

SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR GOD

NPR's radio show "This American Life" ran an interesting segment about an effort by the Columbian government to offer communist rebels an invitation to leave the jungle and come back to their homes. They researched the lives of former rebels to understand what led them to join the rebellion and also what life was like in the jungle. They also developed a program to reintegrate former guerillas by helping them with education, job training and psychological support. Then they went deep into the jungle and selected nine 75 foot tall trees close to trails they knew the rebels frequently used. They decorated the trees with Christmas lights. And they set up motion sensors that activated the lights when someone passed by and revealed a message that said: *"If Christmas can come to the jungle, you can come home."* The result was that there was a 30% increase, the highest ever number of rebels to date, that came in that year and rejoined their families and society. The following year they ran a similar campaign called "Operation Rivers of Light". They filled seven thousand translucent plastic balls and floated them down a river that the rebels used at night. Each one glowed beautifully and was filled small gifts and heartwarming notes inviting the rebels to lay down their arms and come home.

I don't know much about the situation in Columbia today but when I read that I thought in some ways it is a little bit like the way the book of Revelation pictures salvation. Revelation pictures all of humanity in rebellion. In most *human* rebellions there are at least some legitimate grievances that have not been addressed but in humanity's rebellion against our creator and our perfect loving and righteous ruler – God, it is not that the Creator has been unjust with us but that we have been ungrateful and unfaithful to him. But he wants us back and offers a way back. But will we come back? C. S. Lewis wrote: *"Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms."* Next week we are going to break from our series of messages on Revelation to focus, for the month of March on Jesus and the quest to understand who he is and what he means. But in this message we are going to conclude this part of Revelation by looking again at what Revelation teaches about Salvation. In **Revelation 7:9-10** John is has a God inspired vision in which he sees *a great multitude in heaven crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the*

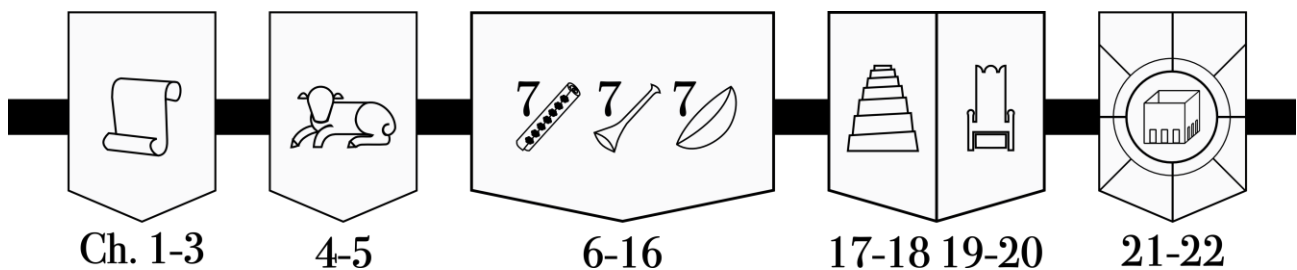
Lamb!” Salvation is rescue and restoration. Rebels are restored to God!

So lets start with the truth that in the Bible and in Revelation...

I. THE SALVATION OF GOD’S PEOPLE IS THE CONCLUSION OF HUMAN HISTORY.

This is a good place to look at the big picture - the story arc of Revelation. Revelation is a God-inspired *revealing* of otherwise unseen realities that empower you to face a confusing world with confident joy because you know God is in control and salvation is the conclusion.

Look at the chart and five major sections...



The first section show us...

A. There is a risen Savior who loves his church.

Revelation 1-3 begins as a letter that reveals the passionate love of Jesus for his church. He sees their suffering, promises to be with them, to help them endure and he challenges them to be faithful to him.

The second section shows us that...

B. God is on his throne.

Revelation 4-5 reveals the throne room of God. There is a scroll that represents God’s plan of judgment and salvation. No one can open the scroll except for the one who is called the lamb. The lamb is a symbol of Jesus who although he is powerful, humbled himself and became a sacrifice to pay the penalty the sins of his people and redeem them.

The third section shows us that as history unfolds...

C. There will be trials throughout history and great tribulation.

Revelation 6-16 reveals what God will do in history. As the invitation of God goes out to the world, calling people to come back to him, there will also be a series of troubles and traumas and judgments from God. In this part of Revelation there are three sets of seven. The seven

seals give the broad story of history, with the growth of Christianity but also wars and famines and persecution and then the final judgment. Then out of the seventh seal there comes a vision of seven angels blowing seven trumpets. These are judgments of God that grow in intensity. They are warning mankind to repent and return to God. When the seventh trumpet is sounded out of it come seven bowls of wrath. At this point there is great tribulation but as bad as things are people refuse to repent, to turn to God and trust in him.

