

We Are Asbury (2): Saved by Christ's Resurrection **John 3:16, Romans 10: 10-13, Philippians 2:5-12**

Intro

As I prepare for this sermon series, I ponder the meaning of our mission statement. I think that it's a well-written mission statement. Does anybody know who is responsible for it? We are Asbury: A – abundantly thankful to God; s – saved by Christ's resurrection; b – blessed by God; u – United by Christ's love for each of us; r- Reaching out to our church family and our community; y - Yearning to tell the Good News to all by being Christ's voice, hands, and feet in the world. I like this mission statement. Of course, each statement is a dense theological statement in itself that needs to be unpacked. This week, we will reflect on 'S' – saved by Christ's resurrection.

'Salvation,' 'savior,' 'saved'... are some of the most used words in the church. But at the same time, they are also most misunderstood. When we hear the word "saved," we often think of getting forgiveness of sins, going to heaven when we die, and receiving eternal life. Having an assurance of salvation is good, but narrow understandings of salvation also create problems.

Rob Bell, a pastor, once had an art show at his church while he was giving a series of teachings on peacemaking. He invited artists to display their paintings, poems, and sculptures that reflected their understanding of what it meant to be a peacemaker. One artist included in her work a quote from Gandhi, a well-known peacebuilder through the means of non-violent resistance. Many people found Gandhi's word in her artwork compelling and inspiring. But not everyone. Someone attached a piece of paper to it, saying: "Reality check: He's in hell" (Love Wins, 1)

Is Gandhi in hell? What do you think? Who knows if he is in hell or heaven? The answer is "nobody knows but Jesus!" Also, it's none of our business to judge or claim whether someone is in hell or not. Imagine that your time on earth ends and you have just gotten into heaven. You meet your neighbor who was an atheist. How would you feel? Perplexed? Good? Bad? If God saved everyone regardless of their faith, how would you feel?

Furthermore, if there is no heaven or hell, would you still be a Christian? Wesley Allen, a preaching professor, was teaching an adult Sunday school class and during a discussion, one person asked this question. "If there is no heaven and hell, would you still be a Christian?" Everyone in the group answered... 'no.' Allen asked why they wouldn't be Christians if there is no heaven and hell. They answered God wouldn't be fair if God didn't reward some people for trying to do good and condemn others for bringing harm into the world. They understood life as a kind of the good person test and heaven as a kind of reward for their good living in this world. But if salvation is simply understood as going to heaven after we die, we lose the rich meaning of salvation. In fact, getting saved cannot be equated with going to heaven.

What is salvation?

What is salvation? First, I would like to remind you that many understandings of salvation exist in the Bible. But we have to remember that the story of salvation through Jesus Christ is, first of all, about the love of God for every single one of us. John 3: 16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." The story of salvation in Christ is not about who's in and who's out or who's in heaven or who's in hell. Rather, it is a story about the stunning and expansive love of God for us. Apostle Paul wrote, "God shows his love for us in that while we

were still sinners, Christ died for us.”(Romans 5:8) Salvation is God’s act of love for us. We don’t earn it by our own efforts or merits.

So what is salvation? To understand salvation, we first need to understand the biblical meaning of sin. In biblical understanding, sin is more than simply committing a crime or engaging in bad behaviors. The Greek word for sin is ‘*hamartia*,’ which originally means “to miss the mark or target.” For us, God is the goal and faith’s target. If we miss God and fail to follow God with all our hearts, we sin.

Have you ever tried archery? Do you know the best way to hit the target? Get closer to the target. The closer you get to the target, the less you will miss the target. On the other hand, the farther away you are from the target, the more likely you will be to miss the target. The same rule can apply to our relation to God. The more we stray from God, the more we will lose the purpose of our lives and thus we sin and even commit crimes. The best way to avoid sin is to get closer to God.

Let me show you a painting. [ppt] This painting is called “Paradise.” This painting portrays the Garden of Eden. The man in the red garment symbolizes God and the man and woman are Adam and Eve. As you can see in the center, Adam and Eve had a face-to-face relationship with God at the beginning. After their disobedience to God’s word, what did they do first? As you can see on your right, they hid among the trees. They hid from God. A theologian simply puts it, “sin and depravity is hiding behind trees.” Sin represents an unwillingness to be oneself before God. As a result of sin, the relationship between God and human beings is broken and we are separated from our target, God. As time goes on, people have forgotten where the target is. No matter how good a sniper you are, you cannot hit a target unless you know where your target is. That’s why we, Christians, believe that salvation is not our achievement. We don’t know how to get to God.

At-one-ment: “To be at one”

Because God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ emptied himself, and became human. In his letter to Philippians, Paul wrote, “Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.” We, Christians, believe Jesus Christ dying on the cross was the sacrifice necessary to redeem our souls. We call it the atonement of Christ. Atonement refers to reparation for sin but its literal meaning is “At-one-ment,” “to be at one.” Through Christ, we are able to be at one with our Creator and the true life, God. This is one meaning of our mission statement. We are saved by the atoning sacrifice of Christ for our sin, which separates us from God. We receive this salvation by grace. It’s a free gift from God.

But salvation has another dimension. Imagine that you received a free ticket to Disney World and have just gotten there. What do you want to do? I know that most of us are mature enough to enjoy any given moment without doing anything. But, to enjoy Disney World, you need to see attractions and even try a roller-coaster! The meaning of being saved by Jesus Christ is to enjoy the life of being at one with God in Christ. Following the way Jesus taught us, getting closer to God through prayer, worship, and meditation, serving others in need, and fellowship with other Christians... we enjoy the new life in Christ and mature in faith and love. In this sense, salvation is also a process or a journey toward holy living or a life getting closer to God. That’s why Paul said, “work on your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Salvation is God’s

gift, but it also requires our response. The Good News is that the Holy Spirit walks with us on our journey of salvation as well as on the journey of our beloved Asbury family.

My friends, We are Asbury abundantly thankful to God; saved by Christ's resurrection. Nothing can take away this precious gift from God. But at the same time, we need to continue to strive to be holy, to imitate our Christ, to love like our Christ does, and to be at one with God. Do not settle for a mediocre version of faith but keep working on our salvation with fear and trembling. On our spiritual journey, we will experience the joy of being at one with God. Amen.