

Salvation in John's Gospel

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[0:00] Please open your Bible. We're going to look for a few minutes, and I hope it's not more than a few minutes, at a subject. And the subject is the doctrine of salvation in John's Gospel.

This is a theme I'll explain to you, I'll be quite honest with you. Every time I go to teach at the ministry training course in Haywards Heath, I tell them I will teach about this subject, but I always run out of time, which is just as well because I've never ever prepared the talk for it. So I would like one day to prepare the talks for this subject because it's a great subject. And even now I've not managed to do it because we've had a little change of tack and we're going to think about deacons next week. So this is half a beginning to something which I still won't actually get going on. The theme of salvation in John's Gospel is a theme of wonder and of worship and of fascination and a little bit dissatisfaction in the sense that you might have the same experience as I. You read some of the texts in John's Gospel and you think, I wouldn't have quite put it like that if I'd written John's Gospel. I would have put it a bit differently. Why does he put it that way? Why does he say that? And it's that sort of little sense that we haven't quite got the hang of it that always tantalizes me that I'd like to sort of work through. Well, I'm not going to do that all this evening, but let me just try and give you a little flavor in a few minutes of what I mean. Here's the classic text, isn't it? 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. Do you know how many texts in John's Gospel speak about salvation and use the word save? No. It's more than one, but if you put them all together, it includes Jesus actually saying, using the word save, Father, save me from this hour.

That's one of the things that Jesus said. Do you remember that text? This text doesn't use the word salvation, does it? But it is about not perishing. It's a wonderful expression of gospel truth faith and the love of God. And I think familiarity ought not to blind us to the fact that it is, it's a text on its own. There are very few other texts that dare to say what this text says.

It has within it this question of faith. So it says that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. So faith is very much part of this. And if we were to continue with the study, which I hope we will at some point, we would see faith. It's a very important thing in John's Gospel.

[3:14] But you might ask yourself, why does the text begin with the word for? Have you ever asked yourself for God so loved? Why does it say for? We repeat it as if the word for is just one of those words that you add in to a sentence without making any difference to it, like um, um, God so loved the world that he gave.

Why does it say for? That's a good question, I think. And how can God love the world if, what does that mean? Does it mean God loves absolutely everybody? What happens if they don't believe? And if they do perish, how does God's love fit with that? That's quite a difficult question. And how can God love a thing like the world if in some sense it deserves to perish? What sort of love is that? It's certainly not a love of delight. God doesn't look at the world and say, you're all such lovely people. Oh, you know, my heart goes out to you, you're so brilliant, you're so clever and so selfless. And that's not, that's not what the world is like. The world in, in this text is a world which would otherwise perish.

there's, there's, there's, so that's just a few little thoughts on a text that we often come back to, but it, it certainly deserves thinking about some more. What about John 10, 26? Surely Jesus should have been advised by his PR department not to say verse 26. Uh, he is in controversy with the Jews, Jews. Uh, they don't, uh, trust him. They don't believe him. In chapter 10, verse 25, Jesus answered, uh, they say, tell us plainly. He says, I did tell you you didn't believe. The miracles I do in

my father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. Now Jesus, I think Jesus is not well advised to say that, is he? Uh, you do not believe because you are not my sheep. Uh, it seems to say there is something which determines their reaction, whether they can or will believe.

Uh, you do not believe because you are not my sheep. Well, if we're not your sheep, oh, I don't know that, that is quite a difficult thought, isn't it? I don't know whether you, you see how difficult it is. Uh, if you don't, I'll just leave, leave that, uh, hanging. How does it all fit together? That's the sort of thought I'm, I'm thinking. You know, we, we associate with Paul, the Apostle Paul, these difficult doctrines of predestination and free will and all of that, uh, all of those thoughts. But actually John is the one who, uh, really makes us think, why did you say that, Lord? Why is it said that way? So I don't mean it just to say, oh, well, it's a conundrum and I want to send everybody confused, at home confused. Uh, but, but to say when the Bible says things that grate us a little bit and make us think and make us say,

I didn't think it was supposed to be put like that, then there's something there for us to, to grapple with, for us to learn in fact, because our thinking must be wrong, mustn't it? It isn't Jesus that's wrong, it's us that haven't understood something. So that's, that's what was itching within me to try and, uh, and, and open this subject up to look into it. But, uh, rather than try and solve everything, let's just take the first step. And I think the first step would be to look at the first text in John's gospel that speaks about salvation or anything like that. So in John chapter one, right at the beginning, it begins with who Jesus is and it goes, it goes on to who John the Baptist is. And then the, I think the first text that addresses our, our theme of interest of, of, of, of what we would say salvation, uh, is around and about verse, verse 10, 11, 12.