The fourth section shows us.

D. Jesus will return as a conquering king.

The victory of Jesus comes in two stages. First in **Revelation 17-18**; the fall of Babylon. Babylon is a symbol: the embodiment of human culture in rebellion against God, looking powerful and drunk on pleasure. Babylon has an alluring beauty on the surface but underneath the caked-on façade she's an ugly, poisonous old harlot. The beauty that turns peoples' heads is often no more than skin deep. Revelation reveals that what is true of people is true of whole cultures and civilizations. Babylon and all it represents will be revealed and destroyed. Then, in **Revelation 19-20** Jesus is enthroned. Every enemy is destroyed and Jesus is revealed and enthroned as Lord.

But that is not the end....

E. There will be a new creation.

In **Revelation 21-22** there is a new creation. The creator: God and humankind, the earth and heaven are all in perfect harmony. Every tear is wiped away and all things are made beautiful on the renewed earth with the city of God at the heart of it all. This is the story line of Revelation: 1.) Jesus loves the church, 2.) God is on the throne, 3.) There will be tribulation, 4.) Jesus will return as conquering King. 5.) All things will be made new. Vinoth Ramachandra, a Sri Lankan Christian says this is part of the Christian faith that is different from every other religion, *“Biblical salvation lies not in an escape from this world but in the transformation of this world. You will not find hope for the world in any of the religious systems or philosophies of humankind. The biblical vision is unique.”* Salvation – this Salvation belongs to our God.

When we understand this it shows us also that...

II. THE SALVATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE REVEALS THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S GRACE.

*There are three reasons that the salvation of God's people reveals the greatness of God's grace and each truth is powerful and practical.
First...*

A. It is a salvation that is for *all* people.

Revelation 7:9-10 *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* God's salvation transcends every distinction of race and class and culture and identity. That's part of the greatness of God's grace. He wants to save all races and people and bring them together in his love and under his Lordship.

It is a salvation for all people and second...

B. It is a salvation that is *through* Jesus.

Revelation 7:14 Describes the people who have received salvation as those who *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*. This is Revelation's vivid way of saying you can only be saved by the grace of God through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Illustration: In the symbolism of the Bible your robe represents whatever it is you rely on to make yourself acceptable and presentable. Imagine you were invited to the Oscars to walk the red carpet, what would you wear? Well, every one of us is going to have to stand before God. How will you present yourself to God? What you've got isn't clean. You don't have anything, can't buy anything, or make anything that is clean enough to cover you so you can stand before God.

We need salvation because we have a problem and it goes deep. Listen to what Jesus said, **Mark 7:21-22**, For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person." How do we get clean from the evil that defiles us when it comes from inside us? . To use the picture here in Revelation through Jesus' we can be washed and made pure in the eyes of God. We deserve God's judgment but Jesus, suffered the judgment we deserve for us. We owe a debt to God's justice that we cannot pay off but Jesus through his sacrifice on the cross paid the debt for us. It's all God's

grace. Grace means undeserved kindness and love. You don't earn it you just lay down your arms and come home. *That's the third thing...*

C. It is a salvation that *brings us home* to our Creator.

Revelation 7:15-17 *“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* It's not just that God says, *“You are forgiven you can go now”*. God says, *“you are redeemed, you can come home now.”* This is more than forgiveness. Forgiveness really just means, no one is going to come after you to punish you. This is God saying I have adopted you and I want to bring you home to me.

Illustration: I have a friend named Joby. He is the pastor of a church in Jacksonville. He and his wife have two dogs - boxers that they love. They are the kind of dog people that give their dogs presents for Christmas and sometimes let them sleep in the bed with them! They live near a busy street so they fenced the backyard to give the dogs a safe place to be their doggy selves. But one day, they got out. You know how dogs can be when they find a gap in the fence and squeeze through and they are like; *“Free at last! We can go left. We can go right. We can chase cats. We can lift a leg on the neighbor's flowerbeds; we can do whatever we want.”* So off they went.

