

What is Saving Grace?

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[0 : 00] I would like you to turn in your Bibles this morning. Isn't that a sweet phrase? Turn in your Bible. What we confess together with that statement and your activity is that we are a people who have been drawn out of darkness into light! by the Bible, by the truth, that God has given to us.

And we, in this broken and very difficult world that we live in, may rely upon every word that God has given to us for comfort, for counsel, for encouragement, that our hearts might, for one thing, be resolute in our pursuit of the glory of Christ and also confident in our eternal end.

And I trust this morning that as you take your Bible in hand, you do not take it for granted. And that one of the things you're actually doing, I didn't even look at my watch to know how much time I have to do this, but, oh, we've got time.

And one of the things that you're actually doing is you're engaged in prayer. This is not the passive part of the hour. It is every bit as demanding that you be engaged in what we do together as during our corporate singing.

And by the way, the most important singers are not on stage. They're here. They're God's people. The people who are up here, John and whoever the musicians are, their heart's ambition is to help you lift up Jesus.

[2 : 08] Do you understand that? They're not here to entertain you. They are here to stir your heart with a desire to see the Lord Jesus exalted. And that's one of the reasons why one of the standard questions that John and I ask each other is not, how did the musicians do?

Did the pianist come in on the right note? I mean, that's John's business, but not. I always, how did we sing, right? How did we sing?

Because the truth of the matter is, is that when people who are filled with the Spirit are touched with the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ, it happens to come out.

Agreed? Agreed? Okay. So here we are. We're at this very active part of the service, and some of you are thinking, I thought I could kind of sit here and just kind of brain dead and float through, and 45 minutes from now I can think about leaving.

You have an active part in what happens next, both in being a Spirit-enabled listener, and that means you need to say to the Holy Spirit, will you please help me?

[3 : 20] Secondly, I might miss some of the important things that you have, and I want your help to hear the things that are valuable, and I need to remember. Secondly, that you would remember to pray for me as I preach.

Do that. Pray for me as I preach. I don't care if you do it out loud. It won't put me off, because we are dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

So I want you to look in John to chapter 4, verse 39, and kind of back up with me just for a moment, and it helps to kind of frame the passage. Let me have you, as you are in John chapter 4, to turn back just for a moment to the very beginning of the book of John and remind yourself that John is a different gospel than the rest.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called synoptic, and they give us kind of a synopsis. They give us an overview of the life of Christ. John is different in that while it gives us much about Christ, it is not focused primarily on the historical or the chronological details of Christ's 33 years here on earth.

It is focused primarily on driving home this point. Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. And John gets right to that task immediately in John chapter 1 where he says there in verse 1, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[5 : 02] Boom! You got it? No hesitation and no waffling. It's like, well, he was a pretty good person. Bang! He is God. Not only that, but the Scriptures roll on with power, and you come down to what it says there in verse 14, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Talking about the incarnation. God the Son for all eternity taking on human form. And John, as he continues in explaining the matter of who Jesus is, he says, here is God the Son who came to earth and took upon himself human flesh.

Why? Why? We understand from what John the Baptist says right there in chapter 1, when he saw Jesus coming, he said, Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

And so John chapter 1 lays out for us in clear, clear vocabulary who Jesus is as God the Son, the Savior of the world.

Chapter 2, then, gives us a very interesting picture of Jesus in two rather different settings. One is the wedding feast at Cana, where he privately, and known primarily, just to his mother and disciples, turns the water into wine and demonstrates his power over nature.

[6 : 34] And then chapter 2, the latter part of it, guess what he does? He cleanses the temple. I mean, I want you to imagine, in contemporary vocabulary, someone walking into the Supreme Court and throwing all those 12 out on their ear.

That's, in essence, what Jesus did when he cleansed the temple. Chapter 3 gives us... Now, by the way, Jesus came to be what? Say it with me. The Savior of the world.

He came to save lost mankind. Chapter 3 gives us our first picture of Jesus interacting with an individual who desperately needed Christ.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and he had some little curious spiritual questions, and Jesus nailed him with, You know what? You have to be born again.

Nicodemus was kind of at the high end of the food chain of being an effective, religious, good Jew. And Jesus said, You have to have a do-over because you're not there.

[7 : 39] Nicodemus passes from the scene. We have no indication of his conversion at that time. And then we come to chapter 4, and guess who chapter 4 is all about? I mean, it's a scuzzbag, a lowlife.

