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You will be disappointed if you expect to hear all about salvation, but hopefully it can have that idea. To you, I am going to read the list of ideas the committee sent out. What is the biggest thing we need to be saved from? Self. Salvation is the initial step to... [other comments.] Salvation is becoming alive to Christ. I consider it a privilege to share with you, but I am also humbled. I feel safe addressing this subject with you brothers today. With some of the things we struggle with in our constituency, some of the tensions, I've been asking myself: Could it be we are especially weak on our understanding of salvation and grace? Are there some gaps there? We have either through our own misinterpretation through what we have inherited or been exposed to, perhaps? On the doctrine of salvation, nearly everyone on this planet has got a doctrine of salvation. It won't match yours and mine. Everyone who has any sense of a life hereafter, will be thinking about how to get there safely. If you have the audacity of Steven Hawkins, who was asked if he is faced with reality of an eternal God, he said, "I will ask why you hid Yourself so well." It sounds like an ignorant response from an educated man. He won't be asking God any questions, but bowing his knee, hearing. Our view of salvation is shaped by our understanding of who God is, what He expects of us, how we see us coming to Him, what we believe ourselves to be, and what happened at the fall of man. Where is fallen man headed? More things would factor in, but those are some key places to begin from. I just want to admit that I always feel responsible when I take the Word of God and expound from it--what God shows us in His Word. We are placing ourselves in a vulnerable position, trying to understand the ways we apply them. A group of men like this, who are not afraid to talk if questions should arise. What is the scope of salvation? Where does it start and end? This doctrine highlights the difference between Christianity and other religions. Most people on this planet have some doctrine or idea: the way they get safely to the other side. Flawed in many cases--but they have their ideas. The notable difference I see is that we have a God with whom we have a relationship. We seek to please, which is vastly different from a God we are scared of or trying to please. When a Muslim once asked a Christian why it's not as good, the Christian said it is, if you do not need a Savior, but I needed a Savior. A believer invited a Jehovah's Witness inside and said that you're not going to change my mind and I, not yours, but I want to ask a question: Supposed I lived a life of sin and then I was soon going to die. What kind of hope can you offer me? The man said, absolutely none. We have something v.g we can offer to the person who is dying and has lived a life of sin. It is the same as we can offer salvation to that tender soul that comes seeking the grace of God.

We debate about what people can and cannot do, as long as the church exists. At least in the last 400-500 years, the debate has intensified around whether can we lose our salvation once we are saved. For now, I would like to take you to a story in the Scriptures. In John 3: the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus. Jesus broached the subject about how to be saved. In verse three [reads verses through 21]. Jesus, here, opens the discussion after Nicodemus presented himself. He was a seeker curious about what was going on with this man. Obviously he had a different school of thought, but he was sincere. Jesus in verse three states that except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. What does it mean to be born again? In the early 1970s, *born again* became a buzz word to describe a certain type of Christianity. It's a Biblical term, but it was a movement started largely by Chuck Colson bearing that title. Even today, if you ask the average Christian if they are born again, he will say yes. But what does this mean? Nicodemus tried to fit this into his framework: how can a man be born a second time from the womb? It was Nicodemus's way of trying to make sense out of what Jesus was saying. I'd like to move down to verse six, where Jesus moves the discussion into the realm of the spiritual. What is born of flesh is flesh, of spirit, spirit. He was talking about something spiritual when he said you must be born again. Then he used an example with wind [reads verse]. Jesus is saying that this is the way that it is for the believer. Something happens, you can see the obedience, but you cannot really describe it. If Jesus did not take it upon himself to describe it, it probably is a chore for us to do it. It's okay if we try to understand it in terms we can understand. If I were to ask you to relate to me your experience of the new birth, I'm sure the stories would all be different. One thing I suspect would be mutual, and that would be the lifting of the burden and the sense of being free. For me, the birds seem clear and the sun brighter, it seemed to me that life had changed. I can't describe how it was. I had an experience later in life that seemed a little the same way, when I laid down some bitterness I was carrying. It's not that we can't experience something similar, but the new birth occurs when we lay ourselves down on the altar and God takes over. I just finished preaching through the Sermon on the Mount. One of the things that became special was Matthew 5:3. After I began interpreting the Sermon on the Mount through that verse, it makes sense to me in ways it did not before. [Reads verse]. That best describes the attitude we have to have in order to receive the new birth--a poverty of spirit. I used to look at the Beatitudes as a recipe: do this, get this. The poverty of spirit is different, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The rest give consequential blessings. It's in the future: do this, inherit this. But it's not that way when it speaks about "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That's the quality that is absolutely essential for us to receive the new birth; that's where salvation begins--a poverty of spirit. We bring to Him our sin, and He cleanses us, and He makes us new creatures. Would to God that all of our carnal desires would evaporate when that happens. Somehow we still have to deal with our carnality, but it's at a different level. That's part of what it means to be born again; we don't understand how it works, but we see the effects in ourselves. I think to understand what Jesus is trying to do with Nicodemus, we must understand the context. Up until now, the spiritual teachings of the Israelites amounted to an instruction of law. There was grace sprinkled throughout, but they were educated in the law using the head. Three ways we receive instruction: our heads, our works, and our hearts. Nicodemus had been also instructed on how to live; he knew how to live. He knew how to think about God, but what drove him to ask Jesus those questions, whatever they were? Nicodemus had been taught, he knew the words, the law, and had come to an understanding, but he wanted to know something else. Jesus now opened another question on the heart level. That is what's unique about salvation when Jesus came... moving

