

# **Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ**

## **Lecture 11**

### **Jesus' Teaching concerning Salvation**

#### **Introduction**

In our last session, we considered the theme: “Jesus: The Teacher.” We looked at the major themes of Jesus’ teaching. Indeed Jesus was widely known for His great teaching, all of which was connected with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. That assertion can be made because God’s kingdom encompasses all of life. There were many “kingdom themes” that Jesus taught in the overall mosaic of His preaching and teaching on the Gospel of the kingdom of God.

In this next section, we will study five of the kingdom themes that Luke highlights in His Gospel:

1. Salvation: Entering the kingdom
2. Forgiveness: Forgiving others as a law of kingdom relationships
3. The blessed life: Living the blessed life which God gives to all who follow the ways of the kingdom
4. Prayer: Living in the kingdom in fellowship with God, the King (learning from the life and teaching of Jesus about prayer)
5. Money and possessions: Living as a citizen of God’s eternal kingdom within the context of the kingdoms of this world and its materialistic values and search for temporal riches and pleasures

Jesus’ teaching about the theme of salvation: What did He teach? How does a person enter the kingdom of God? And what does it mean for a citizen of God’s kingdom to live his/her life after being welcomed into God’s kingdom, i.e. living a life in relationship to God/Jesus as “Saviour”?

The words “save,” “salvation” and “Saviour” are all very familiar terms for us in our Christian vocabulary. It can even be said that for many Christians, these terms have been clichés that are used without serious thought. So what do they *really* mean? What

did Jesus teach concerning the salvation He came to bring for us? In this lesson, we will focus our attention upon the Scriptures in Luke's Gospel where we find "save" or a related word, eg "salvation", "Saviour" etc.

According to Dr. Howard Marshall in *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (p. 116): "*The central theme in the writings of Luke is that Jesus offers salvation to men.*" This means that in this session, we are studying the most central theme in Jesus' teaching.

## **Understanding "salvation" from the overall biblical context**

***Salvation***, a term that has lost much of its original meaning in current English usage. In part, this may be due to overuse in former times, compounded by popular but imprecise application among various religious groups. Because of this, it is important to exercise care in exploring its range of meaning for the biblical writers. It is an extremely important term in the Bible; thus, further neglect can only lead to considerable theological loss.

*The term for salvation in the OT can connote, in keeping with its root meaning of 'broadening' or 'enlarging,' the creation of space in the community for life and conduct. More often than not, this is created with divine help, particularly in circumstances where God's people face an adversary (e.g., Exod. 14:13-14, 30; 15:2; 1 Sam. 7:8; 2 Sam. 22:28; 1 Chron. 16:35; Neh. 9:27; Pss. 7:1; 17:7; 18:1-3; 54:1; 59:1-2; 106:43-48; 116:1-6; 118:5-14). God rescues and delivers from the situation of opposition and peril to one of recovered spaciousness, prosperity, and well-being. This meaning of the term is expanded to include deliverance from other forms of conflict, particularly in matters of the people's relationship to God. Such a field of reference draws on other terms such as 'redemption,' 'atonement,' 'reconciliation,' 'pardon,' 'expiation' (cf. also 'peace' and 'righteousness'). The goal of such deliverance is the establishment of God's reign among his people and the other nations of the world (e.g., Isa. 49:25-26; 52:6-10; 55:1-5; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32; 37:23-28). Particularly the apocalyptic writings anticipate the arrival of this reign (e.g., Isa. 24-27).*

*The NT writers, apparently following the lead of Jesus himself, appropriate this specialized usage of salvation to designate the establishment of God's end-time Reign. In doing so, they identify God's intent to 'save'/'rescue' (the meaning of the Greek root) with the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (e.g., Luke 19:10; also 14:16-24; 15:3-10; 18:10-14; Matt. 10:6-8;*

15:22-28; 18:12-14; 21:28-32). Jesus' name comes from the Hebrew root meaning 'salvation,' and thus God the Savior and Jesus the Savior become (as in other ways) inextricably linked (e.g., Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:11; also John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Phil. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Pet. 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:14).

*The meaning of the term 'gospel' ('good tidings') is the essence of salvation (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:9-10). The traditions about Jesus record various accounts of Jesus' acts of delivering people from forms of physical, spiritual/psychic, and demonic/cosmic bondage to a condition of restored wholeness and soundness (e.g., Mark 1:40-45; 2:1-12; 5:1-20, 34; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 17:19; John 9; 12:3-7). 'Saved' life is thereby seen in the context of a life that is 'redeemed' in relation to God, oneself, and others in community.<sup>1</sup>*

## **SALVATION AND GOD'S HEART / NATURE**

### **The roots or origins of man's salvation**

Our salvation is from God, by God and for God. God is revealed in the early pages of the Scripture as Creator and then as Saviour (Gen.3:15). Jesus is called "Saviour" – Luke 1:47; 2:11; cf. see Ex.15:2.