It is the woman at the well, the Samaritan, and she was a woman who had been married five times, and what? She was living with a man at the time. And so we have a picture, Nicodemus on this side, the Mr. Goody-goody, and here we have Mrs. Samaritan, not the goody-goody, and Jesus meets her at the well, and he allows the conversation to drift over into spiritual things.

And that's where we are now. In John 4, verse 39, let me pick up on the passage and read it to you. It says, Many Samaritans from town believed in him because... And I want you to put your finger.

You may even want to underline because... I'll start right from the get-go here and just ask yourself this question. Are there people that you know have come to faith because of your testimony?

That's a fair question, isn't it? I mean, after all, and this is one of the things I was thinking about as I was meditating and praying earlier this morning about our message, I was thinking about how many illustrations in the Bible we have of people who discover great news and just kind of sit on it.

[9 : 01] I mean, I was like, Yeah, it's a good thing. I'm glad Jesus saved me. I was a wretch, but I'm not telling anybody because I don't want anybody to know. Right? I mean, every case you have, and I was reading, actually, in my morning devotions about where Jesus would heal these people who were blind or he would heal these people who were deaf, and he would say to them, Don't go tell anybody.

Right? How would they handle that instruction? Right on. I won't tell anybody. I can see you, but I'm not talking about it. Right? They were all over the place talking about the wonder and the miracle that they'd enjoyed and in classic fashion, here is the woman saved from her sin, and she runs back into town, and she lets them know who Jesus is.

Let me read the passage as we go on. It says, Many Samaritans from the town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me all that I ever did.

And so when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed with them two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this indeed is the Savior of the world.

Now, we have in this passage this morning a very, very interesting little conclusion to the earlier two scenes, one of Nicodemus and the other of the woman at the well who came face to face with Jesus as Jesus dealt with the heart needs of Nicodemus and the woman.

[10 : 38] And one of the things that I want you to take away from the passage this morning is a clear understanding of what saving faith is. What does it mean to be saved or be converted or to be born again?

And you see, it's a very important question because the truth of the matter is that heaven and hell rest on the outcome. When we come to that moment in our lives where we slip from this place into eternity, I want you to know that Tim Knoyer has complete confidence in how the story ends.

Not because I've been a good person and I have done all these nice things that, you know, like helping elderly ladies across the street and taking care of my neighbor's cat and those kind of... That's not why I'm going to heaven.

I want you to know that. I'm going to heaven because Jesus Christ is my Savior and He died in my place and He satisfied the debt of my sin and I trust in His finished work alone.

And I want you to understand as you look at the passage that we're going to look at this morning, what John's gospel wants us to see is what is saving faith.

[11 : 50] Saving faith, for one, is knowing the truth about our need. Saving faith is knowing the truth about our need.

And since the Bible is something that gives us the truth, I think it's very important for us to allow the Bible to be the primary instrument of helping us grab and get a hold of the reality of what saving faith is.

And so I want you to mark that little phrase there in verse 39. It says here, many Samaritans from town believed because of the woman's testimony.

What the Samaritan woman had done is that she had gone back into town and she'd given a report. That word testimony that is used there is a word that speaks in the Greek of bearing witness to something that you are a first-hand witness to.

You may talk about the fact that there was a wreck on 270 and you saw pictures of it, but I can tell you this, the police officers are not going to rely on hearsay evidence that you had from the news.

[12:58] They want to actually hear from a witness what happened in that event. And what the word tells us is this woman went back into town and she says, I saw it. I saw Jesus. I heard what he had to say and I am giving you testimony of the reality of who he is and what he had to say to me. And here is Jesus as he ministered to this woman. He brought conviction to her life and she goes back into town and she says, hey, I want you to meet the man who exposed the truth of my sinful state and also delivered me from sin's grip. Not only did he expose the reality of the hardness and the despair of my soul, but he also gave me hope in that he identified himself as the Messiah, the one who came to be the sacrifice for my sins. And what this says is this, is that belief or saving faith really follows hearing the truth and understanding it. And I think that's very important because we have people going around today presupposing that the fundamental responsibility of the church is to make people happy.

[14:09] Now, I want people happy, but people can't be happy until they hear difficult news about the reality of their soul. Over the years, one of the things that has happened over and over and over again, and spring is here, and so it's starting the process. I get regular calls. People ask, can we use the church to have a wedding? And my standard answer, guess what it is? Some of you know. It's, I am so glad you called because we love the opportunity of helping a couple who know Jesus establish their home with Jesus in the center. And I say, it's our blessing and our privilege, and I would love to have you and your fiance come and visit us. Oh, I don't need to visit you. I've seen the church. Really? Yeah, I was on the web. I thought the building would be pretty suitable for our wedding. wedding. Well, you want to do the reception here? Oh, no, we're going to blah, blah, blah. You know, I'm going to do it there.

