

The Means of Salvation

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[0 : 00] Well, as you know, companies more and more these days are using AI. So I'm guessing you've heard of this already. In fact, they're even using it to help referee some soccer matches.

And so, for example, a soccer match in Scotland had an AI-powered ball tracking camera at a football match. And so it would kind of track things and it would make a call through the loudspeakers to, you know, blow the whistle and stop the play and things like that.

The only problem was it kept mistaking the referee's bald head for the ball and so ruined the game. And so AI is a bit hit and miss, isn't it?

But given it's still being used so regularly, I thought I'd give it a go for our topic today, which is the means of salvation. And so I asked AI about it and it said the means of salvation are the ways to achieve salvation or being saved from sin and going to heaven.

And some of the ways it kind of listed was doing good works, like giving to charity, worshipping, following God's law. And that way you would achieve your way to heaven. But is that right?

[1 : 09] That's not what we heard last week, is it? Last week we saw three scenes. The story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the little children coming to Jesus and the rich young ruler.

And they're all about salvation, whether they use different words or not. And so with the tax collector, it was being justified or receiving the kingdom like children or wanting eternal life like the ruler.

It was all about salvation. And Ricky helped us to see that salvation is not achieved, but received. That is, it's not achieved by the religious deeds like the Pharisee or by obeying God's law and being wealthy like the ruler.

But it's received like the little children. And yet that left the disciples with a question in our passage towards the end of last week. They heard this and asked, who then can be saved?

It's not even this rich ruler who obeyed God's law can be saved. And Jesus replied, what is impossible with man is possible with God. But the question then becomes, how?

[2 : 19] How does God make it possible? How do we receive it? In other words, what is God's means of salvation? And that's what Luke shows us this week with another three scenes, beginning with the most vital or central part of God's means, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And so we're at part one on your outlines and verse 31 in your Bibles or on the screen. Jesus took the 12 aside and told them, we are going up to Jerusalem. And everything that is written by the prophets about the son of man will be fulfilled.

He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him. They will flog him and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again.

And remember, we're in the part of Luke's book where Jesus has deliberately set out for Jerusalem to die there and rise again.

And it's just as it is written in the Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah we had as our first reading. And this tells us two things. Firstly, it tells us why he's going to die.

[3 : 33] And so you might remember from Isaiah, it says he was pierced. Why? Well, for our transgressions, our sins. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him.

And it's by his wounds we are healed or forgiven. Jesus would die to take the punishment for our sins in our place so that we don't have to.

Instead, we can be forgiven and given peace with God and new life. Instead, you see, the prophets tell us why Jesus was going to die.

But second, that it's written in the prophets also tells us that his death was not random or unforeseen. It was planned and predicted, wasn't it, in the prophets.

In other words, it tells us this was always God's means to save. Isaiah even mentions the resurrection too.

[4 : 33] Later on in verse 11, which we didn't have read out, it says, After he has suffered, he will see the light of life. There's the resurrection. The point is, Jesus' death and resurrection is the first part of God's means of salvation.

It's the most vital and central part. And this means if we want others to be saved, then they need to hear of Jesus' death and resurrection for them too.

Don't they? Are you sure we're to build relationships? We're to be caring. We're to be good witnesses that it might provoke an opportunity. And we need to be wise with which opportunities and so on.

But when they come, we are to speak to them of Jesus' death and resurrection for them. So otherwise, they cannot be saved.

Sometimes people quote that monk Francis of Assisi. Have you heard of this guy before? He said, Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.

[5 : 40] That is, preach the gospel with your good lives and only use words really if they're absolutely necessary. But here's the thing. He never actually said that. It's a misnomer.

He was not actually, there's not in his writings anywhere. He never actually said it. In fact, it was actually the reverse. He was actually huge into preaching.

In fact, he even preached to the birds, which is a bit odd, right? But that's how big into preaching he was. At the point is, we need to do what we can to help others hear about Jesus' death and resurrection for them.

