

The Means of Salvation

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm sure you know that AI is around, yeah? We've been hearing about it, and more and more companies are using AI. In fact, they're even using AI, believe this or not, to help referee soccer matches.

And so in Scotland, there's an AI-powered ball-tracking camera, and it makes calls and blows the whistle over the speakers and stops play and things like that to help referee.

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

But because everyone's using it, I thought I'd give it a go for today for our means of salvation, which is the theme of the three stories today. And this is what it came up with.

So AI overview, the means of salvation are the ways to achieve salvation or being saved from sin and going to heaven. And among other things, it said, doing good works, giving to charity, worshipping, and following God's law.

[1 : 09] That's how you achieve salvation. Is it right? No, that's right. We heard that it's not right from last week. This week and last week really do go together.

And we saw last week three scenes. The story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, then the little children, and then the rich ruler. And they're all about salvation, whether it spoke in terms of being justified or entering the kingdom or inheriting eternal life.

Those three stories use that three lots of language. All about salvation, though. And Ricky helped us to see that salvation is not achieved, as AI says, but it's received, as Jesus says.

And so we saw it's not achieved by religious deeds, like the Pharisee who fasted and gave and so on, nor is it achieved by obeying God's law or being rich like the ruler.

It is received like the little children. And yet that left the disciples with a question. When they heard that the rich ruler couldn't enter, have eternal life, they said, well, who then can be saved?

[2 : 14] Do you remember? And Jesus' reply was, what is impossible with man is possible with God. But how? 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 today with another three stories. Beginning with the most vital or central part of God's means, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So we're at part one and verse 31. 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, spit on him. They will flog him and kill him. But on the third day, he will rise again. Remember, we're in the part of Luke's book where Jesus has deliberately set out for Jerusalem in order to die there.

And so he pulls people aside, his 12 disciples aside and tells them. In fact, he says, it's just as is written in the prophets, verse 31.

[3 : 25] And this helps us to know two things. First, it tells us why Jesus is going to die. We heard it in our first reading. One of the prophets like Isaiah.

Isaiah, the prophet says he was pierced. Why? For our transgressions. He was crushed. Why? Well, for our iniquities, our sin. The punishment that brought us peace was on him.

And by his wounds, we are healed or forgiven, saved. You see, the prophets tell us that Jesus is going to die to take the punishment for our sins in our place so that we can be forgiven and given peace with God and new life instead.

You see, the prophets tell us why he's going to die. But second, the fact that it's written by the prophets also tells us that Jesus's death was not random or unforeseen.

No, no, it was planned and predicted. In other words, this was always God's means of salvation. Isaiah even mentions his resurrection too, actually in verse 11 that we didn't read out.

[4 : 35] After he has suffered, he will see the light of life. Resurrection. The point is, Jesus's death and resurrection is the first part of God's means of salvation, the most vital and central part.

And this means if we want others to be saved, then they need to hear about Jesus's death and resurrection too, don't they? Yes, we need to build relationships.

We need to show care and compassion. We need to be a good witness that it might provoke opportunities. But when those opportunities come, we need to speak to them about Jesus's death and resurrection for them.

Otherwise, they cannot be saved. Sometimes people quote a monk called Francis of Assisi, Have you heard of this guy before? They say he said this saying, Preach the gospel at all times.

Use words if necessary. And it's a kind of catchy little phrase. What it's saying is, you can preach the gospel just with your life, but you don't have to use words. Only use words if you absolutely have to, if it's necessary.

[5 : 47] But the problem with this quote is, firstly, he never said it. It's a misquote. He actually never said it. He actually said the opposite. He actually was big into preaching.

In fact, he even preached to birds, which is a bit weird, right? But that's how big into preaching he was. So it's actually not from him. But the second problem is, people need to hear about Jesus.

And they only do that when someone tells them. Otherwise, they might just think we're good people for the sake of being good people. The point is, we need to do what we can to help people hear about Jesus and his death and resurrection for them.

Whether that's speaking it ourselves when the opportunity comes up. And yes, we do need to be careful, but we can kind of talk to people and perhaps kind of angle them towards opportunities when they ask you what you did on the weekend, for example, the classic one.

Or writing some verses on birthday cards or supporting others who do speak it. And I said to the earlier service this morning, and for those who are a bit wiser in age, I said to them, you guys can get away with anything, okay?

[7 : 00] You can. So you have even more opportunities to say it. The point is, the first and central part of God's means to save is Jesus' death and resurrection.

And so people need to hear it. Though the disciples don't quite see it, verse 34. The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what he was talking about.

I think at this point, they knew Jesus was the Messiah or Christ. They were both titles that mean anointed king, like Mr. and Mrs. and Professor and Doctor and so on.

But they didn't get that Jesus, the king, had to die. It was hidden from them. And not by God this time, I don't think. By their own preconceived ideas.

You see, for Jews, it was inconceivable that God's king would be crucified. But they should have known it. In fact, Jesus expected them to get it.

