

Brackenhurst Methodist Church 2 August 2009
Why Jesus is Not my Saviour: Part 2

Welcome & Notices

Call to Worship: Exodus 15:2

The Lord is my strength and my song:

he has become my salvation

He is my God, and I will praise him,

my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Prayer

Opening Statement

- Welcome again as we look at the second sermon under the title of “Why Jesus is not my Saviour”
 - I'm glad to see that some of you are back!
- Perhaps I can re-title the sermon, and some folk have commented that I should rather have said, “Why Jesus is not only my Saviour, not just my Saviour”.
 - Perhaps I could say why Jesus is my Saviour
 - * But qualifying the words ‘Jesus’ and ‘Saviour’
- And you will remember that I said last time that I want to explain how I understand those two words
 - Last time I looked at Jesus as the Word made flesh
 - * And Jesus as Lord
 - Today I'm looking looking at how I understand Saviour
- But you will know, if you were here last time, that I'm trying to get away from the evangelical concept of “Jesus died for me on the cross; His blood shed on the cross for me paid the price for my sin”
- Now I'm happy if you call Jesus Saviour under those terms, but with two provisos
 - Firstly that you know why you believe it.
 - * In other words, have you done your homework? have you studied scripture fully, not just the appropriate verses, have you done the theological work need to do?
 - * So that this understanding is not just something you heard at an altar call when you were 16 and responded to and have never thought through more fully.
 - And secondly I'm happy for you to believe it and hold tightly on to it as long as it is life-giving for you and for those around you.
 - * So important that our faith is life-giving

- As I said last time, I need to move on from that understanding of Jesus as sacrifice because I've begun to find that that image is no longer life-giving for me
- Maybe I can use an illustration of a snake shedding its skin every year.
 - The snake's skin is important — and not just for belts! — it serves a number of important functions for the snake
 - * It keeps the outside out; it protects the snake for the elements, from injury
 - And it keeps the inside in! It stops all the snake's organs from flopping around all over the place
 - * That would be a pretty sad snake with no skin!
- It's important for the snake to have that skin
 - But for the snake to grow he has to shed that skin every year
- Now I don't know what it must feel like for the snake, and I don't think snakes can think the way we do, but I imagine if they could, these would be some of the thoughts that might go through a snake's mind:
 - Is the new skin going to work properly
 - * What if it leaks?
- I guess that the new skin will be a little more sensitive than the old one
 - And I'm sure it must be scary for your skin to start sliding off, and probably irritating, itchy, maybe even painful
- But what would happen if the snake didn't shed his skin?
 - There would be no growth, the old one would become worn and tattered, and ultimately not very helpful
- Sometimes we need to lose the theological skin that has kept us warm and safe, and grow into a new one (sometimes irritating, scary, painful)
 - And I'm sharing some of my journey
 - * No to try to upset people who are happy and comfortable in their theological skins
 - But to encourage those who are not; those who are also struggling
 - * so that maybe you / they will have the courage to grow into a new skin
- And so today as we look at how I understand salvation, let's remember that as I look at these topics it's about my journey — and your journey may be different
 - engage me!
 - * Please don't grumble in the car park — gossip just hurts me, and you and the church community — and I always hear about it
 - Rather, if there is a problem let's talk about it
- And it's about making Christ central.
 - So let's turn to scripture

Scripture:

