

God's Power To Save

By

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John wrote that Jesus did many things which were not written, “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (John 21:25, 20:31).

The faith that is required for salvation is belief in what the apostles have written concerning Jesus. Paul narrowed this down considerably, in writing that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The word *gospel* comes from the Greek word which means “good news,” and according to Paul it is the news concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:3-4). One might believe the miracles Jesus wrought and understand the parables He gave, but however strongly he might believe these things, he would still be unredeemed and under condemnation unless he knew of and believed in the atoning death of Jesus and His resurrection.

Theologians have offered numerous theories about what happened at the cross, making it a deep mystery. No doubt, we are incapable of comprehending the complete mind of God, so there may be more to the atonement than we can grasp. But here must have been reason for God to have revealed as much as he did in scripture concerning Christ’s death, certainly enough to make clear the connection between the death of Jesus and the ultimate death of man when he faces judgment in a state of sin.

“Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf” (1 Cor. 5:21). This could mean no less than that Jesus became the bearer of sin on my behalf, and, as Peter explains, He “bore our sins in his body upon the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). By assuming our sins He also assumed the penalty for them, which is death. His resurrection in three days demonstrates the hope for every one who is free from this death-penalty. It was through His death that He abolished death’s power and by His resurrection that He brought to light the meaning of immortality (2 Tim. 1:10). Thus Christ’s death and resurrection is the basis and heart of the gospel, which is declared to be “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

This seems clear enough, and in the early days of the church it was all that was needed to challenge and stir the minds and hearts of people to renounce sin and the world and take up the cross and follow Jesus. It is not so clear to many people today, and the church has resorted to many pragmatic schemes as substitutes for God’s power unto salvation.

THE RANSOM

Jesus spoke of His death as a ransom, saying that he came “to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45). Paul also used the expression (1 Tim. 2:6). According

to definition of the original (Greek) word, *ransom* means “the price for redeeming” (Thayer), “a redeeming price” (Strong), and in the form found in these scriptures it carries the meaning “for, instead of, in place of.” Thus Paul could write, “for you were bought with a price...” (1 Cor. 6:20).

The ransom is identified with the death of Jesus. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man” (Heb. 2:8). “Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same” (Heb. 2:14).

The ransom teachings confirm the fact that in dying Jesus was undergoing the penalty of sin due to us all. The difficulty with this is that it is generally thought that the penalty for sin is not death, but life of some kind in perpetual misery. We hear it over and over, that no one actually dies, but must live forever in a state of heavenly bliss or hellish torment.

If death for sin means eternal torment, then that’s what Jesus would have had to suffer, since He is the ransom price. If “the iniquity of us all” was laid on Him, and He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” then wouldn’t Jesus have to suffer eternal torment in order to ransom us from such penalty? If eternal torment is the penalty for sin and Jesus is not suffering it, then we are unredeemed and are left without hope, condemned to unspeakable woe for eternity!

But we *are* redeemed; we *are* saved from death’s penalty, because Jesus “tasted death (not eternal torment) for every man” (Heb. 2:9), and as proof that His redemption was satisfactory God raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:32, 17:31). The gospel consists of these two events for which Christ came as a flesh and blood man. The account of His virgin birth is not there only to show us that Jesus is the Son of God, but also to prove that He was a flesh and blood man who could die to ransom others of flesh and blood. Baptism, also, has its significance in its connection to Christ’s death. “All we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3), and “he that has died is justified from sin” (Rom. 6:7). We are baptized into Christ’s death because it is in His death that the penalty for sin is met.

THE BLOOD

It is significant that many hold to a faith “in the blood” but makes no connection between the blood and the wages of sin. It is as if the atonement were in the blood itself, rather than in the death of Jesus.

In the Old Testament sacrifice the blood represented the death of the sacrificial animal, and apart from that death it had no significance at all. This entire sacrificial system was fulfilled in Jesus, “the lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). His blood was human blood “like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:15), and would have had no power apart from His death. The good news is not that Jesus shed some of His blood, but

that in the shedding of His blood He died to meet death's penalty for us. As Isaiah put it, "He poured out his soul (life) unto death" (Isa. 53:12).

SUFFICIENT POWER

For 1900 years people's lives have been changed by the gospel, but in this age of technology and psychology the idea has arisen that the Bible is not enough, that the good news of Christ's death and resurrection is not enough, and that means God has provided for His work has somehow lost its power.

The world sells its products through sophisticated psychological influence, and many seek to equip the church with the same kind of influence. Bible college graduates sometimes are better trained in psychology than in the Bible, and many preachers employ every psychological tool they can handle in trying to obtain the commitment of the unredeemed.

Preachers should beware lest they cause people to embrace a false Christ by converting them to a psychological idea, rather than to the One who alone can save by the power of the gospel.

In Revelation, John describes the scene in which angels and all the heavenly hosts give honor and praise to Jesus. Why such exaltation? Was it because He walked on water and healed the sick? Was it because He was born of the virgin Mary and is the heir of God the Father? No, none of these. It was because he was fully obedient to the Father, to the point of dying for our sins, as the heavenly song explained: "Worthy art thou...for thou was slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10). He was "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" (Heb.2:7-8).

This is the good news, the gospel, and it is just as new to millions today as it was in the first century. Lost, confused, and dying people do not find saving mercy in the popular psychology designed to raise their self-esteem and make them feel good. They find no assurance of life in the recital of religious experiences, or in the entertainment that helps to market the modern church. What is needed is the truth of Christ, and Him "set forth crucified" (Gal. 3:1). Here alone is there redemption from sin and death, and the promise of immortality.

It is the gospel, and only the gospel in its clear and simple form, that is the power of God unto salvation.

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