Whether it's speaking in ourselves when the opportunity comes up or writing verses on birthday cards or supporting others who do. And for many people in this congregation, you're at an age where you can get away with anything.

And so you have even more opportunity, actually. For Jesus' death and resurrection is the first and most vital part of God's means to save.

[6 : 48] Though the disciples don't see it. Verse 34. The disciples did not understand any of this. The meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what he was talking about.

I think they, at this point, they knew Jesus was the Christ or Messiah. They're both titles like Mr. and Mrs. And the titles mean, of course, King. But they didn't get how this king had to die.

It was hidden from them. And not by God this time, I don't think. Rather, by their own preconceived ideas. Remember, for Jews, it was inconceivable that God's king would die on a cross.

But they should have known it. Indeed, Jesus expected them to get it. In fact, earlier on in the gospel, he tells them to listen carefully to what I'm about to tell you about my death.

You see, he expects them to get it, doesn't he? Which is why later on, he says to them, how foolish you are not to get it. Or that the prophets spoke about what would happen to me, the Messiah, the king.

[7 : 55] You see, if Jesus knew God had hidden it from them, he would not have expected them to get it. So rather, it was actually their own closed-mindedness that hid it from them.

Which is why Jesus had to later open their minds so that they could understand it. And so verse 34, with this idea of it being hidden, reminds us that the means of salvation also includes God's enabling, doesn't it?

I still vividly remember visiting a grandmother of someone at an old church who was dying. And so this person asked me to go and visit them. And I did. And I explained about Jesus's death and resurrection.

I answered all her questions. I pointed out all the evidence we had, which actually makes it a reasonable thing to believe. And she said, look, I understand what you're saying, but I still just don't get it.

I wish you men, look, I understand your reasoning and your logic, but I just still can't believe it, that it's true. She needed God to open her mind to really see it, to see that it is really true.

[9 : 11] And so not only do we need to help others hear of Jesus's death and resurrection, we need to persist in prayer that God might open their minds to prayer night, this Wednesday night. But God has to enable people to truly see and believe, have faith, which brings us to the second part of God's means of salvation.

So part two, verse 35. As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting on by the roadside begging. And when he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

He called out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Here Luke moves from the disciples who do not see to a blind man who ironically does see.

That is, he may not see physically, but he sees spiritually who Jesus is. For the disciples, it was how he, they couldn't see how he could die.

But for this man, it was he could see who Jesus is. Because did you notice how the people referred to Jesus in verse 37? Jesus of Nazareth. But how does he refer to him in verse 38?

[10:21] Jesus, son of David. And the son of David was the king. The Christ would come from King David's line. See, he gets who Jesus is.

It seems that this blind man had heard of what Jesus has done, and God had opened his mind to understand who Jesus is, the promised king from David's line who saves.

And so he believes or has faith in Jesus, so much so that he keeps calling out to Jesus. Verse 39, those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

And so Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. And when he came near, Jesus asked him, what do you want me to do for you? Lord, I want to see, he replied. Jesus said to him, receive your sight.

Your faith has healed you. Literally, it says, your faith has saved you. This is what the healing represents at being saved.

[11:30] Like Isaiah, by his wounds, we are healed, forgiven, say. But here's the second part of God's means of salvation. Faith. Faith in King Jesus who saves.

And so putting it together so far, God's means of salvation is faith, in King Jesus who saves by his death and resurrection. And so the question for us, firstly, is do we have faith?

If you're here this morning or on listening online and you don't yet have salvation, you cannot achieve it. No matter how good you try to be in life.

No, no, we can only receive it by believing or having faith in Jesus who saves us. Saves us by his death and resurrection. And so do you have faith?

It's worth it, by the way, because it comes with new life, doesn't it? You see, these miracles were not just acts of Jesus's compassion, but also signs of Jesus's identity as the anointed King who comes to bring new life.

[12:40] Jesus said earlier in Luke's gospel, when he was starting his mission, he said, the spirit of the Lord is on me, quoting Isaiah 61, because he has anointed me. There's the Messiah word, anointed me as King to proclaim good news and even recovery of sight for the blind, just as he's done here.