Luke 14:12-24

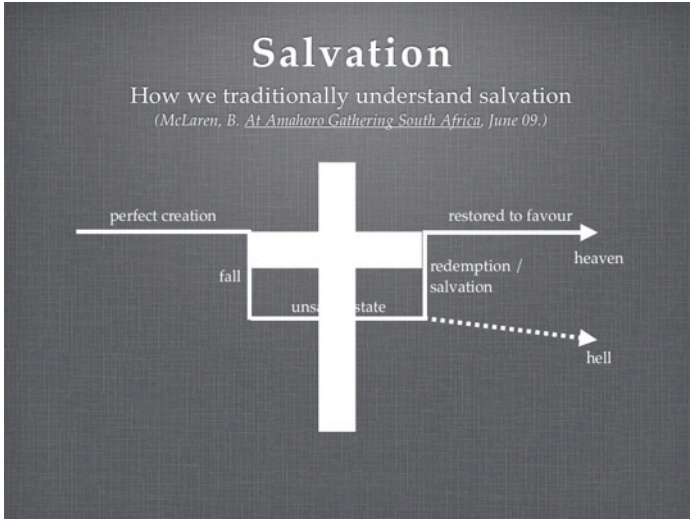
Phil 2:1-18

Message

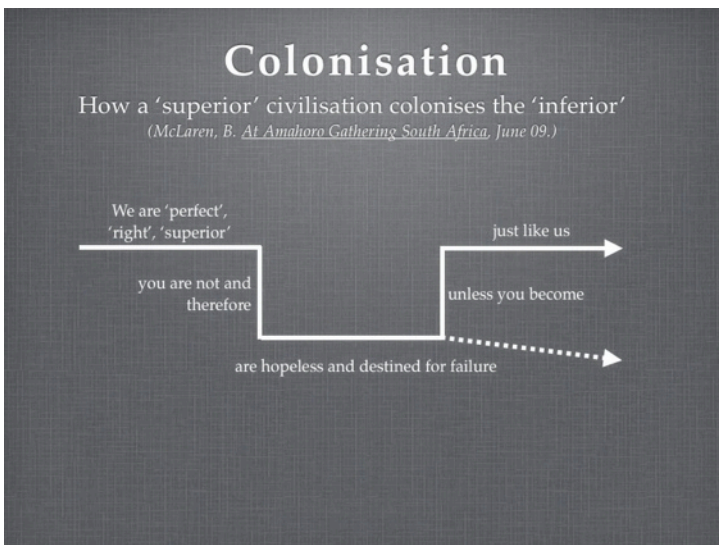
INTRODUCTION

- The idea of salvation has always been a key concept in Christianity, from the first writings in the Christian Testament of which Paul's were the first
 - Right up to our own day
- And also in our own Wesleyan heritage, with the 'four all's of Methodism defining for us the meaning of the gospel:
 - All need to be saved
 - All can be saved
 - All can know that they are saved
 - All can be saved to the uttermost
- So I have no desire to say that salvation is not Christian, it is a vitally important part of being a Christian
 - My concern about the concept of salvation is that we have taken the term out of its original context and made it mean something different from what was originally intended.
- Reality is for many of us salvation means little more than going to heaven one day when we die
 - And indeed that seems to be the central focus of Christianity today.
 - * To get oneself, and as many others as possible to say the sinners' prayer
 - * to accept Christ as personal Saviour
 - * To have your sins forgiven
 - * And to have an assurance of going to heaven after one has shuffled off this mortal coil
 - Even though there is no mention in the Bible of "sinners' prayer", "personal saviour" and little focus on life after death.
- It is my understanding of scripture that if you were to ask Paul if he were going to heaven if he died tonight he would be rather puzzled by the question.
 - He probably would have said "yes", but for him the point of Christianity was more about people becoming fully mature and fully formed in Christ.
 - * Salvation, for Paul, was more about experiencing the glorious realities of being in Christ, and experiencing Christ in oneself (McLaren, B. Adventures in Missing the Point, p 20)

- So I want to suggest today, that God is bigger than salvation for after death, and that a bigger understanding of salvation leads to a fuller life now.
- [OMITTED DUE TO TIME] Traditionally, though, if we were to present our understanding of Christianity in diagram form, it would probably look something like this:



- Ie, created perfect, men and women sinned and fell out of favour with God and were banished from Eden into an unsaved state.
 - * We need to be rescued from that state and restored to favour with God so that we can go to heaven one day when we die.
- If we are not restored to favour we go to hell
 - * And it is Jesus who makes that restoration possible through his death on the cross.
- Brian makes the intriguing point that this is the same model that so-called superior civilisations have always used to colonise so called inferior peoples.



- The Greeks used it before the time of Christ: their culture was the epitome of what it meant to be civilised
 - * everybody else were barbarians (bar-bar — couldn't understand language)
- In order to become acceptable to the Greeks the barbarians had to speak their language, dress like they did, live like they did.
- In more recent times this was the model followed by those who colonised Africa: “Learn our language, dress like us, live like us and leave your barbaric, uncivilised ways behind”.
- Interestingly, inbetween the Greeks and the Europeans colonising Africa was the Roman empire.
 - In the early 300s the Roman emperor Constantine had a vision and become a Christian, and, you guessed it, the whole Roman empire had to become the holy Roman empire, and become just like him!
 - * So his subjects, if they were not Christian, were hopeless and destined for hell, and so the local magistrates were duly appointed to gather up all the citizens, march them down to the local river and forcibly baptise them so that they could become just like Constantine.
 - That's the origin of robes and dog collars, by the way — dress of the Roman magistrate.
 - * And that's the origin of Christening — people were made into Christians against their will
 - * That's why we don't speak of Christening in church, but rather of baptisms.
- So Brian suggests that the radical message of Jesus that all are accepted regardless of who they are and without condition got mixed up with the colonisation of the Holy Roman empire by Constantine
 - And this idea of needing to be saved for heaven became a part of Christian culture.
- And we see this today
 - We are not prepared to entertain the idea that somebody with different ideas about religion to me can also be accepted by God
 - * To be accepted by God you have got to think the way I think, believe what I believe and do things the way I do it, then you'll be okay
- I've seen it recently the way people have responded to my last message
 - People aren't willing to accept that I see things differently and can still have a meaningful relationship with God!

