**“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” – Romans 10:13**

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**Part I – Sermon Series – Beyond Belief**

We are in the middle of a Sermon Series right now called “Beyond Belief” where we are looking at what it means to “step out and really live our faith.” It takes more than just saying you “believe something” instead you have to know and believe it so deeply that it is a core conviction that shapes and defines who you are so that you are living into it and going beyond that belief.

Each week we have been looking at a different topic in this Sermon Series and today the topic is the Assurance of Salvation. So what does it mean when we talk about Salvation? And how do we really know for sure that we are saved?

Since it is Mother’s Day, I thought you might like some motherly advice on this topic from an old TV show. The son is saying, “Now Mama, you don’t have to go to church to go to heaven.” And Mama’s response is “Well, you don’t have to wear a parachute to jump out of an airplane either, but it certainly helps.” Church can help guide you toward salvation.

But also, there are always questions about baptism and salvation and even how much water it takes to make sure you are saved. Now if you are Baptist (and by the way I was raised Baptist so I can say this) it takes a lot more water – it is the full immersion, you have to be dunked in order for it to count. We Methodists like to be a little more flexible and have options such as dunking or pouring or sprinkling. We believe that it is not the amount of water involved but that the Holy Spirit is involved and so most important is the heart of the believer and the commitment that is made.

But it is obvious that sometimes churches can become too legalistic about trying to do things properly. I don’t know if you saw this article that was in the paper. By the way, in the past it would have been in the Religion section of the paper, but since most papers have done away with that section, I think it was in the Sports section instead. The title of the article was “Man’s Baptism Overturned After Instant Replay Reveals He Was Not Fully Submerged” (Obviously, it must have been a Baptist church.) It says:

*Local man Jacob Vasquez was overjoyed to publicly give his life to Christ this past Sunday, being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*Unfortunately, Vasquez’s conversion was overturned by officials after an instant replay revealed he was not fully submerged in the baptismal.*

*After the man was dunked in the water by star pastor Mike and his associate pastor Bill, he emerged and raised his hands in victory, jumping from the water and spiking his Bible in celebration. But officials quickly threw a yellow flag in the air, indicating they needed to review the play.*

*They carefully studied the play over several minutes and determined that the man’s finger was clearly above the surface of the water, negating the play and nullifying the man’s salvation.*

*“Incomplete submersion by the offense, conversion overturned. 12-month penalty serving in children’s ministry,” the officials declared as the crowd booed. “Salvation denied.”*

*Once his time has been served working with the 3-4-year-old’s class, he’ll be allowed to attempt the play again.*

*The man has accused the refs of being Presbyterians.*

**Part II – Truth about Salvation**

I thought you would enjoy that. You know we talk about heaven and hell, and salvation and being saved. And sometimes we sort of kid about it as if it is a laughing matter, but really it is the most important thing in our lives because it determines our eternity. And I can see how it can be such a confusing topic to those who have not really studied the Bible or learned the truth about Jesus Christ and what it means for him to be our Savior. There are a lot of statements about salvation in the Bible, but then there are also spiritual disciplines and teachings from the church to help you grow in your faith which sometimes gets intermingled with the question of salvation, and then there are the claims of our culture and our world that get thrown in there as well which try to negate some things while claiming you need to do other things. And in the end, for many people they just throw up their hands saying I can’t believe any of it because it overwhelming and just sounds like a lot of foolishness.

By the way, speaking of foolishness, 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.*

So, before we start thinking that we are all wise and understand everything, maybe instead we step back today and just humble ourselves and see what we can learn from God and God’s Word (the Bible) about this topic of salvation.

Because when we ask the question “What is truth?” The only truth is God! After all, it was God who came up with the concept of salvation. We as humans invented the problem of sin, so God’s solution to our sin is salvation so he wrote the book on how to be saved. So, if we really want to be saved then the truth of “how to be saved” is in the Bible.

Once again, I am going to encourage you to write down the scriptures we cover today. Make a note of them so that later you can look them up in your Bible and pray about them and listen for God’s guidance. For many of you I will not be telling you anything new that you have not already heard. But hopefully it will be a good review for you and it will provide you with the information you need to share with others and encourage them in their faith.

**Part III – Who Needs Salvation**

Let’s start out with who needs salvation? The short answer is – All of us! Let’s face it, most of us do not spend too much time thinking about heaven and hell or life beyond this life. We are too wrapped up with what is going on in our little world right here instead of thinking about eternity. Usually it is not until someone close to us passes away or possibly we have a brush with death or a difficult diagnosis, before we start questioning what is beyond this life.

And most people if you ask them if they think they are going to heaven or hell, they will almost all tell you that they are a pretty good person. They can always rationalize why whatever they did wasn’t really that bad and so they think if there really is a God and a heaven and a hell, that they guess they will go to heaven.

I don’t know about you, but that is a pretty important topic and I don’t want to just guess, I want to know for sure I am saved. I want that assurance of salvation.

