

Acts 16:16-34
Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21
John 17:20-26

Salvation is more than fire insurance. Salvation is more than guaranteeing eternity in heaven. We will see in our reading from Acts that salvation refers to a wholeness in life as well as eternity in heaven.

Jesus and Satan were having an ongoing argument about who was better on his computer. They had been going at it for days, and God was tired of hearing all of the bickering. Finally God said, "Cool it. I am going to set up a test that will run two hours and I will judge who does the better job." So down Satan and Jesus sat at the keyboards and typed away. They did spreadsheets, wrote reports, sent e-mails. They sent out e-mail with attachments. They downloaded. But ten minutes before their time was up, lightning suddenly flashed across the sky, thunder rolled, and the electricity went off. Satan stared at his blank screen and cursed. Jesus just sighed. The electricity finally flickered back on, and each of them restarted their computers. Satan started searching frantically, screaming, "It's gone! It's all gone! I lost everything when the power went out!" Meanwhile, Jesus quietly started printing out all of his files from the past two hours. Satan observed this and became irate. "Wait! He cheated! How did he do it?" God shrugged and said, "Jesus saves."

Jesus saves. That is a phrase we may hear quite frequently within the church. When most people hear this phrase, what probably comes to their minds is that this person is in a right relationship with God that will lead to eternal life with God in heaven. Many see "salvation" as fire insurance, that is, by being saved they will not live in hell for eternity. In our society that is becoming more and more secular, more and more

unchurched, many people may not know what is meant when someone says, “Jesus saves.” Does he save money, or Green Stamps?

Salvation has a broader and deeper meaning than living eternally in heaven. To be saved means more than being saved from the fires of hell. The *New Interpreters’ Dictionary of the Bible* points out that “the most fundamental meaning of salvation in Scripture is God’s deliverance of those in a situation of need from that which impeded their well being, resulting in their restoration to wholeness.” Such wholeness is God’s original intent for creation. The Greek verb “sozo,” which is translated “save” is also translated as “make well,” “heal,” “all right.” For example, earlier in Acts, in the story of Peter preaching to the crowd after healing the man who was lame, Peter referred to the man as “healed,” using the Greek word “sozo.” In both Matthew and Mark, we find the story of the woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, who believed that if she just touched Jesus would be “made well.” The translation “made well” is again from the Greek verb “sozo.” So the Greek word “sozo,” means more than being saved from hell. It is being delivered from a situation that impedes well-being, resulting in a restoration to wholeness.

In the Old Testament the Exodus is the paradigm or model of salvation. Israel had been slaves in Egypt for over four hundred years. They were oppressed by their Egyptian overlords. God finally answered the Israelites prayers for freedom, and God called Moses to lead the people out of their slavery in Egypt and to liberation and freedom back in the promised land of Israel. After the Israelites had escaped from the Egyptians through the Red Sea, we read, “Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the

Egyptians.” We find numerous references to God saving the people of Israel from their enemies.

As we read our passage from Acts today, we see a lot of saving going on. Paul and Silas are in Philippi. They met a slave-girl who was a fortune-teller. While following them, she cried out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” Paul was getting annoyed, eventually casting the demon out of her. Well, this upset her owners because they have now lost a source of their income. They seized Paul and Silas and managed to have the authorities flog them, and thrown into jail. That night an earthquake shook Paul and the others free. The jailer, seeing the doors wide open, assumed the prisoners escaped, and was about to commit suicide. He would be executed for letting prisoners escape. However, Paul stops him, declaring they were still there. The jailer asks Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” He could very well have meant, “How am I going to survive this mess?” The jailer’s concern was for the moment, however the missionaries offered him an opportunity of a lifetime, salvation that transcended the current crisis. At the jailer’s home, we find a double washing. The jailer takes them to his home, where he has their wounds, and his entire family was baptized, representing a washing of their sins.

There are all kinds of saving going on here. The servant girl was freed from the demon that had possessed and oppressed her. The jailer was saved, otherwise he would have been executed, his life would have been threatened if Paul and the other prisoners had escaped. Paul and Silas are freed from their imprisonment. And the jailer and his family were saved in the spiritual definition of that word.

God does want wholeness for us. Why we do not experience wholeness now is a question we cannot answer. We cannot answer why there is suffering in this life, why there is pain, grief, sorrow, depression, and anxiety. God does desire wholeness for all of God's creation. And it will come in the end. To be sure, there are still many problems to be solved in our world.

We have much yet to do. to bring release to the captives, justice for the oppressed, and peace for those ravaged by conflict. God calls us to be his creaturely agents. Think about the Exodus. Moses tells the people that they are to stand by and watch the salvation that God will work at the sea. God tells Moses to participate in the deliverance by stretching out his hand with the staff, thus dividing the waters. That God is the ultimate agent of salvation that does not conflict with the fact that creational agents are often used in the process of bringing salvation. When God calls Moses to "bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt," God uses the same verb from the prior statement that God would "bring them out." As we go through the Bible, God uses a series of human agents. God called the judge Gideon to free the Israelites from the Midianites. God called the young boy David to kill the giant Goliath. God called a non-Israelite, a Gentile, the Persian king Cyrus. Cyrus had defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Israelites who had been in exile in Babylon, to return to their homes in Israel.

God calls each and every one of us to be his agents for wholeness. Perhaps it is contacting our congress people to let them know that, as people of faith, how we feel about an issue. Write a letter to the editor. Participate in a demonstration. Educate

others about the issues. Donate money to a cause. Be an advocate. It may seem like it is only a drop in the bucket, but each bucket of water begins with a drop of water.

As important as these actions are, they are only a part of a higher, more important action, the saving action of a sovereign God who enters our humanity to take it up and redeem it to its final destiny.

Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might be to our God
forever and ever. **Amen.**