- The people who haven't accused me of being a heretic and bringing evil into the church just want me to read this book
 - * or watch that evangelist
 - * or listen to this tape
- Because I am wrong and putting my eternal soul in the dangers of hellfire and brimstone
 - * And you know, they love me, and if I kneel down right now and repent God will forgive me.
 - * I've got to become just like you!
- As I understand the gospel God accepts me for who I am, and God accepts you for who you are, and there is space in God's kingdom for an infinite number of understandings of who God is and how his saving power works.
 - I don't have to think the way you think, and you don't have to think the way I think
- And thank God for that
 - Thank God he has made us all different!
 - * that's why I keep saying, this is my journey, and maybe it's not yours and that's okay, I'm not asking you to become like me! [OMITTED SECTION ENDS]
- So, if salvation is so important, how do we understand it?
 - Salvation is from sin
 - Salvation is for all
 - Salvation is about now

(1) Salvation is from sin

- I don't think that anybody will argue with me on this point, although possibly the definition of sin will become a point of contention.
 - See, if you ask someone what sin is they will usually suggest the breaking of a law
 - * Sex before marriage
 - * stealing something
 - * greed
 - * homosexuality
 - * idolatry
- All those things we like to feel guilty about, and make others feel guilty about!
 - The kind of thing that you have to get on your knees and beg forgiveness for
- No, the kind of sin I want to speak about this morning, is the sin of brokenness

- When we look at Jesus we see that the people he mixed with, and the people he forgave, were the very people who were accused by the Pharisees as being sinners
 - * The prostitutes, tax collectors, outcasts (McLaren, B. Adventures in Missing the Point, p 24)
- Jesus was a saviour to these people not because he saved them from their sins that the Pharisees condemned them for, so that they could go to heaven one day,
 - But because he accepted them and gave them a place in society
 - * Jesus said these are the people who would be included in the feast of God's kingdom
- This is the kind of sin that Jesus came to save people from
 - Not sinful acts, but the brokenness of being excluded
- The brokenness of being blind, or lame, or crippled, or poor
 - the brokenness of not knowing what to do, and doing our best to get through life only to find that it is not enough
 - The brokenness of living in a society that distorts what life is about
 - the brokenness of living with other people who are broken and hurt, and who try to break and hurt us
 - * And the brokenness of a world in which we do have enemies out to destroy us
- It is from this sin that Jesus has come to save us
 - And this, for me is where the death of Christ on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for sin makes sense
- In it's first century setting the statement that Jesus is the sacrifice for sin becomes clear in the context of the temple sacrificial system in Jerusalem
 - if you had done something wrong you had to make a sacrifice at the temple
 - * It was only the Temple leaders who, according to them, could forgive sins and who had access to God.
 - And through their beliefs and politics they excluded those who were truly broken, who really needed to hear that their sins were forgiven
 - * who really needed to hear that they were okay
- So when the first Christians said that Jesus was the sacrifice for sin they didn't mean literally that Jesus died in the place of a perfect lamb
 - they meant that Jesus had the authority to forgive their sins and the temple did not
 - * It was an anti-temple statement that subverted the sacrificial system
 - * It was a statement of radical grace that transformed broken lives in the way that the temple leaders could and would not

- It is to me so sad that with the growth of Christianity under that colonisation system of Constantine that it wasn't long before Christianity became the temple with it's own institutional monopoly or grace and access to God (Borg, M. Heart of Christianity, pp 94-95)
- So salvation from sin, then, is not because we have to do something to be accepted by God because of all the laws we break
 - rather, it is knowing that in our brokenness, God accepts us as we are and calls us to do the same for others
- Not to lift others up to where we are in the picture, but to accept them where they are
 - "For it is while we were yet sinners, that Christ died for us." (Rom 5:6-11)
- The message of salvation from sin is not to hear that God the police officer and judge will let us off if we say that we are really sorry, if we make the right sacrifice and do the right things
 - The primary message is that God is not police officer and judge.
 - * God accepts us just as we are.
- No 'if' statement follows, despite our tendency to add one or more:
 - if we truly repent, if we truly believe, if we accept Christ as Saviour
- The message of salvation from sin is one of unconditional grace:
 - "You are accepted," period, full stop. (Borg, M. The God we Never Knew, p 65)
- Salvation from the sin of brokenness

