

**Title** The Essence of Salvation  
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**Speaker's Residence** Pilgrim Christian Fellowship (Stuarts Draft, VA)  
**Date** Wednesday, April 7, 2010  
**Venue** Fair Haven Amish Mennonite (Goshen, IN)  
**Program** Beachy Amish Mennonite Ministers' Meeting 2010  
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Grace and peace to all in our Savior's name. Looking across this sea of faces, for one I was looking for the face of my beloved, and I just found her. Second, I'm realizing that you're my comrades in this great work. I was very moved to think of the fact that some of my heroes are here. I'm especially thankful that two of my team members are here, Brother Bennie Byler, who has been my bishop now for going on 30 years. He's one of those men I admire and look up to, and am thankful for his influence in my life. I'm also thankful we have with us our newest minister, Brother Simon Schrock. Perhaps we should stop to consider Brother Howard Eichorn and his need. His beloved is very ill; her life is hanging in balance. With the pressures of the ministry, this dear brother would love to be here to receive encouragement. Could we pause while everyone intercedes for our brother and his situation? (*Silent prayer; Ken concludes.*)

If you would define salvation—I thought of last summer when my family visited the location in Somerset County, PA, when those nine miners were trapped by rising water in 1993. A miracle happened. They were able to bore down into the earth and opened up where they were trapped, and every one of them was plucked out. That day, salvation came to those men and their families. Salvation, in the NT, means to rescue, deliver, save. This morning, I'm thankful we can say with Simeon, mine eyes have seen thou salvation. Those whose faith is fully in him can be sure He is in our hearts, Christ. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved. We're here because of him. Hebrews 2:3, we're told 'how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?'

We have a two-fold obligation to this salvation. We're called to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Then as our calling as servants of Christ, we're called to stand alone with our brother Paul to endure all things with the elect's sake that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 2:10.

What greater question is there then 'how can man be reconciled to God'? We have an adversary that, ever since the beginning, has been very hard at work to undermine and misinterpret and misinform people about the essence of salvation. This topic is important. I'm thankful we don't have to understand everything about it. I'm sure my understanding is limited and inadequate to lay out the essence of salvation, but I do know it works for all who put their faith in Christ.

Three main points

- 1) The problem of the other gospel, the selfish salvation, and causes
- 2) The atoning work of Christ our victor
- 3) What does saving faith look like; what it means to follow him, and what should be the fruit of saving faith in the lives of those we pastor

### *The Other Gospel, Selfish Salvation*

I don't like conflict, but Jesus warned there would be another gospel, a delusion, a watering down. It's easy believe-ism or cheap grace, and it's a selfish thing. Unconditional eternal security. The other gospel is characterized by this terminology: "Would you like to go to heaven?" "Would you like to accept Jesus as your personal savior?" I'm sure people have been genuinely saved with these buzz words. The biggest problem I have is that the statements come from another Gospel that comes from 'what is in it for me.' Contrast with this response from a man who had been thoroughly humbled and brought to the end of himself, and as he lay there, there was a response that came from that man, and it is the response that comes to people who have had a revelation of Jesus, and it may come at a moment like it did for Paul, a period of time, it may be dramatic, not so dramatic. People with that kind of revelation realize the Lord they are facing is too great. With fear and trembling, they cry out, "Lord, what will thou have me to do?" That is the language of genuine salvation. They're willing to make themselves poor in spirit and surrender to this Christ. Romans 1:16, [excerpt:] "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation..."

See, Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel. It leads to salvation, because it is the power of God, and because the righteousness of God leads to salvation. Paul's understanding of salvation is thoroughly God-centric. He was concerned about God's power and righteousness being revealed through the lives of saved people. Paul was not primarily concerned about saving people from going to hell. We don't read anywhere that he invited people to accept Him as their personal savior. He called people to repentance, according to Acts 21. I believe that one of the primary reasons that we are caving in to the culture and the reason we are losing identity is because of a fundamental misunderstanding of what it is to be saved, a misunderstanding of salvation. I do not believe we can borrow as much from the other gospel as we have without losing something.

What is wrong with this other gospel? Number one, a neglect of Jesus' teaching, including his teaching on salvation. If I were leading someone to Christ, where in the Scriptures would I go? Romans 10:9,10, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth..." That's a wonderful passage, and countless souls have been genuinely born again by putting their faiths in those truths. But it would be well if we would remind ourselves, what did these verses mean in the context/times they were written. To confess Christ as Lord, what does it mean? Does it mean I get up at a meeting or testimony during baptism that they confess in front of the approving group of people that Christ is Lord? Yes, it means that. But what would it have meant to the Roman Christians?