God's heart and character is to save life, not to destroy life, and this fact can be seen in Luke 6:9 *"Then Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?'"*

These Scriptures above reveal what was at the very heart of Jesus' deepest motivation in His being among men: to save life, to offer life, not to judge or condemn people according to the Law. His motivation stands in vivid contrast to the Pharisees' controlling interest in the minutiae of the Law.

Cf. John's Gospel where we see frequent references to the contrast between "life" and "death" ("life" occurs 50 times in 42 verses in John):

- Jesus is "Life" (John 14:6)
- Jesus' coming is to give abundant life (John 10:10)

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<sup>1</sup>Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. 1985. *Harper's Bible dictionary*. Includes index. (1st ed.). Harper & Row: San Francisco

The picture of God's character revealed to us through Jesus is *not* of a heavenly watchdog, policeman or Pharisee who is watching our every move to see whether or not we obey all points of the law of God. Rather God is revealed to us as "holy" – not "holy" in a negative sense (demanding perfection), but in the positive sense = reaching out to us in our unholy and broken state in order to make us holy through His blood so that we might live in the beauty of His presence forever.

God's nature is as "Saviour" – the God who comes down in order to rescue a lost humanity, who seeks after the lost in order to save them from His wrath and the condemnation that He Himself in His justice and righteousness pronounced upon sinful humanity.

### **Salvation and our human condition**

If God the Father's heart and also Jesus' heart is to save mankind, then it means that the condition of all men in the eyes of God is described with the word "lost."

How "lost" is man? The biblical answer is: Completely and utterly lost, without any hope of finding his own way back to God. Cf. being "lost at sea," rudderless, tossed about in a small dingy at the mercy of mountainous waves, taking in water and just waiting for the inevitable when a huge wave would just totally swamp the dingy and send the helpless sailor to the bottom of the ocean.

The truth is that no man can save himself no matter how outwardly good or respectable they may appear to be. We sometimes think: This or that person is such a good-living person, they must be so close to the kingdom of God. But the truth from Jesus' encounters with the best-living people in His day is that they were the very ones who were the "blind," whereas the ones who "saw" and were "saved" were the "sick" and "lost" ones according to the opinion especially of the "good" people. (Cf. Roman Catholic theology – human nature is essentially good and with that innate goodness, man can make it a long way "up" towards God.)

"Saved" means being rescued by a merciful God when we were in this absolutely and utterly hopeless condition. God, our Saviour, sends Jesus, the greater than Moses, to come down to earth to rescue us, to take upon Himself the ultimate penalty for our sin, i.e. our condemnation and death. Only God's Son could pay this penalty because only

He has never broken any of His commandments. Only Jesus, God's Son, could save us because He alone was the perfect, sinless Substitute and Sacrifice who could take away our sins.

## **SALVATION AND SATANIC OPPOSITION**

Luke 8:12 -- *"Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."*

This is the first part of the interpretation of the parable of the Sower. The picture given is of seed falling by the path and then a mighty swooping bird comes quickly and devours it. In this simple statement, Satan's purpose is also clearly revealed: he is the destroyer of life, the one who works to rob people of divine opportunities and possibilities to believe and be saved.

God is at work to save man eternally, but His work is fiercely and continually contested by His arch-enemy. This underscores the fundamental importance of fighting against Satan's work through prayer and perseverance in the face of discouragement. We cannot just sow the seed of God's word and then just relax like a farmer who sleeps after sowing the seed. Rather as we go out with the Gospel, every care needs to be taken so that the seed grows into a healthy plant that bears much fruit. This requires watering and pulling out the weeds that grow up to choke the good seed.

## **SALVATION AND MAN'S RESPONSE OF FAITH**

Luke 7:50 *Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Luke 8:36 *Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.*

Luke 8:48 *Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."*

Luke 8:50 *Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."*

Luke 17:19 *Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*

Luke 18:42 *Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."*

Note the close linking in Jesus' teaching between **faith** and being saved – Luke 7:50; 8:48,50; 17:19; 18:42. What is this "faith" that Jesus is speaking about in these

Scriptures? Obviously it is not an intellectual faith (facts stored in the mind) but a faith in action, a faith that can be witnessed as a person takes initiative to reach out to Jesus to experience God's saving power, e.g. to be healed.

### **SALVATION AND GOD'S SHALOM**

Salvation is far broader and richer than "spiritual" help that God gives to us. Neither is it just futuristic. In Jesus' saving and healing people, He meets them at their point of human need which is also often related to spiritual needs. The human and the spiritual needs are never separated in God's "shalom" (wholeness). Salvation is a complete and perfect "package":

- Spiritual sickness: the prostitute needing forgiveness (Luke 7:50)
- Demonic affliction (Luke 8:36 – note this is Luke's comment rather than a statement made by Jesus)
- Longstanding sickness (the woman with 18 years of bleeding – Luke 8:48; leper – Luke 17:19 though in the NT sometimes "leprosy" gives us a view of sin's destroying effects in our lives; the blind man – Luke 18:42 – once again "blindness" and living in darkness also has a spiritual application)
- Death (Jairus – Luke 8:50)