[7:48] It says, he was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Now, yet, now, did you notice verse 11, he came to his own, but his own did not receive him. This is a very typical John thing to say something and then contradict himself in the next sentence. So nobody received him. He says that, uh, he came to his own, but his own did not receive him. Nobody received him. Then he says, well, actually, yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, not of human decision, nor a husband's will, but born of God.

And that's the text in which John introduces us to the subject of salvation. Let's just look at that for a few minutes. Um, I've just written it up there to give myself a little bit more space.

So he came to his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. So even to begin the text that way seems to tell us that there's something going against the grain if you believe. Most people do not believe and there are exceptions.

exceptions. So, uh, here's my bullet point. There's something exceptional about salvation. It isn't the normal thing. It's, it's exceptional. That's the way the, the, the text puts it, isn't it?

They did not receive him. There should be an eye there. Yet to all who received him. To these, there's an exception to this, what seems to be almost a, a, a, um, an unbroken rule.

[9:45] Well, salvation's an exceptional thing. And if you and I have received salvation, that's exceptional. And we might ask, how come I'm the exception? How come there's something, something exceptional has happened to me? And I think you might, logically, you might say, well, I'm a bit of an exceptional person, actually. But the text won't allow that to stand for a moment.

It won't allow us to say, that's something about me. It, it leaves us to say, well, that the, God has done something exceptional. Why me?

Another bullet point from this text is that it is about faith. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name. Key thing, faith. Key thing, faith. That's a profound truth about the Christian life. We live by faith. It's not about a buzz experience. So sometimes people, when they explain how they became a Christian, say, God zapped me. I'm not, I'm not disputing that God might zap somebody. But the Bible doesn't invite us to rest our security on the fact that something sort of

bizarre and sort of neon lights happened to us. What it does do, it says, rest yourself in faith on what Jesus has said. And I say that because that's a very important thing for going on in the Christian life. Because however spectacularly your Christian life started, and it might have started in a wonderfully spectacular way, at some point the Christian life will come back to this. Whether it's spectacular or not, whether you feel up or down or not, will you just believe? Will you just trust in Jesus Christ? And it says here that faith is this key thing to those who believed in his name. Another bullet point, this Christianity is supernatural. Do you notice how he takes his, he goes out of his way to say, being a Christian is not something that happens in the ordinary course of things. So he says however many times, not born of natural descent, not of human decision, not a husband's will, but born of God. And how many times does he say not?

[12:50] One, two, three. So he's going out of his way to emphasize something, isn't it? And I think in the context, in a Jewish context, he's saying that the Jewish people who say, well, we're fully paid up, descendants of Abraham, we're the people of God, we're the children of God. John's gospel comes in and says it is not to do with your ethnicity. Your ethnicity neither qualifies you nor disqualifies you. It is not to do with your natural descent. And it is not to do with a human decision. Now, perhaps that loads the term a little bit, but he's saying it's not a humanly, bottom of, you know, if you dig down deep, it's not a human thing. It hasn't come from human impetus. But born of God, God has done something. It's God's work to make people Christians. If we're Christians, it's because

God has supernaturally done something powerful and deep and amazing. Bullet point. what happens is we're given the right to become children of God. The new, new, new international version goes out of its way to make sons or daughters into children, doesn't it? And fathers into parents. And sometimes it's quite right to do that. Sometimes I'm not sure it goes a bit far. But here it does say children. So it's not gender specific. It's really to do with family. What is Christianity about? It's entering the family of God. We become children of God. And we can therefore call God our father. That's a remarkable thing. We take it for granted, but it's a remarkable thing.

To call the God of Israel our father. And one more bullet point. He says it is, he gives us the right up here, right to become children of God. Interesting. I don't think if I'd been writing John's gospel, I don't think I would have thought, dreamed of using that word there, but he does. It's the word *exousia*, which means, it usually means authority. A policeman has authority to stop the traffic. [15:36] And a judge has authority to judge. And the prime minister has authority to make laws and things like that. And he says, this is the gospel that in this exceptional way, he gives people the right to become children of God. The right, the *exousia*, the authority. And I'll just push one button on this, which is to say this, that we're children of God and that's our God-given right.

Right. And Satan loves to say to us, well, you can't be children of God. You don't deserve to be in his family. You don't deserve to be able to look up and call God father. Slave maybe, minion maybe, serf maybe, but child, no. And this word *exousia* says, I have the right to call God my father. And I think we can put it in this way that when Satan says, you can't do that, we can say, it's my right. I'm not going to be pushed around by you. You're telling me I can't.

Well, I'm saying I can, because God told me I can. Let's sing something together. Let's sing this.