Before the term "gospel" came into the Biblical terminology (meaning 'good news'), that word was used to describe the pleasure of those people when they received a new Caesar in power. When a new Caesar took the seat of power in Rome, heralds were sent out to major cities in the empire, and these heralds were to proclaim a new Caesar is in power, and people were called to give allegiance to this man. The people were required to congregate in that city to hear about the

good news of the new Caesar. It was called, for example, the 'gospel of Augustus Caesar.' It was the gospel of the kingdom, and that's the context we should understand Romans. The people were publically and verbally required to declare their allegiance to this new God-ruler. They understood that at Rome when they read the letter from Paul. Salvation was contingent on them making verbal allegiance to the new King-of-Kings. Salvation for them was not an easy raise of the hand or responding at a revival meeting or pledge or easy testimony. It was a total commitment to the new King who had just been introduced to the world. In confessing Christ as the new King, it meant death. To not pledge one's allegiance to Caesar meant death in certain areas.

We have here this very strong call, total allegiance to this new king and kingdom. If you start with the teachings of Christ and work up to Paul, you see Jesus said the same thing over and over again in his teaching. For example, "so likewise, whosoever does not forsake all that he has, cannot be my disciple." He's calling for unconditional, unqualified allegiance, and it's the demand he still makes. He gets specific in places. He names things we must give up to enter into salvation. Matthew 7:24, [excerpt:] "No man can serve two masters... you cannot serve God and Mammon." Jesus is laying down terms for this salvation. Jesus is asking for allegiance. A man will either love money and possessions and let go of God, or he will let go of money and possessions and hang on to God. The choice is clear here, the terms are as stark and sharp-edged as it would have been for a citizen in Rome deciding to serve Caesar or Jesus. When have you heard this in a personal evangelism class? That other gospel, the selfish salvation has reduced faith down to believe a certain point in time and certain things about the death of Christ, but the teachings of Christ are too hard, so they are pushed back into the era of the Law or into the millennial Kingdom. They're too hard; we can't live them, they say.

### *Atoning Work of Christ*

Robert Friedmann had a passion for Anabaptist History. He says Protestantism is a one-sided teaching on the Pauline teaching of salvation by Christ. The individual, a total depraved sinner, craves for salvation, and eventually finds it in putting his confidence in the finished work of Christ. There's truth in that, but it's a one-sided emphasis. It ignored the remainder of Paul's teaching and the Gospels' and produced a system of individualistic and selfish outlook. Are we seeing any of those? The Gospel did not change the culture of the people who believed it, where there are sharply defined lines of the Kingdom of this World and the Kingdom of God, and God's people lose their identity. The early Christians and Anabaptists saw salvation as a world drama, a conflict between good and evil, and Christ and the Kingdom came and overthrew Satan. Through the new birth into this Kingdom, we now live a new life and are justified by faith.

The second problem, the model of the atonement, the penal satisfaction model of atonement. A man, Abelard, in the 1100s developed a way of thinking of Jesus' work on the cross. God requires perfect obedience to his law. Since all men have fallen short of the law, God's justice and holiness have been seriously violated, and a widening deficit between the requirement and what we were living. Someone had to make up the difference, and that someone had to be a man, but it couldn't be man, because man proved he couldn't meet the requirements. So, it took both the God part and the man part of Jesus to make up the deficit, so he lived a perfect life; then on the cross, God did place the sins of the world upon Jesus. As Jesus hung on the cross as the Lamb of God, then God looked down and was satisfied (Isaiah 53 is clear on this). Then this theory

goes on to areas not supported by Scripture. God's sense of justice had to be satisfied, every sin had to be punished, so God not only put the sin of the world on him, but also the guilt and punishment for all his sins. People then believe he went to hell and suffered. Since God's justice was fully satisfied, now he could be merciful to us. Every sin that was ever committed was made up by Jesus. The song "Jesus signed my pardon... when he signed my pardon on Calvary." A transaction there to satisfy the wrath of God. That theory is all over in the literature and songs we use. I believed that all my life, and I was shocked to find that this theory of atonement was not held by the early church. Not until 1100 did this man develop this. Listen to David Bercot's CDs on the atonement, or a Swedish theologian [name].

The first problem is, does God require exacting and retributive justice for every sin? What about the parallel in Matthew 18? Initially, the debtor was just forgiven. But the biggest problem I see is that the work of Christ was primarily a work of appeasement of the wrath of God. It wasn't a victory over sin, Satan, the world, and death.

Before we get into what the early church believed, let's look at the meaning of word 'atonement.' It's about reconciliation, to be made one with. God has a heart for oneness. The thing that separated us in the first place Jesus took care of in the cross and made room for atonement. 1 Peter 3:18. That is a wonderful Scripture describing the work of atonement as the early church believed it. The early church believed in a model called the Christus Victor model. Christ voluntarily paid a ransom for our deliverance. 1 John 5:19, the condition of the world Jesus entered into. We know the whole world lies in wickedness, the sway of the evil one. When Ronald Reagan gave a speech, he described the USSR as the "evil empire" and there were repercussions. But this verse is far worse, the empire under the control of Satan. Into this enemy empire, Christ came with a new way, a new kingdom. He says in Matthew 28, the son of God came to minister and to give his life a ransom. The prominent view of the early church, the price was not paid to God but to the bad guy. This was not a negotiation with the devil. It was like this.