[15:14] But we just want to have a ceremony in a sacred place. Hey, church is you. It's not this place. And I say, well, the rest of the family wants to be in there thinking, oh, do I have to pay for all those people eating with me? You know, I say, no, no, no. Just, we want to be part of seeing your home centered on Jesus. Well, I'm not interested in that part. I just was looking for a facility to rent to kind of do this thing. Well, we're not into that. We are here to help people grow in their relationship with Christ. And here is Jesus explaining that this starting point of developing a relationship with Christ is coming to a realization of the darkness of the soul and the desperation that sinners are in because of sin that draws them and separates them from God.

So what is saving faith? I think it helps for one to just kind of stop and recognize what it is not. For one, saving faith is not mere feeling. Feelings can be caused by so many different things. And any of you who know me know that feelings kind of, there they are. I was at the ordination council. You know, and I had, you know, at 66, I had resolved being an older man now that when I asked questions, I would be kind of just calm and quiet and not get emotional.

[16:51] You know, I was like, have you ever seen me cry at a wedding? Never done it. And so, you know, here they, I mean, I'm sitting towards the back and that's a safe place for an older guy, you know, towards the back. And they said, well, we're going to ask that Pastor Knoyer asked the first question. So I got started and guess what happened?

Just calm, quiet voice. You know, and I was thinking of the blessing of being a pastor and then being there as a pastor and watching a young man that had grown up in our church, there sitting alone on the stage answering questions about what it meant to be a shepherd of God's people.

And my heart just kind of welled up within me. And, and I, I, I was emotional. Took me a while to control myself to where I could get to the question.

So what I'm telling you is that, hey, emotions are not all bad and, you know, if you try to stuff them down forever, you know, sometimes it's just hard but, but the deal is this, is emotions don't bring people to faith.

[18:12] Emotions may prompt you to think carefully about where your heart is. That's okay. But at the end of the day, emotions are not what save people. Saving faith is not sincere belief either.

Do you realize that there were millions of Jews that were put to death by Nazis who really sincerely believed what they believed? Do you follow that? They believed that.

And, I don't know, some of you here are old enough to remember Jim Jones. Anybody remember Jim Jones? You heard the phrase don't drink the Kool-Aid? How many of you know that phrase? I mean, it's like don't drink the Kool-Aid.

Jim Jones is the one who made it famous. Prior to that, there was this little ditty called Kool-Aid. Kool-Aid, it tastes great. Gotta have some. Can't wait. Now, that's for you who are, I mean, look at this.

It's like for the rest of you, it's like over top. You know, it's like, that was my generation. You know, it's like we sang that song and we really thought Kool-Aid was good until Jim Jones came along and he made people who believed in him drink it.

[19:15] See, having sincere faith may lead to death. I remember growing up in India and truthfully watching, I remember going to the place, the start of the Ganges River and Ganges River is sacred, holy and it was a gathering place for all kinds of real, serious, and sincere believers in Hinduism.

I remember looking at one sadhu who had sat on a bed of nails. I mean, this is the real story and he was sitting on that bed of nails, he slept on that bed of nails and he had never gotten off of that bed of nails except for basic functions and he was doing this because he sincerely believed that that was the means of salvation.

I saw another sadhu who had stared at the sun with his eyes open and burned him out and he sincerely believed that his willing sacrifice of his eyesight was the means of his salvation.

Sincere belief doesn't cut it. I want you to understand that apart from the reality of the truth of the scriptures, there is no hope of salvation and that's one of the reasons why we who know Christ have to be involved in letting people know the truth of their need.

It is the truth that brings conviction salvation and draws a person to salvation. Let me have you see just how clearly this issue of truth is hammered at in the Bible.

[20:51] You're there in John chapter 4, just turn ahead to John chapter 8 verse 32 and here is Jesus again speaking on the matter of truth and here's what he says, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Truth is absolutely essential to our salvation. Turn to another passage in relationship to this.

You're there in John, keep your finger because we are coming back but I want you to go to 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 4. By the way, as I'm turning, I'm praying.

Do you know why I'm praying? I'm praying, Holy Spirit, help me make the word clear. 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 4, it says this, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The truth. What the woman heard and what she had gone into town and communicated to the townsfolk listen carefully because this is important to understand, started with the truth that her sin was her greatest need.