salvation to the heart. Up until that time, there was nothing to do with guilt. When we train children, we teach them what to do and what not to do. Thank God that at some point the teaching of their hands moves to their head, and they begin to realize that this is something you do at this time but not that time. At some point later, they begin to feel guilty for having done it. That's when it moves to their heart. That's what Jesus was saying when speaking to Nicodemus, with the wind: you feel the effect but do not know where it is coming from. That is the essence of what the new birth is about. Something has changed; something is different. Yes, we deal with carnality, for we are carnal beings. It is no longer an effort to do good, but is an effort to do what is in us, the nature of Christ.

It seems to me that here is one of the things we ought to learn from Jesus: how this was staged to bring Nicodemus to the kingdom through his heart. The model for us to follow, when we go to help a brother that is erring. Can we see some of his externals as symptomatic rather than foundational? I'm appealing that when we tried to move a young man from spiritual immaturity to maturity that we consider his actions to be symptomatic. I remember one time when I went to visit with a young man; I came away thinking that "unless I have something of substance next time, I won't go." Substance: that is what lies inside. I want to look at this a bit later. In 14 Jesus introduces the fact that it is no longer about just acting right, but that the Son of Man must be lifted up. After the Israelites were bitten, anyone who looked up at the brazen serpent was healed. Now, did they have faith in the serpent? Moses' word? I'm not sure, but they had enough faith to, at least, look at it. Jesus is trying to move Nicodemus from educating your head and hands to your heart. Then He tells the story about Himself: For God so loved the world... He sent not His son into the world that... This had to be good news to a man like Nicodemus. Jesus is not bringing further condemnation, but light. He did not come with more laws and ways to act right. It's been good news ever since. For many years I would not have seen this in 3:16, I thought Jesus loved us. But it was God. Jesus shared this love, but for God to give Him was a gift only God can give. But He did it. He sent Him to save us.