[8 : 00] Earlier on in Luke's gospel, he even said to them, listen carefully. I'm expecting you to be able to understand this, guys. The son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and be killed.

And later on, when they still don't get it, he says in chapter 24, how foolish you are and slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. If Jesus knew God had hidden it from them, he would not have expected them to get it.

Rather, it was their own closed-mindedness, their own sinful nature, if you like, that hid it. Which is why Jesus later has to open their minds so they can see it.

So they can understand it. And so verse 34, I think, reminds us that another part of God's salvation includes his enabling.

I mean, I still vividly remember visiting a grandmother of a parishioner at an old church. The grandmother was dying, and so this person asked me to go and visit them in hospital, which I did.

[9 : 03] We got chatting for a while, and then I explained to her about Jesus' death and resurrection. I talked about all the evidence we have for it. I answered all her questions, and then she said, look, I understand what you're saying, but I just still don't get it.

By which she meant, I understand the logic, but I just can't believe it. She needed God to open her mind to see the truth of it, you see. So not only do we need to help others hear of Jesus' death and

resurrection, we need to persist in prayer that God might open their minds to see it. Our prayer night is next Wednesday night, for God has to enable people to truly see and believe, to have faith, which brings us to the second scene and the second part.

So part two, verse 35 and following. As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 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 don't see to a blind man who ironically does see.

[10:21] He doesn't see physically, but he sees spiritually the truth about Jesus. In this case, not about him dying, but that he is king, because you notice how the people refer to Jesus in verse 37.

They call him Jesus of Nazareth. How does the blind man refer to him in verse 38? Jesus, son of David. And a son of David would be the, the king, come from King David's line.

In other words, he recognized him as king. You see that the blind man, it seems had heard of what Jesus had done and God had opened his mind to understand who Jesus must be. The promised king who saves.

And so he believes or has faith in Jesus, so much so that he keeps crying out to Jesus for mercy. He says, 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 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. 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 or saved you.

[11:37] You see, this man has faith. And Jesus says, it's his faith that has healed him or literally saved him. And that's what the healing really represents, actually.

Like Isaiah, by his wounds, we are healed, forgiven, saved. And so here's the second part of God's means of salvation, faith. Faith in King Jesus who saves.

And so putting it together with the first story, 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 that faith?

If you're here today and don't yet have salvation, then remember, you cannot achieve it, no matter how good you try and be. You can't achieve it. You cannot earn your way to heaven, but you can receive it by believing or having faith, trusting in Jesus as your King who saves you from your sins by his death and resurrection.

And it's worth believing because it comes with new life. I mean, these miracles were not just acts of Jesus' compassion, they were also signs of Jesus' identity, of who he is as the anointed King who brings new life.

[12:58] Jesus said earlier in Luke's Gospel when he was starting his ministry, he said, the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me. There's the kind of Messiah word, the anointed King, to do what?

Well, to proclaim the good news and to give sight for the blind, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And so giving sight to this blind man here shows he is God's anointed one, the King who brings God's favour, which includes new life.

And that's what it is for this man, isn't it? I mean, can you imagine being saved from blindness? You know, you can't see for so many years and then suddenly you can see? It would have been a whole new life for him, wouldn't it?

And that's what he has. New spiritual life and even new physical life. A new physical life because Jesus was with him physically then.

He's not physically with us, he's spiritually with us, yes, and God will still heal us from time to time but often we have to wait until for our new physical life when we are physically with Jesus later, right?

[14:08] That's how it works. But we can still have new spiritual life now where there is 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.

And for us who do, it ought to lead us to do what the blind man did, verse 43. Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus praising God.

He followed Jesus and praised God. And so do we? We'll come back to the idea of following Jesus more next week where it comes up again. But do we still praise God for the new life he's given us

through Christ?

And not just on Sundays but on other days. We can sometimes receive Christ joyfully as Zacchaeus does in a moment. But then the joy can sometimes fade and the praise can sometimes wane, can't it?

[15:13] Ever experienced that? You know, a bit of spiritual dryness or perhaps, you know, like today, you're hearing the same thing you've heard before and it's kind of a bit bland. When that happens, I've seen people choose to actually withdraw from church and from God.

You know, stop praying and reading his word and so on. But the solution is actually the opposite. It's to lean in. It's to lean in to God's people so that as we speak and serve together we'll find encouragement and enjoyment from one another.

It's to lean in to God himself by praying and asking God to help you open your mind to see Jesus afresh and to listen to God's word about Jesus whether by reading the Bible or even listening to songs about Jesus.