[22:11] Let me say that slowly so you don't miss it. What she had gone into town and shared with the townsfolk is that her sin was her greatest need.

Until a person comes to the place that they realize that their sin is their greatest need, they really haven't come to the place of understanding how essential faith in Christ is.

This morning in my devotional reading in the book of Mark, I came to the passage where Jesus was being criticized by the Pharisees because he ate with sinners. You can think about that.

Must have been at Walmart or Mendy's or McDonald's or somewhere like, you know, where all they are. And so here he is eating with sinners and the Pharisees, I can't believe you're doing that. And here's what Jesus said. He said, I didn't come to help those people who are righteous.

I came to help, what? Sinners. I came to help sinners. And so the starting point of conversion is really coming to grips with the fact, man, I'm a sinner and I've got a desperate need and here's the woman.

[23:18] She went into town and says, you know what? Jesus told me all about myself. she'd gone to the well for water and she'd come to grips with the reality of her sinful heart that had traded sex for security.

And Jesus not only convicted her of her sin but also helped her understand that he alone was the only remedy to her broken and ruined heart.

And all we know about her testimony is that she went back into town and she said this, he told me all that I ever did. Isn't that an interesting statement? In essence, what she was saying was this, is that Jesus convicted me of my sin and he let me know what my problem was.

So, recognize this as you think about it in your own life and ministry, true conversion involves seeing the truth of sin. Now, let me explain this a bit. Seeing the truth of sin is more than feeling bad about sin.

Everybody smile when I say that. Seeing the truth of sin is more than just feeling bad about sin. I mean, feeling bad about sin is something that happens fairly often once you get caught sinning.

[24:35] Why is that? How many of you understand that sin always creates unintended consequences? In every case, there are some of you sitting here that are thinking to yourself, well, the sin that I'm committing doesn't have any unintended consequences.

You're fooling yourself and the reason that you may not be enduring the consequences right now is because God is being incredibly patient and gentle with you but when he lets you experience consequence, he is going to take away all the arguments and you're going to come face to face with the fact that your sin is your greatest problem.

It's not hard to feel bad about sin when you're suffering the consequences but that's not converting faith. Adam and Eve felt bad after they'd eaten the fruit.

We know that because they tried to sew leaves together to make clothing. Have you ever tried that, by the way? I mean, you know, a little bit of vine and maybe a thorn and trying to stitch leaves together.

I've actually tried that in India and it's not a good idea. The garments don't have any durability and moving in them don't go there.

[25 : 55] Okay, so, true conversion involves coming to grips with the reality of your sin. True conversion also involves seeing your utter inability to save yourself.

Let me say that and have you connect with it. True conversion also involves seeing your utter inability to do anything to save yourself. More than just exposing the reality of her sin, Jesus had showed her that her hope and deliverance from the crushing burden of her shame and guilt was really in his hands and his hands alone.

He was the only one who could solve the problem. I remember still years ago when I hurt my back and, you know, standard thing when men hurt their back is I'm alright, you know, I'm not taking Advil or anything like that and eventually what happened is I started having numbness that it made walking, my left leg was what was giving me trouble.

Stop smiling, Hannah. Hannah is going to be graduating and leaving us which I don't think she should do but she's going out to, where is it, Montana, Idaho?

I don't know. Can we take a vote on that? We love you anyway. Okay. But here's the truth, I had paralysis that was as the result of my nerve being impinged.

[27 : 22] I went to a chiropractor and I tried the medicine and I tried all different kinds of therapy and nothing was helping and I was bound to determine that I wasn't going to, you know, do anything other than just kind of gut it out and then I started falling because my leg was atrophying and I was kind of, you know what a numb leg works like?

It doesn't. I fell twice mowing and I came in and I said to Judith, we got to do something about this. Well, ended up having an MRI, ended up having x-rays and all that kind of stuff and finally went to a surgeon and took the MRIs and she looked at this and said, yeah, yeah, yeah, I can fix that.

A couple weeks later, I was actually rolling into the surgery and my MRI films, this is before electronics were what they are now, but I remember rolling into surgery and just as I'm getting ready to leave the waiting bay, they come in with my x-rays and slide them alongside.

The doctor walks in and grabs those and looks at them again. She had about 47,000 to do that day and you know, it's like, which one am I doing, here we go, but she looked at those films and she knew what needed to be done and I had been fully persuaded by that recurring pain, incredible as it was, and by falling that I couldn't solve my problem by myself and I was willing to submit to a good surgeon.