But we need to first realize that we *all* need salvation because we are *all* sinners. Romans 3:23 says – *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* We cannot save ourselves. None of us are good enough. And so, when it comes to who needs salvation – we all do.

Our sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2 says, *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear.* And the penalty for sin according to Romans 6:23 is death. *(For the wages of sin is death…)* That is not just death in this life, but that is eternal death of being away from God.

**Part IV – Good but Not Complete**

So the question becomes how do we move from where we are in our sinful state all the way to God? And to be honest, this is often where things get confusing for a lot of Christians. Because there are certain things that are even discussed in the Bible and we are encouraged to do if we are really going to be faithful to God and grow closer to the Lord.

For instance, we are specifically told to do Good Works. Matthew 5:16 – *Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven.* In fact, we are warned that if we do not do good works then we are sinning. James 4:17 – *Anyone, then, who knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.* Yet as wonderful as our good works are, we are not saved by our good works.

Our Religion includes those things such as praising God, our spiritual disciplines such as praying, Bible study, fasting, being a part of the body of Christ which is the church, taking part in Holy Communion, - those things are all discussed in Scripture and are encouraged as ways to grow closer to God and to grow in our faith and they are all important. But we are not saved because of our religion.

God is very specific in the Bible about how we handle our money. In fact, there are more scriptures in the Bible about money and possessions that there are about prayer and faith, because God knew we needed guidance in that area. Everything we have comes from God in the first place and we are clearly warned in the Bible not to rob from God, but to give God our tithes and offerings. And a tithe is 1/10th of everything we have. Malachi 3:8 – *“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings.”* So how we handle our money is important, but we are not saved by how we handle our money.

Finally, our morality is of upmost importance to the Lord. The Bible clearly tells us what acts are sinful and what acts honor God. And we are clearly told that we will be judged for our actions both good and bad. Yet even if we try to live a perfect life, we cannot save ourselves.

Face it, all of these things are very important to God and he has instructed us in his Word how we should handle each of them – Good Works, Religion, Money, Morality. Yet our human efforts fall short of reaching God.

**Part V – Jesus Christ**

God knew that our sin was so great that it separated us from him and there was no way that we could possibly reach him and achieve salvation by the things that we do. Though they are all important to help us grow closer to the Lord. So, thank goodness, this is where God’s grace comes in. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*

The gift that God gave the world was his own Son, Jesus Christ. John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* But just as it is with any gift, just because someone gives it does not mean that the gift is received. We receive this perfect gift from God when we accept his Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior. And when we do, we receive all of the other blessings and gifts and promises that come along with his Son, including eternal life.

The bottom line is that someone had to pay the price for our sin and Jesus Christ, God’s Son, who lived a perfect life was the only one who could make a difference. According to Romans 5:8 – *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Jesus was willing to die on the cross for our sins to pay the price for us. It was a debt we could never pay, but with his perfect righteous life he took our sins. 1 Peter 3:18 says, *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*

Jesus is that bridge that allows us to be connected to God and have salvation. It is Christ’s payment that brings us to God and allows us to receive all of God’s promises.

**Part VI – Action Step**

Let me make this very, very clear – it is not what we DO, it is what God has already DONE that allows us to receive salvation. We cannot save ourselves. When we look at the Action Steps – the first ones were all from God – 1) God sent his Son, Jesus Christ into the world to live among us, 2) Jesus lived a perfect life and he taught us what is important, 3) Jesus was willing to die on the cross to pay the price for our sins, 4) Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Those are the first Action Steps and they have all been done.

The next two steps so that we receive salvation are our Action Steps. And I know you have heard this scripture verse the last few weeks, but it is by far the best one for all of us to know exactly what it takes for us, and all those around us, to be saved. (You should have it memorized, but if not read it with me.) Romans 10:9 – *If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* So those are the two Action Steps that we must do: 1) Confess Jesus is Lord, and 2) Believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead and he is who he says he is.

**Part VII – Bottom Line**

Let me summarize it for you: there are a lot of things that are extremely beneficial and help us to really grow in our faith and know God better: thinks like the spiritual disciplines of praying and studying our Bible and being a part of a church and being baptized and participating in Holy Communion and doing acts of mercy and being faithful with our possessions and honouring God with our lives. All of those things are good and important, but the bottom line is this: you have to have Jesus.

So what does it mean to “have” Jesus? You have him in your heart, you have a relationship with him, you have him as your role model and guide in how to live life. You “have” Jesus as your Savior and Lord of your life. Jesus is our Assurance of Salvation!

Our scripture for today is from 1 John 5:11-13 – *And this is the testimony* (in other words, pay attention because this is the ultimate truth): *God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.* And here is that extra note of Assurance of Salvation from John: Verse 13 – *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

There was a little boy who was taking his younger brother with him to his Sunday School class for the first time. Before that they younger boy had always been in the nursery. So his big brother leaned over to give him some good brotherly advice – “The teacher asks a lot of questions. No matter what the question, just answer Jesus. He seems to always be the right answer!”

Jesus is the answer! Amen.