(2) **Salvation is for all**

- And so of course that leads me to my second point about salvation this morning, and the second point of the Wesleyan 'four alls'
 - All can be saved
- In our gospel reading this morning we hear how Jesus instructs his host to invite the sinners to his banquet
 - the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.
 - * These were people who were considered sinners in the Jewish culture
 - they were that way, obviously, because they, or their parents, had sinned.
 - * And because of that were permanently excluded from the worship life of the community
- They were unclean and as such not welcomed in the temple or the community for fear of polluting others
 - And so when Jesus is telling this parable about the kingdom, he makes a point of making it clear as to who was included, and who was excluded

- * the very people whom his listeners thought would be excluded are the ones who make up the feast
- “Go out into the streets and alleys” says the master of the feast, “God out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in...”
 - Exclusivity is out, inclusively is in
 - * Everybody the others would have excluded, every single person, is welcomed at the feast
- And who aren't there?
 - The only ones who don't arrive are those who excluded themselves
 - * “I've bought a field”
 - * “I've bought new oxen”
 - * “I just got married”
- The feast is for all, salvation is for all — you don't have to be lifted to be like someone else to be okay.

(3) Salvation is about now

- When we look at Jesus as Saviour we have to understand that salvation is not primarily about what happens after death, but is about what happens now
 - In the parable the feast was today!
 - * Not you will be welcome at the feast after death
- Wesley said that all can be saved to the uttermost
 - * He was speaking about transformation in this life
- And Paul writes the the Philippians encouraging them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling
 - That doesn't sound to me like “give your life to Jesus and be saved in the hereafter”.
 - * And I don't think that we have a theology where if we're not good enough we lose our salvation
 - It's about running the race in such a way that our lives are transformed today!
- McLaren tells the parable of the great race:

Once upon a time, in a land of boredom and drudgery exciting news spread: “There's going to be a race, and all who run in this race will grow strong and will never be bored again!” Exciting news like this had not been heard for a long time, for people experienced little adventure in this ho-hum land, beyond attending committee meetings, waiting in lines, sorting socks and watching sitcom reruns.

Excitement grew as the day of the race drew near. Thousands gathered in the appointed town, at the appointed place. Most came to observe, sceptical

about the news. “It’s too good to be true,” they said. “It’s just a silly rumour started by some teen aged trouble makers. But let’s stick around and see what happens anyway.”

Others could not resist the invitation, arriving in their running shorts and shoes. As they waited for the appointed time, they stretched and jogged in place and chatted among themselves with nervous excitement. At the appointed time they gathered at the starting line, heard the gun go off, and knew that it was time to run.

Then something very curious happened. The runners took a step or two or three across the starting line, and then abruptly stopped. One man fell to his knees, crying, “I have crossed the starting line! This is the happiest day of my life!” He repeated this again and again, and even began singing a song about how happy this day was for him.

Another woman started jumping for joy. “Yes!” she shouted, raising her fist in the air. “I am a race-runner! I am finally a race-runner!” She ran around jumping and dancing, getting and giving high fives to others who shared her joy at being in the race.

Several people formed a circle and prayed, quietly thanking God for the privilege of crossing the starting line, and thanking God that they were not like the sceptics who didn’t come dressed for the race.

An hour passed, and two. Spectators began muttering; some laughed. “So what do they think this race is?” they said. “Two or three strides, then a celebration? And why do they feel superior to us? They’re treating the starting line as if it were a finish line. They’ve completely missed the point.”

A few more minutes of this silliness passed. “you know,” a spectator said to the person next to her, “if they’re not going to run the race, maybe we should.”

“Why not? It’s getting boring watching them hang around just beyond the starting line. I’ve had enough boredom for one life.”

Others heard them, and soon many were kicking off their dress shoes, slipping out of their jackets, throwing all this unneeded clothing onto the grass. And they ran — past the praying huddles and past the crying individuals and past the jumping high fivers. And they found hope and joy in every step, and they grew stronger with every mile and hill. To their surprise the path never ended — because in this race there was no finish line. So they were never bored again. (McLaren, B. Adventures in Missing the Point, p 26-27)

- Salvation means being rescued from fruitless ways of life here and now, to share in God's saving love for all creation, in an adventure called the kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

- Salvation is bigger than going to heaven when I die
 - Salvation is knowing that even in my brokenness I'm accepted
 - * without having to do or prove ANYTHING
 - Salvation is for everybody — especially those who would appear to be excluded
 - * In fact, the more broken the better
 - Salvation is about sharing in the adventure of the Kingdom of God now, today so that my earthly, human life can be transformed to the uttermost
 - * and my world and community can become a better place through me
- When we understand salvation as fullness of life today, and when we live in a relationship with Jesus as Word and as Lord, then I have no problem with calling Jesus my Saviour
 - And I pray that it would be so for you, also.
- Amen

Prayer of Response and Intercession

- You Are

Holy Communion

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