

Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, May 11, 2016

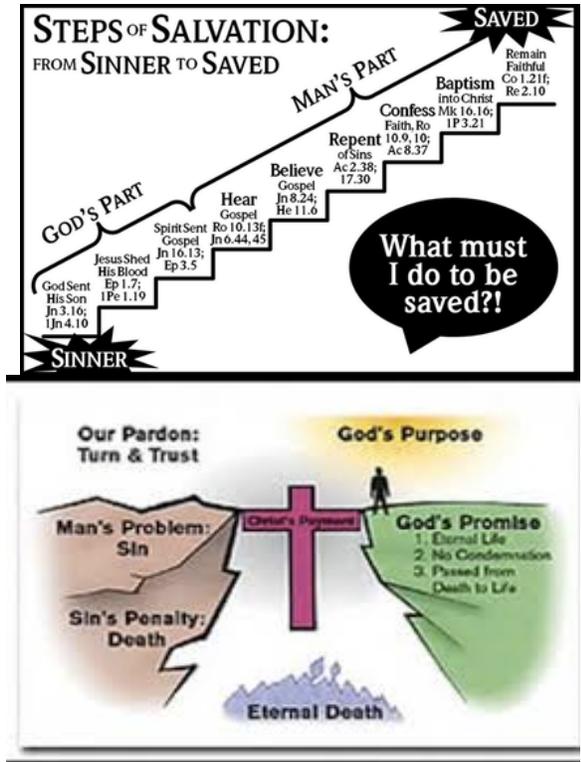
Sunday's account of Paul and Silas' midnight prayer meeting and hymn sing eventuates in the Philippian jailer asking, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They respond, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30,31)

Ask "What must I do to be saved?" in some circles and you'll get a canned, confident response in the form of "The Plan of Salvation," (an extended version of Walter Scott's "Five Finger Exercise" underscoring faith, repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit). Another favorite in evangelical circles is "The Roman Road," featuring a list of passages from Romans. Back in my Fellowship of Christian Athletes days, I learned to draw the process of salvation on a napkin complete with Sin perched at the edge of one cliff, God/ Salvation on another cliff opposite, and a foreboding cavern between them. How was one to cross from sin to salvation without falling to one's death into the abyss? *Glad you asked!* The evangelist-artist now draws the horizontal beam of the cross bridging the abyss from sin to salvation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."

In *The People's New Testament Commentary*, Disciple Bible scholars Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock write, "Many modern readers of the Bible, especially in the mainline churches, are uncomfortable with the language of salvation. Yet such language pervades the New Testament, where the Greek words for "savior," "save," and "salvation" occur 176 times, of which 44 are in Luke-Acts." In other words, if napkins, Roman Roads, and The Plan of Salvation does not suit your theological palette, how do *you* understand salvation?

In our Sunday School Class last week, we had a helpful and enlightening discussion about this keystone word of our faith and the experiences that exemplify it. The experience of salvation, we determined, involves our being delivered/ rescued/ freed/ lifted/ *saved*:

- *from* a condition out of which we are helpless to free ourselves
- *to* a more favorable condition
- thanks to the *grace* (intervention) of God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.



We created three columns and listed words describing the process of “being saved.” Our “salvation equation” read:

We were saved *from* (blank) *to* (blank) thanks to the *intervention* of (blank).

<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Intervention (grace)</u>
bondage	freedom	liberation
death	eternal life	resurrection
danger	safety	rescue
stuck in miry clay	solid ground	lifted up
darkness	light	insight/enlightenment
confusion	clarity “eyes rinsed”	direction/ guidance
guilt	cleansed	forgiveness
despair	hope	assurance
illness	health	healing
anxiety	peace	consolation

We then discussed the ways God’s gracious intervention comes to us in times of need: from another person (a friend, a doctor, a teacher), from something we read or hear (a scripture, music, some wise advice), from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prayer, the encouragement of a friend, or a fortuitous turn of events.

We discerned there’s no end to the variations of conditions we find ourselves in from which we cannot free ourselves and no end to the ways we experience the divine interventions that result in our finding ourselves in a much better place.

We named ways the “equation of salvation” is expressed in scripture, song, and elsewhere:

- I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see
- Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Goodness and mercy follow me.
- We admitted we were powerless over alcohol. We came to believe a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. (Steps 1 and 2 of the Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Steps)

We acknowledged we all have salvation stories to tell—instances when we found ourselves in circumstances and states of mind from which we could not deliver ourselves but from which we experienced interventions we can name as God’s saving grace. We decided what we need to do is take the time to tell these stories to one another. At that point, we ran out of time and we had to scamper off toward the sanctuary for worship.

Here’s to the hope we can be intentional about sharing our salvation stories with one another. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!