But if you are a pet lover you know how it is when you have dogs and they're lost. When, Joby finds out the dogs are lost and it's been hours, he takes off driving around the neighborhood looking for them but he can't find them. Then his wife calls him and she says, they're on the Internet! (No, they had not opened a Facebook account or started a website) they had been picked up by animal control and taken to the city animal shelter in Jacksonville. So he goes to get them. The lady at the desk sort of scolds him for letting the dogs get out and he takes it and then asks what he has to do to get them back. She says: *“It will be \$290.00 for each dog.”* He says, *“Alright”*. And she says, *“Well you have to go back to identify your dogs first.”*

So he goes back and there they are in the kennel looked up with all these other dogs that are barking and whining. And you know how expressive dogs can be, he looks at these dogs and one is just

pathetically clueless, but the male, he knows he's been bad and looks miserable and guilty and sorry. Joby looks at them and it comes to him that his dogs thought they had found freedom but it led them to a place where they lost all freedom, they were trapped, in bondage and there was no way they could free themselves. They could not get out on their own. What's he going to do tell them; *"You guys need to get jobs and come up with \$290.00 each? You better deliver papers or race greyhounds or something! You have to pay your own debt."* No matter what they said, even if they said, *"Listen, you're the master! We get that now and from this time on we will be perfect dogs, we will obey all your commands"* ... it still wouldn't pay the debt they owed and they still would not be able to get themselves out of the kennel.

So he goes up to do the paper work and says to the lady - "What if I don't have the money, almost \$600.00, what then?" She says, "Well, you relinquish ownership of your dogs." He says, "What happens then? Do you put them down?" She said, "No, we bathe them, groom them, fix them if that is needed and put them up for adoption." At that point he looks over his shoulder and there is a huge poster that says, "Adopt a dog for \$30.00." So he takes the piece of paper and says: "Okay, I'm going to sign over ownership." So, he signs the paper and it is notarized - and she hands it to him. And he says, "Okay, so I don't own them any more. You own them - they are your property not mine." She says, "right." He says, "okay", turns and takes two steps and then turns back and says: "I'd like to adopt some dogs please. I'd like a male and a female something in brown." She said, "You can't adopt your own dogs!" He said, "I have a notarized piece of paper here that says I don't own any dogs." She scoops up her stuff and goes back to her manager and he can see them back there having this crazy discussion. Then the manager comes out angry -- but there was nothing he or they could do. So Joby filled out the adoption form and with \$30.00 and the adoption form he redeemed his dogs and legally adopted them back into his family and his care. They had incurred a debt they could not pay but their master was willing to pay the debt to get them back. It wasn't because of anything good they had done but simply because of his love for them and his willingness to pay the price they couldn't pay to make them his again. All human analogies are imperfect but there is a picture in that story of Salvation in Revelation.

Conclusion

Where you are in relationship to this salvation? In Revelation, as in the entire Bible, this Salvation has to be received. Remember the C. S.

Lewis quote: *“Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.”*

Listen to the invitation that comes toward the very end of Revelation.

Revelation 22:17 *The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.* This is God calling rebels to come home. You have to come to Christ, believe he died and rose again to pay your debt for your Salvation and then take the gift of eternal life by trusting in him as your Savior. You whisper a prayer: *“I thirst for this, I want it, I trust in Jesus and ask you for it.”*

In Christian faith you don't change your life in order to achieve salvation. You receive salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and then that grace you have received changes your life.

The reason true Christians love God and want to serve him and help others is not because they think that by doing so they will clean themselves up and earn God's love and avoid his judgment. No! If that's your motive for what you call “living a good life” it isn't really good at all in God's eyes and it never can be because it is all selfish. You are doing it for yourself to earn salvation or to prove yourself worthy. It's all about you and it all is for you. You never do anything simply because you love Jesus if you are doing it to save yourself. If you understand it is a free gift for the taking and you take it and then serve Jesus, because you live him, then that is good and beautiful.

Listen, Christian friends, some of you think you get all this but do you really? Do you get it deeply? Won't you admit to yourself and to God that for some of you your money is not just your money, it's the robe you're trying to wrap yourself in as if it can make you presentable or satisfy your thirst? For some of you maybe, your youth, your beauty, your health, your success accomplishments are not *JUST* your youth, your beauty, your health, your success or your accomplishments! You've tried to find in those things your robes of righteousness that make you worthy, and acceptable and satisfied but they are not enough. If they were you wouldn't be so anxious, angry or empty or insecure. You need to discover again and over and over again that the salvation of God's people reveals the greatness of God's grace and rest in that. That can be the end of the struggle and the beginning of a new and better motivation for a life of love for God. Take it. Take it by faith. Take it by prayer and faith. Say, *“Lord, choose Jesus. I choose grace, I choose the blood washed robes of his righteousness as my dress. I rest in your saving grace. I take and drink the water of life.”*

Amen