

**Articles and Sermons :: Our Salvation is a Work of God by Zac Poonen**

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Salvation as described in the New Testament has three tenses - past, present and future. If we are born again, we have already been saved from the PENALTY of sin. We are now to be saved from the POWER of sin. And one day, when our Lord returns in glory, we will be saved from the very PRESENCE of sin. And each one of these aspects of salvation is the work of God. God's word tells us very clearly: "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works that no one should boast" (Eph.2:8,9).

Jonah was delivered from the fish's belly only when he finally acknowledged that "salvation can come only from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). The next verse states, "THEN the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land". God waited until Jonah acknowledged that he could not save himself. And He waits on high until we too acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves from any sin or any difficult situation. Then He commands deliverance for us as He did for Jonah. When we find ourselves in a "tight" situation, like Jonah was in, instead of complaining and murmuring, if we would only learn to give thanks to the Lord and to confess that salvation comes from the Lord alone, we will find deliverance coming soon.

Salvation is not a self-improvement program. That can only change us on the outside. The work of God changes us on the inside.

God works in such a way that man can never glory in anything. If we are to experience a thorough salvation from sin, then we must be saved from glorying in anything that the Lord has done for us - including the victory He has given us over sin. The smaller we are (in our own eyes), the easier it is for us to get "an abundant entrance into God's kingdom" (through the needle's eye) (2 Pet.1:11). And one proof that we are really small in our own eyes will be that we never despise another human being - whatever his religion or his denomination, or his lack of light (on the truths that we have understood) may be. Even when we look at the worst of human beings, we will say to ourselves: "There go I but for the grace of God".

Jesus always referred to Himself as "the son of man" - or in other words "an ordinary man". This is what we must recognise ourselves to be too, at all times. If we have been saved from the penalty of sin, it is God's mercy alone that gave us that salvation. If we are now being saved from the power of sin, that too is the result of God's mercy and grace given to us freely. So what do we have to glory in? Nothing. Consider an illustration: If others were to admire a beautiful painting that you had painted, you could be tempted to be proud of your accomplishment. But when they admire what someone else has painted, how could you even be tempted to be proud? We could use this illustration to the work of salvation that God accomplishes in our lives. If it is we who have improved ourselves or sanctified ourselves, then we could be proud of it. But if it is God Who has done this work in us, then how can we ever be proud of it?

What is the quality of our "sanctification"? Is it merely a work of moral improvement? If so, we have experienced nothing Divine or supernatural in our lives, but only done what any man with a little determination can do. But if it is a genuine work of God that has taken place in our lives, then we have been given eternal life (God's nature) and that is a free gift from God (Rom.6:23). (God's nature cannot be manufactured by us in any case). And if what we have become is the result of God's free gift, then all boasting is ruled out. So if you are proud of your victory over sin, then you must have manufactured it yourself!! In that case, your victory is useless and certainly not the genuine thing. And the sooner you throw it away, the better. Seek instead to partake of the Divine nature. Paul said that he did not want to be found having a righteousness that was of his own making, but only with the righteousness that came from God (produced by God) through faith in Christ (Phil.3:9).

In Romans, we see the development of the gospel message chapter by chapter. Here is a brief outline of the first few chapters:

• Chapters 1 to 3 - The guilt of man made plain.

• Chapter 4 - Justification (being declared righteous by God) by faith.

• Chapter 5 - We have freedom of access to God now through Christ's blood.

â€¢ Chapter 6 - Our old man was crucified with Christ, so that we need not sin any more.

â€¢ Chapter 7 - We are free from the Law and from a legalistic attitude towards the Christian life.

â€¢ Chapter 8 - We can now live in the Spirit and put our lusts to death daily.

The result of such a salvation is that "we are more than conquerors in Christ" (Rom.8:37). The danger at the end of all this is however, is that we can imagine that this work of salvation is OUR OWN accomplishment. And so we have three wonderful chapters that follow Romans 8, that explain that salvation is a work of God, from start to finish. Although these chapters (Romans 9 to 11) refer to God's dealings with Israel under the old covenant primarily, the Holy Spirit seeks to apply these truths to our lives today.