This teaches us that "salvation" in the mind of our Lord reaches far deeper than just the issue of man's salvation from God's wrath. It touches and affects all the damning effects of sin in a person's life. In God's plan for saving man, He brings salvation to our souls / spirits and healing to our bodies, delivering us from the present effects of sin in our lives and also the controlling power of Satan over our lives. This salvation is experienced in this present life in the form of a "down-payment" – our bodies are not healed perfectly; we still suffer in part from the influences of the enemy in our lives; and our minds are sometimes plagued with doubts and fears in relationship to our relationship with God. But we look forward to God's eternal kingdom where we will experience the fullness of God's gift of salvation.

### **SALVATION AND GOD'S DEMAND**

Luke 9:24 *"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."*

Luke 17:33 *"Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."*

We are called to lose our life for the sake of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Jesus repeatedly spoke about people losing their lives by attempting to save them, i.e. to enjoy their life selfishly. Herein lies a strong call to give one's life wholly and totally for Christ and His kingdom.

### **SALVATION AND MAN'S QUESTIONS**

Who will be saved? How many will be saved? Will all the Jews be saved?

Luke 13:23 *"Someone asked him, 'Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?'"*

It would appear that Jesus' hearers were beginning to understand from His teaching that not all the Jews would be saved. Jesus doesn't give them a "yes" or "no" answer just to satisfy their curiosity. Rather He challenges them to make every effort to enter through the narrow door. He then adds: *"... because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."* (verse 24)

In this way, Jesus makes very clear that not everyone who wants to will be saved. In the end when people see for themselves the dreadful realities of hell, they will cry out to be saved but cannot. (Cf. the story about Lazarus and the rich man in torment -- Luke 16:23-24.)

So Jesus challenges all who would be saved to *"make every effort to enter through the narrow door"*. This is obviously not a matter to take lightly or to give occasional effort to. Without a wholehearted, serious striving to enter in, man can be taken captive by the enemy and destroyed. Only those who so strive will be saved.

Luke 18:26 *"Those who heard this asked, 'Who then can be saved?'"*

This verse comes at the end of the passage that tells about the encounter of Jesus with the rich young ruler. Jesus tells this man to sell all he owned and give to the poor, and then to come and follow Him. He went away disappointed with Jesus' words. This also meant that he walked away (perhaps forever) from any hope of receiving the very eternal life he was seeking after.

This teaches us that we must reject an easy-believism, eg. "Just believe and you'll be saved!" Jesus calls people not just to receive eternal life as a gift but also to follow Him, i.e. to submit their wills wholly to His will as Master. People can only be saved on God's terms, not theirs.

### **SALVATION AND THE CONFESSION OF JESUS' ENEMIES**

*Luke 23:35-37,39 "The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!' "*

Here's a confession of truth from Jesus' enemies that He did indeed save others. It's interesting how truth is revealed even at times through the mouths of God's enemies.

It is clear that during Jesus' life-time, it was a firmly established fact that many people were "saved" by Him, which included both saved from the diseases that wracked their bodies, the power of evil spirits that had them in its grip or the sins that held them in bondage. Jesus had indeed revealed through His life and ministry that He had come to save people. It wasn't just something still to be awaited or looked for. God's power through Jesus, His Son, had already been at work in the lives of many people so much so that even His enemies were unable to deny this.

But through this same story God reveals something especially powerful concerning His own Son: His desire wasn't to save Himself but to save us. He could have saved Himself very easily by calling on God to send Him twelve legions of angels to rescue Him. (See Matt.26:53.) And God the Father would have listened to the prayer of His beloved Son.

But Jesus had come to save this fallen human race and so He refused to display His power for His own sake in any vindictive sense.

Truly Jesus the Son of God showed us the meaning of the word of God, that it is the Father's work to avenge man's evil towards God's people, not man's. In God's perfect moment, He would vindicate His Son and avenge all that man had done to Him. Thus in

complete surrender to His Father's plan without taking His life into His own hands, Jesus hung there on the cross right to the end of His earthly ministry. He did not allow the intense pain and suffering to take His eyes of the Father's holy and eternal purposes.

*John 12:27,28 -- "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"*

As Jesus contemplated how He could so easily experience His own deliverance, He prayed the loftiest prayer of all, that the Father would exalt and bring highest honour to His own name through what Jesus was about to do. He saw that it was for the very reason of being offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world that He had come down from heaven. He could not turn back at this final hour, even if the pain and the rejection would be so intense. He would not save Himself so that we might be saved. A perfect Saviour!

*Acts 4:12 -- "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* What a wonderful verse that speaks so clearly that God has set only ONE WAY for anyone to be saved, i.e. through placing their faith in the name (= Person) of Jesus. All other ways lead ultimately towards delusion and eternal destruction. But in Jesus' name, anyone may be gloriously and eternally saved. Amen!

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