to never give up on us, but work in all kinds of situations in our lives to shaping and molding our character, making us more and more like Jesus.

[20 : 20] Here's another example and hope it is even more near and dear to you. Philippians 2. Therefore, my beloved, Paul's writing to a church, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Every person who is truly a Christian, the Spirit of God works in them, and the Spirit of God gives us the desire to please God. The Spirit of God works in us to give us the ability to please God.

If you're a Christian, let me say it this way, if you are a Christian, then you know all this. If you're a Christian, you know from experience that God has been working in your life through His indwelling Spirit since the day you were saved.

You know what it's like to have this heartfelt desire to overcome sinful habits and to develop Christ-like character.

If you're a Christian, you know from experience because God's been working in you, you know what it's like to resist temptation. None of us do it all the time, do we? But if you're a Christian, the Spirit of God living within you, He has been working in you and you have seen some good results in being able to say no to some sinful habits, resist temptation, and actually overcome some things.

[22 : 01] And you can see in your life now far from perfect, but evidences of Christian fruit, character of Jesus type qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I've said on many occasions, like the Chuck Swindoll book title, in this process of growing, sometimes we make three steps forward and then two steps back. But three steps forward and two steps back is progress.

That's what I want us to see here. All of us have a long way to go in becoming more like Jesus. But if we're truly Christians and have been for any length of time, we should be able to see signs signs of progress.

Not perfection, but signs of progress. Salvation is a lifelong process. It will continue until the Lord calls us home to heaven.

But on that day, it will be complete. Look at this, one more. Salvation is a future experience. Now we're going to go into verse two. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

[23 : 17] This last phrase underlined there describes salvation as an ongoing process. Now since it will not be complete in this life, it won't be complete until we meet the Lord after death or at His coming.

It points to the future of when our salvation will be complete. Now the New Testament word that describes our salvation being complete after life in this world is the word glorification.

That's the final step in the process of salvation. It will take place not in this life, but when we see Jesus, however that happens. When that happens, we will be set free from all the sinful desires of our sinful nature.

We'll be set free from all the temptations of the world and the devil himself. You know, there's a lot we don't know about what's going to be like because we don't know anybody that has arrived to that point yet.

You've got to be dead in terms of this life and this world to experience glorification. So we don't know anybody. We don't know a soul except Jesus, what it will be like.

[24 : 30] But John, the apostle, he lets us know looking at Jesus is enough. Look at what he says about what things are going to be like one day. Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

This passage we're looking at this morning helps us see the truth about salvation. As we now prepare ourselves to observe the Lord's Supper, understand that if you are truly a Christian, you should think of the salvation that Jesus secured through his death and resurrection like this.

Think like this. My salvation began at a moment in time when God called me to turn from my sin and put my trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Therefore, I can say right now, I have been saved. But that's not enough. That's not the whole gospel. That's not the full truth about salvation.

That's just the beginning. If you're a Christian, you should be able to say right now, my salvation has continued ever since my conversion. God has been working within me.

[25 : 55] Enabling me to continue to believe, to love him more and more, to want to obey, put forth the effort to obey. If you're a Christian, your testimony would be right now, while I am, I've got a long way to go to truly be like Jesus.

By God's grace, I can see progress. Therefore, if you're a Christian, you can say right now, I am actually being saved. I'm in the process of being saved.

And then one more. If you're a Christian, you should be able to say right now, my salvation will be complete when God calls me home. I won't be, I won't have any more problems with temptation and sin.

Then I'll be like Jesus. I will be fully mature as a Christian. And at that point, I will be able to say, I am saved.

But until then, we say, I will be saved. Final thought. Paul makes it clear that saving faith is continuing faith in verse two.

[27 : 06] Look at this. And by which you're being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain.

I've said this many times and we're closing with this. Saving faith continues. When God begins a work, he's going to bring it on to completion, Philippians 1, 6 tells us.

So I want you to understand, look at that verse. By which you are being saved, if you demonstrate that you still believe, that you still love the Lord, that you still are seeking to follow the Lord.

Only God can do that kind of work in us to cause that to be true. Only God gives us the desire and ability for that to be true. But if you're a Christian, that will be true.

I want us to spend the next few minutes examining ourselves, thinking about what the Lord has said to us through this message, and prepare to observe the Lord's Supper. Would you pray with me now? Father, please work right now in the lives of every person in this room to show them where they stand before you.

[28 : 23] Father, I pray that every true Christian, you will give them assurance. Help them to understand, dear God, that salvation is your gift through faith in Jesus.

but Lord, help them to see that saving faith is continuing faith. And I pray, dear God, that you will dispel the lie if anyone believes it this morning that simply because they mouthed words of confessing Jesus or walked an aisle in a church and were baptized, and they think of that as their salvation, a transaction, a done deal.

Help them to see, that's wrong, that's a lie of the devil, that's deception. Help all of us to understand, dear God, that when you save, you never leave us alone.

Help us to see, dear God, that even times when we fall away, you bring us back. You make our lives miserable until we confess our sin and come back to you.

So, dear God, drive home the point in everyone's life this morning, the truth about salvation. There is a beginning, but it continues. Don't let anyone leave here today thinking that a mere profession of faith with no evidence of a changed life, no desire and ability to please you.

[30 : 02] Don't let them think. That's what biblical salvation is. Help us, Lord, also now to prepare ourselves through confession, through commitment, through whatever needs to be done.

We might observe the Lord's Supper in a way that would honor you, that would be meaningful to us. and just, let's all now just an attitude of prayer.

Heads bowed, eyes closed. Listen to the Lord, respond to Him, and prepare for the Lord's Supper. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.