And to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And so giving sight to this blind man shows that he's God's anointed one, the King who brings the Lord's favor, including new life.

And that's what we see in our passage, don't we? The blind man effectively has a brand new life, doesn't he? I mean, can you imagine what it must have been like for him?

Unable to see for so many years and then suddenly sight back. It would have been nothing less than a whole new life. Both new spiritual life and new physical life, because Jesus was with him then physically.

And so I need to say that for us, God may still choose to heal us from time to time, but often we have to wait for our new physical life when we are physically with Jesus later.

[14:00] But we can still have new physical spiritual, sorry, new spiritual life now with hope and meaning and purpose with God's spirit and God's family to help us.

As Jesus said last week, with a hundred times as many family in this age and in the age to come, life eternal. And so it's worth having faith in King Jesus who saves by his death and resurrection. And for us who do, then we need to respond like this blind man did. Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God.

He followed Jesus and praised God, didn't he? And so for us who already have faith, is this what it leads to? Following Jesus and praising God. We'll come back to the idea of following Jesus next week, but do we still praise God for the new life he's given us through Christ?

And not just on Sundays, but other days. I mean, I know we can sometimes receive Christ joyfully, like we'll see Zacchaeus do in a moment, but then the joy can sometimes fade and the praise can sometimes wane.

[15:11] Have you ever experienced that? Especially when like today, everything we're hearing we've heard before, haven't we? When that happens, sometimes people actually withdraw from church or from praying or from reading God's word.

But the solution is actually the opposite. It's to lean in, to break the rut. We're to lean into God's people. Whereas we speak and serve together, we find encouragement and enjoyment from one another.

And we're to lean into God himself. I pray that he would open our minds to see afresh what he's done for us through Christ. Or make time to listen to his word about Christ, whether it's by reading the Bible or listening to hymns.

But that will renew our gratitude and reignite our praise. I don't know about you, but every time I hear that song, How Deep the Father's Love for Us, it's got, there's lots of good verses.

Often this one hits me. It was whose sin? My sin that held him there. Until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought who?

[16:27] Me life. I know that it is finished. Whenever I sing this song and am reminded of Christ's death for us, it renews my gratitude and reignites my praise.

When the joy fades or the praise wanes, don't withdraw. Lean in to God and his people. That we might continue to praise God for the new life he's given us through Christ.

Just like this blind man did. And like him, we're to follow Jesus too. As I said, we'll come back to this more next week. But at the very least, it means repenting. Like Zacchaeus.

This week. So part three, chapter 19, verse one. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

He wanted to see Jesus or who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. And so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him. Since Jesus was coming that way.

[17:31] Here we meet Zacchaeus, or as my kids used to call him when they were little, zucchini. Though perhaps we'll just call him Zach. And he's the chief tax collector. We're told as someone in Bible study said last week, he's like the federal treasurer, you know, arranging taxes for everyone on behalf of the government.

In his case, the Roman government, which could explain why he was so wealthy because it gave him a larger pool to cheat and skim from. And so you could call this chief tax collector, a chief sinner, but he's clearly heard of Jesus.

Hasn't he? Because we're told he wants to see who Jesus is at this stage out of curiosity. But then something happens in verse five, when Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus come down immediately.

I must stay at your house. Now this is more than Jesus just noticing a grown man up a tree and thinking that's odd, right? Although he was short.

So maybe it would look like a child anyway. I don't know. That's odd. Because he doesn't actually look up and stop. No, no, he stops. Then looks up. Doesn't he?

[18:41] When he reached the spot, then he looks up. It's as though he knew he was already there and he knew who he was.

In fact, he calls him by name. Doesn't he? Zacchaeus come down. I must stay at your house. Not because Jesus needs a cheap place to stay.

No, no. But because he came to seek and save the lost first 10, like this chief sinner. Now, inviting yourself over for dinner might sound a bit presumptuous to us, but in that culture, it was an honor to host an important person like Jesus.

