

1. What Happened? (2Q 2021—The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant)

Biblical Material: Ps. 100:3; Acts 17:26; Gen. 2:7, 18–27; Gen. 1:28, 29; Gen. 3:15.

Quotes

- The first step in a person’s salvation is knowledge of their sin. *Seneca*
- Christ is not only the Savior but the salvation itself. *Matthew Henry*
- The first sin in our universe was Lucifer’s self conceit. *Thomas Carlyle*
- Christianity has done its utmost to close the circle and declared even doubt to be sin. One is supposed to be cast into belief without reason, by a miracle, and from then on to swim in it as in the brightest and least ambiguous of elements: even a glance towards land, even the thought that one perhaps exists for something else as well as swimming, even the slightest impulse of our amphibious nature — is sin! And notice that all this means that the foundation of belief and all reflection on its origin is likewise excluded as sinful. What is wanted are blindness and intoxication and an eternal song over the waves in which reason has drowned. *Friedrich Nietzsche*
- Above all, do not lie to yourself. A man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point where he does not discern any truth either in himself or anywhere around him, and thus falls into disrespect towards himself and others. Not respecting anyone, he ceases to love, and having no love, he gives himself up to passions and coarse pleasures in order to occupy and amuse himself, and in his vices reaches complete bestiality, and it all comes from lying continually to others and himself. *Fyodor Dostoevsky*

Questions

Why did God have to make promises in the first place? How does our concept of sin affect how we view salvation? How would you explain what went wrong in God’s universe? How does a concentration on our legal standing with God affect our relationship to him? How can wrong ideas affect our understanding of what is going on in the great controversy?

Bible summary

Ps. 100:3 sums up how we were originally created. Acts 17:26 explains that God made all the people of the earth from one man. “The Lord God shaped the man Adam from the dust of the ground. He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living being.” Gen. 2:7 FBV. Gen. 2: 18–27 described the creation of Eve. They were made in God’s image, and their descendants were to spread throughout the earth (Gen. 1:28, 29). Then came the Fall and the conflict with Satan (Gen. 3:15).

Comment

Maybe a better title for this study would be “What Went Wrong?” It’s not just a case of “What Happened?” but the reasons and the consequences. For if we don’t understand what sin is, what went wrong, and God’s response, we won’t be able to understand the solution correctly. Only as we understand what went wrong in the first place can we understand what God’s salvation really is!

Many images that have been used to describe salvation fail to rightly represent what is going on. It is God winning us back to love and trust him by the demonstration of who he is and

how he can heal us. What was the problem we faced as human beings back in the beginning? We believed the lies of the Devil and distrusted God and so broke our love relationship with him. How does God restore this relationship that is vital for our continued existence? By showing the Devil and our parents were totally wrong in their rejection of God, most effectively by Jesus' life and death, showing us the truth about God. Once God has regained our trust, then he can heal us—an active intervention that restores the image of God in us.

In the Old Testament God identifies himself: "I am the Lord who heals you." Exodus 15:26 FBV. In Luke 8:48 Jesus explains that we are healed by placing our trust in him to do just that, and in Luke 7:50 Jesus uses *the exact same word* to describe salvation. Jesus wanted us to understand that *salvation is healing*.

Included in the meaning of salvation are the two ideas of rescue (save) and healing (salve). The related words save and salve show that we both need to be taken out of our current fatal situation, and we need to be cured of our fatal disease too. Rather like a drowning man—he needs to be taken out of the water, and then he needs the water taken out of his lungs! The good news is that in God's plan, he does both. He both saves us from this sinful world, and he cures us of our sin-sickness, which if left untreated would inevitably kill us.

This is far more than pronouncing we are legally not guilty. Due to our Western preoccupation with legal concepts of sin and guilt these are what most people think of when we speak about salvation. We speak about imputed righteousness and being covered with the blood, yet what Jesus primarily came to do was to heal the sin damage, the broken relationship that is at the heart of the problem. So when we speak of salvation, remember that in God's mind it is about healing. Jesus' life encapsulated this concept, demonstrating through all those miracles of healing that God most wants to re-make us in his image, to restore us to our former selves, to heal all the sinful brokenness.

We seek salvation from our sicknesses when we go to the doctor. We are not asking the doctor for forgiveness—what we want is healing. Similarly in our sinful state. While we surely are sorry for our action, while we in ourselves crave forgiveness, what God most wants to do is to step in as the divine Physician and heal our sinfulness. If we understand that our greatest need is healing, we will concentrate on that. Sin is not some kind of objective thing, but relational—or the lack of relationship

Only as we see our need to be healed from our antagonistic sinfulness, to be remade by the Creator who gave us life in the first place, to be changed from hostile rebels into trustworthy friends—only then is our sin problem truly dealt with and we can become all God intended us to be, welcomed back as prodigals into the family of our loving Lord.

Ellen White comments

Many who are now dwelling in the shadow of sin and death, as they see in God's faithful servants a reflection of the Light of the world, will realize that they have a hope of salvation, and they will open their hearts to receive the healing beams, and will in turn become light bearers to others yet in darkness. {CT 468}

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As the Life-giver, He assumed our nature, that He might reveal the character of God, and stamp His image on all who would receive Him. {7BC 469}