Until you come to grips with the reality of sin in your heart, you will not come to the good physician. And so as you look at the passage going back there to John chapter 4, you find there that she goes into town, she tells them the truth about who Jesus was, and what they do then is they as well come to grips with their condition and recognize their desperate need.

[29 : 18] And I like what the outcome of this process is. Number one, the Spirit convicts us that we are sinners and we can't save ourselves. And furthermore, number two, the Spirit comes and helps us understand that Jesus is the Savior.

Look at verse 42. We're going to step ahead for a second. It says there, they said to the woman, it's no longer because of what you said that we believe for we've heard for ourselves and we know that this indeed is the Savior of the world.

The Spirit of God brings us to the point that we understand that our only hope is in Christ as our Savior. Savior. So recognize these two pieces. Number one, saving faith convinces us of the reality of our sin.

It's based on truth and drives home the point that we're in a mess. Number two, saving faith is believing the truth about Jesus. You look at verse 39, she went into town, she told them the truth about Jesus, and in verse 40, out they come.

Many of them, they wanted to hear who Jesus was, and as they listened to him, they said, would you stay here longer and keep ministering to us? And he did, he stayed two days. Now everyone that had believed at that moment, and we read that a number of them had believed earlier as a result of the woman's testimony, they were part of this throng that gathered, and they perhaps just listened further as Jesus was teaching, and those who did not believe came along, and as a result of listening to what Jesus had to say, they came to grips with their own sin.

[30 : 50] Look at verse 41. And many more believed because of his word, because of his word.

Now what word would Jesus bring that would bring salvation to individuals' hearts? Number one, and I want you to have this pictured firmly in your heart and understand it clearly, number one, saving faith means believing that man cannot save himself.

Think with me. Common question. I don't have any hesitation asking an individual. Is so, when you die, where are you going to spend eternity?

It's a fair question. I mean, after all, what it says in Hebrews chapter 9 is this, it says, it's appointed unto man once to die, and after that, what? The day is coming when I'm going to give an account, and you're going to give an account to Christ.

Christ. And so, where are you going? I get a chuckle when I'm on an elevator, and we're going up or down.

[31 : 56] It doesn't make any difference, but when I get ready to punch the buttons, one of the things I say is, my last trip is up. You know, it's like, I'm a little weird, but you know, it's like, my last trip is up.

Okay? And it is. Jesus makes it clear in the scriptures, man cannot save himself.

And until you come to that point that you recognize the moral bankruptcy of your heart and the absolute desperate condition of your soul, you are not there and ready to hear the sweetness of the gospel.

Number two, saving faith believes that only God can save men from their sin. sin. Only God can save men from their sin. I want you to get that clearly fixed in your mind because there's a lot of people running around today that when you ask them, why are you going to heaven, their standard answers, I've been a pretty good person.

Now, I'm glad to hear that. I mean, I wish there were more people that were pretty good. But the truth of the matter is, the Bible says, not by works of righteousness. There's nothing that you and I can do that can bring redemption or salvation to us.

[33 : 03] Why is that? Why is that? We sang a very interesting song this morning. It said, all my righteousness is as what?

Filthy is the discreet King James translation of a much more blunt Hebrew word. word. The truth of the matter is, our best efforts actually have a little tincture, a little flavoring of self- adulation and appreciation.

Aren't you glad, God, I'm as nice as I am? And he says, yuck. Man cannot save himself, only God can do that.

And finally, saving faith believes that God sent his son to be our savior. Do you know that? Do you know that?

You're a sinner. I'm a sinner. sinner. I have never gotten over. I have never gotten over.

[34 : 22] The reality of the convicting power of Jesus that led me to discover just the darkness of my heart. And brought me to realize that the only person who could do anything about me was Jesus.

And what he did for me was Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. Oh. We sang that song this morning, what can wash away my, what?

Sin. What can take away the burden? The darkness. The depression. The hopelessness.

The blackness of your soul. There is no remedy but the blood of Christ. And the reason that there is remedy is Jesus stepped up and took your place and died your death.

He paid the penalty for your sins. And saving faith is a clear truthful grasp of bad news.

[35 : 41] I'm a hopeless mess deserving God's judgment. And the good news God sent his son to die for me.

And there's nothing else that counts but that. we're going to do something a little different this morning. John is going to lead us in two songs.

By the way, happy people that know Jesus do what when they sing? I always smile, they blow it out. Okay? That's what they do. They don't just kind of sit there.

And I'm not going to be watching John, but you give me a grade, will you? I am hoping that all of you are not going to be sitting there like this. Okay, John's going to come lead us. First song, you sing