

Forms of Salvation
A Sermon by Chris Hensley
Based on Psalm 27 & Luke 9:37 – 43
Presented to Sardis Baptist Church
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During this season of Lent we are taking up the idea of salvation and exploring it in different ways with specific emphasis on the idea of salvation within the here and now, remembering and recognizing that the Kin-dom of God which Jesus spoke of is now, not some distant and far off thing. Salvation is not something for which we wait as though we are merely watchers in the wings once we have our ticket punched, however that manifests itself – most often as baptism and a confession of faith within the Christian tradition, or at least the tradition with which I am most familiar. Rather, salvation is something which can be experienced in the here and now and is something which the Church has been called to offer.

Our passages this morning each tackle the idea of salvation in different ways. To begin, our Hebrew Bible passage found in the Psalter reveals a psalm which falls into two genres – trust and lamentation. It may nearly be divided equally with the transition being at vv. 6 and 7. The psalm begins with a declaration of trust and uses similar imagery to a more familiar psalm in the 23rd psalm. Just a word of reminder, when we see the word lord in all caps, this is the English translators note that this word was Adonai in the Hebrew which is a place holder for the covenant name of the God of the Hebrew people. Basically, this distinguishes God from other folks who might be identified as lord in the English translations of the text. That to say, the psalmists trust is in the LORD. The psalm begins with a declaration that the psalmist will trust in

God regardless of the external circumstances. The psalm shifts then to cry out for salvation in the form of an emotional plea that God come near to the psalmist in their hour of need. It is as if the psalmist is saying, “God, I trust you and I want you near me.” I am reminded of a child who is stirred awake by the groaning of a house settling or a troubling dream and, while knowing a parent is in the other room, wants to lay eyes on that parent. The same is true for adults as well. There are moments patients who have need of assistance from others seek the comfort of laying eyes on their caregiver, or even I seek the comfort of laying eyes on my wife in moments of trouble and distress. We are social creatures after all and we need one another. It stands to reason that we who are persons of faith would need a tangible reminder of the presence of our God, our Adonai, our hope and our salvation. The psalms serve us well when we need a visceral reminder or connection within our scriptures.

Turning then to our Christian Testament reading in the Gospel of Luke, we pick up where we left off a couple of weeks ago at the transfiguration. Jesus descends the mountain with Peter, James, and John to find the others in a situation of uncertainty. Let us be reminded of the larger context of our passage. Luke’s Jesus has already equipped the disciples with power and authority to teach, heal, and even drive out demons which our text says afflicts the boy. It is easy to read this and other passages like it and assume that the disciples are dopey and incompetent. Instead, I invite you to reflect on the humanity of the disciples. They, like us, are human and are prone to human frailties and uncertainties. Further, the disciples have just heard their teacher and friend make yet another prediction of his looming death and stated that to follow him is to pick up the cross and bear it in this life. This is

some heavy stuff to wrestle with mentally and emotionally. Add to that the destination of the group is Jerusalem and Jesus' death which he predicted. Now, the disciples are faced with further uncertainty in the form of being unable to do the thing which Jesus equipped them to do earlier in this very chapter.

The boy's father approaches Jesus in a state of emotional distress. The Greek suggests that the father is screaming out and this, in the ancient Greco-Roman social context, is a faux pas. It is still a faux pas in our society, too. Controlling oneself and our emotions is considered appropriate, but having big emotions and screaming and wailing are frowned upon. This, though, paints a vivid picture of the grief which the father is experiencing and his deep desire for salvation for his son and himself in light of their affliction. The father resorts to this indignity because the disciples were unable to drive out the demon.

Luke's Jesus, to this point, has always responded positively when faced with a petition to heal someone. However, in this episode, Jesus' initial response is to ask a rhetorical question about how long he will have to be with this faithless generation. Generation in this context, and throughout Luke, typically refers to folks who oppose Jesus' message or do not fully get it to that point. Mostly the Pharisees and those who do not respond to Jesus' message in faith. In this case it is aimed at the disciples.

The boy in this account and, by extension, his father are suffering and they cry out a lament and a word of trust aimed at Jesus and Jesus heals the boy. In fact, there is restoration in the fullest sense according to the text. Jesus

had given the disciples the authority to serve as his representatives in the larger world. The Church has also been given the authority to serve as representatives of Jesus the Christ in this world. Now, the healing stories and accounts of possession are difficult to parse for a modern audience with access to the medical knowledge which we have – limited still as it may be. While I do not personally believe in Satan and demons, I do believe in a presence of evil within this world which we are the authors and perfectors of as human beings. In our selfishness and cruelty we do harm to one another, the world around us, and ourselves. This is not our calling as the Church. Instead, we are called to offer salvation to those who cry out in desperation at the sufferings and indignities of this world, however they manifest. Whether these sufferings are in the form of poverty, disability, otherness, or some manifest in some form not mentioned. We as the Church are called to alleviate that suffering. As a child longs to lay eyes on their parent, or I my wife during some upheaval or disconcerting moment of grief, this world longs for a tangible representation of love incarnate in light of suffering and pain. May we remember that salvation is more than some confession of faith, but that it is also, and more realistically so, a loving presence to those hurting. May we be that presence today and always.

Bibliography

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