I don't know about you but every time I hear that song How Deep the Father's Love we're not doing it today but you know that song, this one? there's a couple of verses like this one It was whose sin? My sin that held him there until it was accomplished His dying breath has brought who? Me life I know it is finished Whenever I sing that song I'm reminded afresh of what Jesus has done and it renews my gratitude and reignites my praise the point is you don't withdraw you lean in when you feel spiritually dry that we might continue to follow Jesus and praise like this blind man did and like him as I said we're to follow Jesus I will think more about that next week but at the very least this week following him means repenting when we sin so part 3 chapter 19 verse 1 Jesus entered Jericho was passing through a man was there by the name of Zacchaeus he was the chief tax collector and was wealthy he wanted to see who Jesus was but because he was short he could not see over the crowd so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way so here is

[17:32] Zacchaeus whom my kids called when they were little Zacchini so it might help you to remember Zacchini we'll just call him Zach though and he's we're told the chief tax collector as someone at Bible study said last week he's like the federal treasurer you know responsible for collecting taxes for the whole government the Roman government in this case and it meant he could have then cheated and skimmed from a bigger pool of money which is probably why he was so wealthy and so you could call this chief tax collector a chief sinner but he's clearly heard of Jesus because we're told he wants to see who Jesus is out of curiosity but he's short so he climbed a sycamore fig tree which looks like this with low branches for his little legs so he could climb up there but then something happened in verse five when Jesus reached the spot he looked up and said Zacchaeus come down immediately

I must stay at your house today now this is more than Jesus looking up and noticing a grown man in a tree and thinking that's a bit odd right actually he was short so it would look like a kid up a tree which is less odd I suppose but either way notice the order when he reached the spot and then he stops and then he looks up notice that he doesn't kind of look up and then stop in other words it seems Jesus knew he was there and knew who he was in fact he calls him by name doesn't he Zacchaeus I must stay at your house today not because Jesus is looking for some cheap accommodation right but because verse 10 he came to seek and save the lost like this chief sinner now inviting yourself over for dinner might sound a bit presumptuous in our culture but in that culture it was an honour to host such an important person like

Jesus businesses and events do it all the time they want A-listers to come and it kind of elevates their status doesn't it or even more so for Zacchaeus given that he was despised by so many it would have been a huge honour for him so how will he respond after all the Pharisees would have sometimes declined or they only hosted Jesus to try and trap him we read elsewhere but Zacchaeus well verse 6 he came down at once and welcomed Jesus gladly he comes down quickly and literally it's received him joyfully the word welcome or received is the exact same word that Jesus used of the children last week who are to enter the kingdom by receiving it in faith and trust now kids receive things from their parents in faith and trust well that's how Zacchaeus receives Jesus his faith and it's faith that's proved real because it leads to repentance verse 7 all the people saw this and began to mutter he has gone to be a 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 anyone out of anything I will pay back four times the amount now the

Old Testament law required people to pay back 20% one-fifth of the amount not four times 400% of the amount if they were cheated 400% was only if you stole or killed one of their sheep but Zacchaeus does it for cheating people and what's more the Old Testament law said you only tithe 10% but he gives half his possessions 50% to the poor I'm not sure how much this left him with in the!

But he puts his money where his faith is doesn't he unlike the rich man last week and it's at this point that Jesus in verse 9 says today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham for 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 you know from sinning to following Jesus or in his case from cheating people to giving generously and for us who already have salvation then our faith will not only continue to follow Jesus and praise God like the blind man it will continue to repent when we sin like this little man and so do we you know when we mess up and go oh

[22 : 43] I shouldn't have done that or said that or thought that do we go oh well better luck next time or do we kind of pause and say sorry God help me do better and then move on do we actually repent or do we just brush over?

we need to keep repenting because real faith repents and the good news is God will always forgive which is great news isn't it it should encourage us to repent we already know the outcome forgiveness plus repenting actually helps us become more like Jesus you know the more we repent and pray for help not to do that again the better we'll become and not sinning like that again I'm sure there'll be other sins but the more we stop and say sorry and ask for help the more it will help us not to keep doing it again so it's worth repenting not only is forgiveness but it actually helps us to grow more like Jesus real faith repents and so to put it all together from the three stories God's means of salvation is a repentant faith in King Jesus who saves by his death and resurrection all enabled by God and to be fair to old Al actually he's not that old is it it had most of this stuff to be fair so the first part of when I looked it up on Google it actually had steps to salvation ask for forgiveness turn from sin you turn that's repentance believe have faith trust in Jesus that he died for your sins and rose again that's not bad really is it but like refereeing a soccer match Al is still hit and miss because it had all these other things about achieving salvation too which people have asked me do you use Al for your sermons no no I don't God's means of salvation as we've seen in Luke's gospel is this on the screen and at the center of our salvation is of course Jesus he is the one who set out for Jerusalem to die and rise he is the one who was anointed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor he is the one who called sinners like Zacchaeus to himself he is the one who came to seek and save the lost like us he is at the center of our salvation and so he is to remain at the center of our lives we are to follow him praise God for him and repent that we might be more like him let's pray that we would do all that and then praise God for him let's pray our gracious father we thank you for this reminder of things that we probably already know but we pray that you'd help us to live in light of it because that's the hard part help us to do what we can to help others hear of Jesus and to persist in prayer for them that you might open their minds to see the truth of Jesus and help us we pray to keep him at the center of our salvation by following him praising you for him and repenting to be more like him help us in this we pray in his name amen

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