Jesus, here, elevates the role of believing to a new level. There was a level of belief in the Old Testament. Something will happen in a man's heart that there will be a conversion experience. When we talk about salvation, Jesus ends up in verse 21 [reads verse]. As humans, we are asked how we act, live, and demonstrate the power of God in our life. Jesus, here, makes the point that our deeds are made manifest as they are wrought in God. That is at the end of the discussion about the heart. If we were to take only the words of John three, we may be left guessing as to what that all includes. What does salvation consist of, look like? Are we primarily saved from eternal punishment or to something? Here, I fear, sometimes, we have preached an unbalanced gospel. It means what it says: that we were saved from eternal damnation, but also unto something. We asked the question: What's the balance between faith and works? That may be the wrong question to ask. If we look at *balance*, we are looking at competing forces to equalize. That is not the role of faith and works. We are talking about a *blend* rather than a *balance*. We have a hard time figuring out God is both wrath and love. The truth is that it is not hard for God. He would entreat us that our faith propels our works and that works bring evidence of our faith. How do we view John three as opposed to Matthew 25? The Judgment Day: when you have the sheep and the goats. If you just take that passage, we will be judged by how well we have treated the least of these. That's part of it, but only one part. Of necessity, we take Scripture as a whole. In both passages we take it as being part and parcel of salvation. I continue to believe that unless

we demonstrate by our actions, the way we live, and unless we demonstrate our faith, I question whether or not we have been saved. Here's where it is easy to go to one of these texts. God calls us to a life where our heart is changed; things become new; the old is passed away, and all things are new.

I'd like to go to Ephesians 2:4-10. [Reads verses.]: it's not a matter of us doing the good works that saves us, but that these things (the renovation of our heart) have spawned a new life. That's what the new birth is about. We have been created unto good works. We often talk about grace/works; would it be correct to say grace is God's part and faith is man's? We need to reach in faith to receive what He sends to us. That's God offering salvation to us, but we must receive it. In the *Mennonite Weekly [World] Review*, something impressed me, how it said that the gift of salvation has been given to the whole universe, but the problem is not everyone is willing to receive it. Unless you receive a gift, it has no value. That's how I see salvation.

Back to the question: What are we saved from or to? There's no question that we are both saved from punishment, self, ruination, and saved unto good works, life and life eternal. One illustration: Can a drowning man be saved to something? A boat? a life vest? But the next part is, is he saved until he gets to shore? That is, in some ways, what we see in salvation. I mentioned earlier that there is much debate in our circles: Is salvation irrevocable? I would say this: I don't have a problem with the security of believers, but I do the security of unbelievers. When we believe, we are secure; we can have that assurance, but when we quit believing or live a life that interrupts our ability to believe, we lose our salvation. I cannot tell you when that point is. That's why I am willing to let Him judge, err on the safe side of--well, let me say-- I refuse to judge people's position before God. It is His responsibility. Someone recently gave an illustration that has helped me understand salvation from a more hopeful perspective. There's this question: are we saved: is it an event? or a process? It was an event for me, but it's also a process. It's not just something that happened back there. He said how he was visiting in Alaska, it was cold outside and they went to visit a family. As they walked through the door, they felt the warmth of the house. They closed the door behind them, and then enjoyed the fellowship. Not once did he turn around, admire the door, glorify it, and focus was on the door itself. He focused on what was inside. That was an apt illustration of how we should see the event in our own life. It is the entrance into the Kingdom: once we are in there, why make such a big deal? (That sounds irreverent). When we put so much focus on that event, we tend to minimize where we ought to be today. Years ago, I stopped by a business and the man told me he is dying of lung cancer. He then told me how he was saved a long time ago and everything is fine between him and the Lord. He has a nicotine habit, but he was saved back then. Then he lit up. The demeanor of that man's expression and story disheartened me because it was not saved from-and-to, but to-do-what-I-want-to-do. In his case, he almost spoke with an edge of anger. He knew what position I would come from, I'm sure. If that's our focus, the door, we may have invited some of this idea that we are secure in Christ--so from there on out, it is not that important what I do. I love the theme of these meetings, "Reflecting His Image." Would it make sense that one of the questions we can ask (if a person is erring or is external) is how/what he is doing is reflecting the image of His Lord? It may, indeed, but who is his lord? We can excuse ourselves. I, myself, have benefited from the teaching on assurance of salvation. We move on beyond that. When the forgiveness of sin frees us from its power, we are truly saved from sin.

I'm assuming most of us make or living by the sweat of our brow. We shepherd in--our spare time? If we're going to really meet the needs of the people we serve, it's going to take time. Titus 2:11 and ... [Reads verses.]