

THE SEA OF SALVATION

Scripture Lesson: John 17

Text: John 10:14,15

Songs: R3757; R358; R359; F11; R92 1,4

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord,

So far we have learned that there is nothing in ourselves that can kindle salvation. It is all God's choosing. Now we ask the next question: Whom does God choose to save?

We have a dramatic answer in Jesus' Highly Priestly prayer recorded in John 17 that we read tonight as our Scripture Lesson. Listen again to some striking verses. "John 17:9, 24, 26." These are people to whom Jesus comes with His presence and power to make their lives glorify His Father in heaven. Who are they? Listen again to our text tonight, "John 10:14,15." It is very plain what the Bible teaches. Jesus came to specifically save a certain number of people who He calls "His sheep" who are part of His flock, what we call the church. This is the clear teaching of God's word, the Bible.

Traditionally this has been known as "Limited Atonement," that is, limited to those whom God has chosen. This is what the "L" of TULIP stands for. Through the years there has been confusion about what the "Limited" stood for. Did it mean God could not save all people? Did it mean the salvation Christ earned was only a partial payment for sin and we had to supply the rest? Did it make God smaller because His central act of salvation was limited? You can sense that while the word TULIP has been an excellent acronym for centuries, the middle letter "L" leaves a lot of room for misunderstanding.

That is why we now often use the acronym FAITH that has "I" as the middle letter—"I" for Intentional Atonement. God has a specific plan that includes specific people that His Son shall save and incorporate into the heavenly kingdom. That was the purpose for which Christ was born according to the angel in Matthew 1:21, "Matthew 1:21." Early in Jesus' ministry He spoke of the intentional salvation of those God has chosen for eternal life. "John 6:37-40." Jesus makes that plain in His prayers for His people, "John 17:1-2,6,9." This intention to save singled out persons is clear later in Jesus' prayer, "John 17:20,21." John would write in his first letter, "I John 4:9,10." This is Intentional Atonement, the "I" of FAITH.

Why is this Biblical teaching important to you and to me? Christians cherished these teachings through the centuries for three reasons. It is Biblical, God-glorifying, and of great comfort to us.

First, this is an accurate representation of what God teaches us in the Bible. Every Christian desires to be as Biblical as possible. We are no exception. We want to embrace a Christianity that interprets God's word as correctly as is humanly possible. Our finite human minds may not fully grasp what God is doing in His salvation plan so we inject other ideas we can more easily grasp, but deep down inside each and every Christian wants to be as close to God's word as possible.

For example, many Christians believe that Jesus died for everyone because God planned for everyone to be saved by Christ's death and resurrection. The illustration often used is money a person keeps in the bank. We want more money than bills. God arranged for Jesus to die for everyone, but sadly many people never withdraw salvation from God's bank. God wishes they would, but they refuse. That view makes people stronger than God. That cannot be, yet that is how many Christians in the North America think. To bring the majority of American Christians closer to Biblical truth Dr. Albert Mohler, the most powerful protestant in America today,

requires every Baptist seminary student to study TULIP. He is convinced that when these Biblical truths are taught to the next generation of pastors they will properly influence all future Christians.

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Second, we embrace this truth because it brings the greatest glory to God. In the illustration we just saw it is possible for a person to be stronger than God. Revelation presents the picture of Jesus knocking on the door of someone's heart saying, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20) This verse leaves the impression that the person has the power to keep Jesus out. Often people will say to those who are not yet Christian, "Let Jesus come into your heart." Preachers will call to people to no longer keep Jesus shut out of the lives. The text has been used again and again to encourage people to become Christians.

The truth that we have seen in the Bible today is that we are saved by God's overwhelming grace. He chooses and He saves through His Son, Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit who works in our hearts. God is not frustrated because people are going to hell left and right refusing to open the door of their hearts to Him. On the contrary, when He stands at the door and knocks every one He has chosen is "Dead in trespasses and sins," according to Ephesians 2:1. Those He has chosen He has the Holy Spirit come to revive spiritually so they can open the door and let Jesus in. Christians or non-Christians, all of us are spiritually dead unable to open the door for Jesus. Christians open the door only because God in His grace has given them His Holy Spirit to infuse life. God is never frustrated in His plan because always He is glorified. Christians glorify God's love by praising Him in this life and perfectly in heaven forever. Non-Christians glorify God's justice by disobeying Him now and suffering in hell forever. Either way, God's plan is preserved and His name praised.

Intentional Atonement gives the greatest to glory to God because it is all in His hands. It is His plan, His salvation applied to us, and His delight to have His children in heaven eternally. No matter how you twist or turn this hologram of Biblical truths, God gets the honor and glory. It is always His story for His glory.

Third, we promote this Biblical truth because it provides the most comfort to us. Intentional Atonement is God picking each one of us out personally and saving us for eternal life in heaven with Him. We are never in some general category or big crowd. We are never a number to God. He knows us by name and we are special to Him. Isaiah 43 begins, "But now, this is what the LORD says—He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'" (Isaiah 43:1) This echoes Deuteronomy 7:6, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession." Earlier in this evening's message we heard how Jesus is the Good Shepherd who calls His sheep and they come to Him. This is all on a personal basis. That is why we often ask, "Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior?" Our Christianity is a very personal relationship that begins with God personally choosing us.

We see this clearly in the everyday relationships that we have. What a difference there is between going to Des Moines and being a big crowd in Hy-Vee Hall or sitting down with your best friend in the Coffee Cup Café. Our salvation is not a Hy-Vee Event Center type of transaction. Our salvation is God sitting down with us at a cozy supper not in the Coffee Cup Café, but in the inner recesses of our heart when the Holy Spirit has us open the door to Christ so He can come to have supper with us. God personally comes to you and personally saves you. You are never in a mass of numbers. You are always special to God.

Since that is the way God chooses to save us, He cannot miss saving us. At Barak Obama's inauguration hundreds of people who were to sit in the purple section got stuck in a tunnel so they never heard or saw any part of it. They were part of a huge herd of people that descended on Washington. No one stopped the events until they could be seated even though they had paid dearly to be present. Since God makes an individual appointment for each one of us to meet Him and receive His personal salvation, we know our salvation is certain sure. When we embrace TULIP or FAITH we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that we belong to

Jesus, body and soul, in life and in death, for time and eternity. There is no greater personal security than that! That is why we sing, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." Let's do that. It is Worship and Celebration Hymnal 92. We will sing the first and last stanza of "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling."