

Session 1
Salvation

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe; to the Jew first and also to the Gentile”
Rom1:16

The Greek word translated “salvation” is “soteria”. Other related words are “soter” for “saviour” and “sozo” for “save”. You may find the word “soteriology” in books on theology. This is the study and doctrine of salvation. Soteria means salvation, deliverance or preservation. It can apply to

- i. material and temporal delivery (from danger or capture both nationally and personally)
- ii. spiritual and eternal delivery (from eternal punishment for sin and deliverance from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God)

Usually the christian message is the explanation or offer of the second of these, i.e. eternal salvation. So there needs to be a recognition of the need for salvation – that we are all sinners and that God's punishment will fall on us if we are not saved by Him, as only He has the power to set us right. There also needs to be a message of distinction and separation. Up to the point at which we are saved, we are governed by Satan as we are in his kingdom, but God's salvation delivers us from this servitude to a citizenship in God's kingdom.

How is salvation to be accomplished? In the Old Testament the need for a blood offering was established early on. In Genesis we read that god clothed Adam and Eve after the fall in animal skins. This obviously involved the death of at least one animal and the shedding of its blood. So the two humans knew what the ultimate consequence of their disobedience was, death. There was also a lesson there about the need for sacrifice and for blood. The message was underlined in the contrasting reactions from God to the sacrifices of Cain and Abel. Abel's involved blood – although the New Testament makes it clear that faith was a central part of the acceptability of the sacrifice. Noah sacrificed when he exited the Ark and the use of sacrifice and blood continues through the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob into the Mosaic Law and throughout the rest of Israel's history with a gap during the Babylonian captivity. This was because God had decreed that only on the altar at the Tabernacle and later the Temple should sacrifices be presented (see especially Dt12). When the Romans destroyed the Temple in AD70, the sacrifices therefore stopped, as they had done during the Babylonian captivity. They will not be resumed until the end times, so some understand scripture. (In passing, we might note that there have been recent attempts to offer sacrifices closer and closer to the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.)

Although this ritualised blood sacrifice was given to the children of Israel, the New Testament makes it clear that the sacrifices were unable to save a man. Hebrews 9 teaches of the Law as dealing with copies of the heavenly things purified by the blood of bulls and goats, but that the heavenly things themselves require a better sacrifice – the blood of Jesus Heb9:23. The point is made more forcefully a few verses later at the beginning of chapter 10.

“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”
Heb10:1-4

The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus' death and his blood were necessary for cleansing and salvation. So the offering of Jesus was part of the means by which God accomplished our salvation. However, to remain there would be to accept a universalist view of the gospel. Jesus died for us all, i.e. for the whole world. Now there is a sense in which this is true. Jesus blood has the potential to save everyone.

“He is the atoning sacrifice (propitiation) for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world”
1John2:2

Yet the Bible is clear that God will judge us and that not all will be declared righteous.

“And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”
Rev20:15

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”
Matt25:46

There must therefore be some other requirement, some means of application of the sacrificial death of Jesus. This is where grace and faith come in.

“For it is by grace you are saved through faith and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works so that no-one can boast.”
Eph2:8

So the blood of Jesus is the means of our salvation, grace is the offering of this sacrifice to each of us and faith is the means by which we lay hold of it. Grace and faith will form the basis of a future session. For the rest of this one we will consider what we are saved from and what we are saved to.

We are saved from the consequences of our sin, the application of the wrath of God. Sin – the wilful disregard of God's witness within us of what is right and what is wrong – causes God to be angry or wrathful. Anger can be very destructive, but is not always so. Rightly used it can be a force for good. Godly anger is a recognition that something, an action or an attitude is wrong and of the need to make this clear and to face it down. When Adam and Eve sinned, God was angry. He recognised the wrong attitudes and actions and punished them accordingly. This was not a sudden, impulsive action brought about by a lack of self-control on God's part. It was a solemnly decreed response by God. ***“In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.”***

It was a measured response, appropriate to the wrongdoing and tailored to the individuals involved. God's continuing care for Adam and Eve was shown in the promise of children Gen3:16 and of food Gen3:18,19, the provision of clothing Gen3:21, the removal from Eden to prevent further harm Gen 3:22,23 and in the promise of future victory over Satan Gen3:15. Similar warning, anger, punishment and continuing care can be found in God's dealings with Cain Gen4. So God's anger is not a capricious, uncontrolled response, but an considered application of his justice tempered with mercy and continued love. ***“God's wrath is not the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil.”*** (J. Packer, *Knowing God* p151)

So sin brings forth the wrath of God, but his justice is righteous and loving. It is in this context that sin has a penalty, a punishment. This punishment was borne by Jesus in his death. Everyone has sinned and is therefore under the wrath of God.

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
Rom3:23

In the end times there will be judgement and the wrath of God will fall on those who reject God's

offer and stand in opposition to Him. The forces of Heaven are led by Jesus against the forces of darkness and the full force of God's wrath is levelled against them.

“Then I saw heaven opened, and, behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war ... the name by which he is called is The Word of God.... He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.... he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Rev19:11-16

This is clearly a picture of Jesus, the very expression of God's love for us and it is he who leads the heavenly forces in this final battle and judgement. All who range themselves against Jesus die by his sword.

“And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse.”

Rev19:21

The judgement of God on all men and women is that they are sinners, opposed to His rule, and therefore deserve death, eternal separation from Him. The good news is that Jesus has satisfied God's wrath by His death. God in Christ has done what we could not do and given us what we didn't deserve. This is the peril from which we are saved.

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me who caused His pain!
For me who Him to death pursued?
Amazing Love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, should'st die for me?
Charles Wesley

We are saved to eternal life in Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Jn3:16,17

Many people will think of eternal life as going to heaven when they die. That we spend eternity after death with our Lord and Saviour is true, but limiting. There are also changes which come about immediately. Earlier in John 3 Jesus is quoted as saying,

“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”

Jn3:5,6

So Jesus is teaching that all who are born again experience a quickening or coming to life of their spirit when they believe. Paul writes of this,

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature

deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”
Eph2:1-5

“When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ.”
Col2:13

“ ... you died with Christ, ... you have been raised with Christ”
Col2:20 ... 3:1

“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God”
1Pet1:23

We have also been removed from Satan's kingdom and accepted into God's kingdom. This means that we have repented of our previous acts of disobedience and selfishness and willingly submitted to God's rule in our lives. Prior to this change of direction we were following a lifestyle inspired by our fallen nature and controlled by the world, the flesh and the devil.

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves....”
Col1:13

This present life is lived by faith in Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”
Gal2:20

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”
Jn14:16,17

Summary

We are saved – rescued and preserved – from the penalty of sin, that is death. We are saved to eternal life by faith in Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. This eternal, spiritual life begins here and now, from the moment of repentance and trust, and continues into eternity. We are transferred to the Kingdom of God.