## Saved? From What?

Scripture: Matthew 1:21; Acts 4:12; Romans 7:13–25; Philippians 3:4–8
Code: A242

Whenever I have preached through the story of Jesus' birth, I am struck with the simplicity and profundity of the Christian gospel. You can see it from the very beginning. It's right there in what the angel said to Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

When the Father gave the incarnate Son a name, He proclaimed His rescue mission in no uncertain terms. *Jesus*, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, means "Savior." Now, "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the Savior-that's been the joyful news from the start.

But you might ask the question: "A Savior to save us from what?" That's certainly a fair question. The word savior implies that we need to be saved from something. Saved is a synonym for rescued or delivered. It implies there's some kind of threatening condition, a dangerous, desperate, or deadly condition from which we need to be rescued. The question is, from what?

If you listen to the way some preachers speak about the gospel, quite frankly, the condition of unbelief doesn't sound so grave. You get the idea that humanity mainly needs to be rescued from its lack of fulfillment. Maybe your marriage hasn't worked out according to plan; or your child isn't turning out to be tomorrow's Copernicus or Einstein; or your dream career has turned out to be a dead end. You understand. You look at the travel brochures; you really want a month in Europe, but you end up with a three-day trip to see the in-laws. Life just doesn't deliver.

According to the gospel some are preaching, Jesus will take care of all that. Jesus will fix your marriage; He'll help you raise confident kids, brimming with self-esteem; He'll help you climb that corporate ladder or breathe new life into your business. The only danger from which you need salvation is the shattering of all your dreams. Everything you've longed for has turned out to be a nightmare, and that's the way it's going to end. But Jesus will take care of it-He'll rescue you from your unfulfilled life.

I've also heard people presenting the gospel as if the great hope of salvation is relief from debilitating habits. Jesus has come to enable you to get control of your life. He's the step stool, the boost you need to get out of the hole you've fallen into. That salvation is especially attractive to a society like ours that is overcome by lust and passion. Many are enslaved by sinful habits: drinking, smoking, pornography, even overeating. Obesity is on the rise in many countries-in America it's almost epidemic. Angry outbursts and uncontrolled tempers destroy homes and relationships. Sexual sin, both homosexual and heterosexual, plagues the entire world-AIDS ravishes entire continents. But Jesus will come along and fix all that. He'll pluck you out of the flood of dissipation by saving you from your drives and desires so you won't destroy your life.

Will the gospel deliver you from an unfulfilled life? From enslavement to debilitating habits? Absolutely, but that needs to be qualified. There is a sense in which the gospel *secondarily* makes an application to those things. When you are genuinely converted, you belong to God and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart. You do have a new reason to live; you have the hope of eternal life and the promise of heaven. That has a dramatic effect on the lack of fulfillment in life. And when you experience the power of the Holy Spirit to change you, you'll see victory over the debilitating habits and passions that your sinful nature generates. That's all true. But those are not the primary issues in salvation.

Finding fulfillment and overcoming bad habits cannot be the most important concerns of the gospel. Why not? Because not everybody in the world is unfulfilled. In fact, I think this idea of lacking fulfillment is a byproduct of our western culture. Throughout the world, there are many who live expecting very little out of life. They don't experience a lack of fulfillment-there's nothing to fulfill. On the other hand, many people are very content with their present condition. They've got all the wine, women, and song money can buy. And not everyone is driven to a point of desperation and disaster by their passions either. There are people who have a certain measure of self-control. So those things cannot be the universal problem.

The real problem is sin and guilt. That's the issue. God sent Jesus Christ to rescue us from the consequence of our sin, and everybody falls into the category of sinner. It doesn't matter whether you're among the haves or the have-nots, whether you have great expectations or none at all, whether you're consumed by your passions or exhibit a degree of self-control and discipline-you are still a sinner. You have broken the law of God and He's angry about it. Unless something happens to change your condition, you're on your way to eternal hell. You need to be rescued from the consequences of your sin. Those are the principal issues the gospel solves.

The truth is, even when you are delivered from the ultimate danger of God's wrath against sin, you might *never* realize your dreams. When you come to Christ, the Lord realigns your thinking so that all you ever wanted, all you used to strive for, you count as loss, waste, garbage (cf. Paul in Philippians 3:4-8). Coming to Christ means the end of you. Also, though you'll experience the power of the Holy Spirit to gain victory over sin, you may never attain total dominance over your drives and passions this side of heaven. Like Paul, you will strive with sin to your dying day (cf. Romans 7:13-25). Issues of fulfillment and sinful passions will be dealt with, in the Lord's time and in the Lord's way. So if you've come to Christ *primarily* to find fulfillment or to escape from bad habits, Jesus may not be what you're looking for.

The church needs to get back to remembering that God sent His Son into the world to save His people from their sins. A proper presentation of the gospel should focus on that. The angel told Joseph: "He is the one who will save His people from their sins. That is why you *must* name Him Jesus." Humanity's real destroyer is sin, and the guilt for sin is a real guilt, a God-imposed guilt that damns to eternal hell. That is why people need to be saved, rescued, and delivered. That is what people must understand in the gospel, and that is what we must proclaim.

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