Last Sunday I was supposed to go to the local jail to preach. Simon Schrock reminded me a few days before that it was my turn to go. With everything going on, I forgot, and Sunday morning came, and we didn't have a second brother to go along and preach. Somebody had to pay a price. Another minister had to give up his Sunday afternoon nap, probably, and cut short his Easter Sunday dinner so that he could take my place for what I had done. Jesus had to pay a ransom to free us from the tyranny of Satan. We do believe that Jesus was the mediator, the sacrifice, God did lay upon us the iniquity of us all. It was less about appeasing the wrath of the Father, and it was all about defeating sin, Satan, death, [etc.] those that kept us in bondage.

That old Gospel song, "Victory in Jesus."

*[Sang the chorus]*

Did you hear in the chorus, "he bought me and sought me with his redeeming blood." I believe this song is theologically accurate. Here are some references you can jot down for you to discern if I'm cutting this straight. Luke 11:20-22, John 12:31, John 16:33, Romans 8:3, Ephesians 4:8, Colossians 2:13-15, Hebrews 2:14-15. It is said that this was the most often referred to passage by the Early Church Fathers, Hebrews 2:14-15. Christ is victor. Jesus' life was an unbroken

string of victory over the devil, such as in the first eight chapters of Matthew. The 40 days in the wilderness, he forgave sin, raised the dead, healed the sick, caused the lame to walk, healed the blind, calmed the storm, and every page turn you have another manifestation of overcoming all the bondage the enemy brought. But a component is missing in the other gospel, the selfish salvation. In all the Gospels, Jesus wins over the kingdom of evil, and he also introduces an alternative lifestyle, another kingdom. It was announcement in another rule. We can be a part of another kingdom. We can't be separated unless we understand salvation on these terms. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

What was the first thing Jesus preached? Repent, for I am bringing you another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. I used to think of that as a train coming down the track, and you better get out of the way or it'll run you over. Hey, you can change your way of life! This is the announcement of another kingdom! You can enter into another kingdom. Jesus said he's coming to offer another way of life. In the Book of Matthew, we have the Sermon on the Mount, and it is the constitution of the new kingdom. All of this presents us with a figure that has tremendous power and authority, who singlehandedly overthrew a corrupt regime and brings in his own benevolent rule for all that follow him in true faith. Satan, sin, death, and the world He defeated. I say, this is the essence of salvation; it is a God-centered salvation. I must choose: am I going to enter in to this kingdom? It's not a cheap question, "Would you like to receive Jesus as your personal savior?" The question is "Am I going to accept Jesus as ruler?" They were calling for more than this other gospel to focus their mind on certain aspects. They were calling people to embrace a gospel of the kingdom. We're justified by faith when we reach out to that kind of Jesus.

### *Saving Faith*

Now, faith that saves—Number one, the early church believed this, they saw Jesus as Lord, not a weak Savior appeasing the Father. So, first and foremost, saving faith means following Christ as Lord, surrender, not a freedom of struggle, but clear evidence of a surrendered spirit, a yieldedness. All authority, all power, has been given to Christ. Who are we to oppose him?

Second, we are called to follow by faith a savior. About adoration—a brother recently said to me about the congregation, our people don't have this effervescent joy, a radiance, a joy for following Christ. A lack of joy may come from a lack of adoration. Christ has come to heal our emotions and set them free. We have to have some output for our emotions. Maybe we as a plain people want to squelch our emotions since we don't want to be known as fanatics. But there is an outlet, Jesus. When we think about all he has done in saving us, it would be good if we leaders could come before our Savior and just adore him. Like Mary who wiped his feet with her hair, just adore him. We can follow all these things, we can obey the commandments and be like the Pharisees with the old Law. I appreciated what Earl said, that Christ is his hero. There should be a sense of awe and wondering. In Revelation, John fell at his feet. Paul did too. The ones who saw him after the resurrection had awe and fear. Jesus said, "if you love me, keep my commandments." Oh, I'm scared of dogmatism that may come when we keep his commandments without adoration. We need to allow Jesus to be master teacher. The other gospel leaves out this element. It focuses on salvation as a point in time. Jesus teaches in Matthew 24, there will be many false prophets, but he that shall endure to the end shall be saved. When was the last time you read that in a 'Romans road' tract? There's a call to follow him. An apprentice

watches his master carpenter closely, and now we are called to earnestly follow him. We must go to his school, study his life and his teachings and the teachings of his apostles. Let's make provision in our lives right now and enter into that schooling.

I'm going to close with 1 Cor. 15:57. Christ is victor, Christ is Lord. Thanks be to God who gives us the victor... therefore be steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord that your labor is not in vein in the Lord.