And so this would have been a great honor for Zac, but he still had to decide whether he would accept the offer or not. The Pharisees sometimes declined and sometimes accepted just to try and trap Jesus.

But Zacchaeus, well, verse six, he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. Zacchaeus is stoked, right?

[19:48] He comes down quickly and literally, it says, received him joyfully. The word welcome here is literally the word receive. Just the same word used for the children last week.

The way we had to enter the kingdom is to receive it like little children. In other words, have faith and trust as children have in parents. And so here is Zac's faith in Jesus. And it's proved real because it leads to repentance. Verse seven, all the people saw this and began to mutter. He has gone to be the guest of a sinner. But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. Now, the Old Testament law required people to pay back only 20% extra if they cheated people. So a fifth, not four times, which is 400%, I guess. 400% only came into action if they sold or killed a sheep, not cheated people.

[20 : 56] But Zacchaeus does it for cheating people, doesn't he? What's more, the Old Testament law only required tithing, you know, 10%. But he gives how much? 50%, half of his possessions.

I'm not sure how much this actually left him with, but either way, his faith is proved real, isn't it? He puts his money where his faith is. Unlike the rich man last week who walked away sad.

And it's at this point that Jesus declares in verse nine, today, salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham.

But the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. And so here's the third part of God's means of salvation, real faith that repents, a faith that does a U-turn from sinning to following Jesus.

Or in Zacchaeus' case, from cheating people to giving generously. And for us who already have salvation, then our faith will continue to not only follow Jesus and praise God like the blind man, but also repent when we sin like this little man.

[22 : 15] And so do we. You know, when you do something and go, Oh, I shouldn't have done that or said that or thought that. Do you kind of just go, Oh, well shrug it off. Or do you kind of stop for a moment and say, I'm sorry, God, help me not do it again.

That we need to keep repenting because the reality is we keep sinning, don't we? And the good news is God will always forgive. Plus repenting actually helps us become more like Jesus.

The more we repent and pray for help, not to do it again, the better we'll become at not sinning like that again, because we're kind of making it conscious and we're asking for God's help.

I'm sure there'll be other sins, but the more we stop and say sorry and ask for help, the more we'll not do it again. So it's worth repenting. God always forgives.

And it actually helps us to grow more like Jesus. Real faith is repentant faith. And so to put it all together for us this morning, God's means of salvation is a repentant faith in King Jesus who saves by his death and resurrection, all enabled by God.

[23 : 29] This is how God makes possible what is impossible for us. This is how we receive rather than achieve salvation. Now, to be fair to old AI, it actually had most of this stuff too.

So when it, the first step it had on its screen was to ask for forgiveness, to turn from sin, that's repenting, to believe or have faith in Jesus who died for your sins and rose again.

I mean, that's not too bad, is it? But like the soccer match, AI is still a bit hit and miss because it added those other things as well. About achieving salvation.

Which is why AI is, of course, no substitute for God's word, right? But Luke tells us God's means of salvation is that. But at the center of it all, the center of our salvation is, of course, Jesus, isn't it?

For he is the one who set out for Jerusalem to die and rise. He is the one who was anointed to proclaim the Lord's favor. He is the one who called sinners like Zacchaeus. He is the one who came to seek and save the lost like us.

[24 : 36] He is at the center of salvation. And so he needs to remain at the center of our lives and our evangelism efforts. He is the one where to help others here and pray others will see.

He is the one where to keep at the center by following him, praising God for him and continuing to repent that we might grow more like him. And so why don't we pray that God would help us to do all those things and then we'll praise God for him.

Let's pray. Our gracious father, we thank you that although we've heard much of this before, we thank you for the encouragement it is to be reminded that we don't have to achieve our salvation.

We can receive it by having a repentant faith in King Jesus who saves. By his death and resurrection. I thank you for your grace, which has opened our minds to see it.

Please open the minds of our loved ones who don't yet see it. And please help us to keep living out our faith. Following Jesus. Praising you for Jesus.

[25 : 49] And repenting of sin. That we might grow more like Jesus. We ask it in his name. Amen.