

<b>Series:</b> Easter 2021	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Various Scriptures</i>	<b>Title:</b> Second Chances!	<b>Date:</b> 3.28.2021
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Website Writeup:</b></p> <p>Today we linger, looking longer as to what it means to be saved, from what, from who, to what &amp; to whom? To appreciate the light we have to understand darkness. To understand life, we have to understand death. Which will we choose in the end depends on our simple response to Jesus now.</p>			

Jesus said to the criminal crucified next to Him, *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* (Lk 23:43). Which says, it’s never too late - God’s the god of second chances. In 2017 *Prison Fellowship* declared April as *Second Chance Month*. President Trump, the U.S. Senate, 19 state & local governments, and more than 230 partner organizations officially declared the same in 2018. Six:Eight has followed suit.

Approximately 1 in 3 adults in America have a criminal record. There are more than 44,000 documented legal restrictions on people with a conviction. These restrictions, coupled with social stigma, bring about what we call a ‘second prison’ where a person can’t get a job, lease, or the like. Depending on the crime, certain restrictions are necessary for certain past offenders, but overall, instead of second prisons, we want second chances in Christ. All month you may see posts or videos on Six:Eight’s social media feeds, and just this week we sent off all the Easter cards to those incarcerated & their families whom we served with *Angel Tree* gifts for Christmas this year! Many thanks to Donna for all her efforts!!!

Last week we celebrated Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as king, although not the king they’d expected. We looked at hell being the end result of rejecting Christ. We said, *all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23)*, and *the wages of sin are death (Rm 6:23)*. That in the end, without Christ humankind will experience eternal separation from God as He closes the door of His Kingdom forever. God’s simply giving certain people what they desire & doesn’t glory in sending anyone to hell. As a matter of fact, this is why His offer of salvation extends to all now, since the good news is the second half of Romans 6:23, *but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

I’m going to assume you’re familiar with the fact that over 2000 years ago Jesus was crucified three days prior to today. He died & was buried in a tomb where His body lay for 3 days. I’m going to assume you’re aware, on that third day He rose from the dead & appeared to hundreds of people. I’m going to assume you’re aware He ate with, met with, touched & taught many people over the following 40 days before ascending to heaven, including His disciples & many others all very familiar with Him before His death. I’m going to assume you’re aware of the integrity & trustworthiness of the eyewitness accounts surrounding these events. That the Gospel accounts & New Testament letters were written by eyewitnesses & date within 1-3 decades of the events. And how people across great distances & time agreed on these events. And that no other ancient writings have such integrity.

Even non-Christian historians with no skin in the game, such as Josephus, Thallus, Tacitus, Mara Bar-Serapion & Phlegon corroborate these details. I assume you know

that none of the Gospel eyewitnesses could've been out for financial gain, power, or self-preservation, since they gained nothing, gave up everything & died for this story, which speaks worlds to its integrity & truthfulness, not to mention their convictions of who Jesus was & is! But you know all that...

God's a god of second chances...but you only get one second chance, don't ya? It's easy to say 'second chance'. Or 'I'm saved'. Or to ask someone, "Do you know Jesus?" But... the question is, by what & from what are we saved? What's the Gospel really mean? We celebrate today the empty tomb, Christ's resurrection from the dead, the second half of Romans 6:23...eternal life in Christ.

But remember what Jesus did just a week before as He crested the hill into Jerusalem, looking down on the city as He came in for Passover, knowingly going to His own death. Luke 19:41-42 tells us...*'As he approached Jerusalem & saw the city, he wept over it & said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes."*' In the middle of all the joy, accolades & shouting, the palm branches & cloaks laid on the road, Jesus wept, knowing many cheering for Him then would turn & shout, "Crucify Him" in just a few days time.

It's easy to cheer when you think you're getting what you want. We tend to see & hear what we want; we filter & don't listen well. We sift the Word of God through our own screen, taking only what we want & dumping the rest. That's what Jesus knew they'd do in just a few days as revealed by his weeping over the city! He knew, as soon as He was arrested, they'd turn - how can their warrior Messiah get arrested let alone go to the cross!? That didn't sift through their screen! Do I want us to be celebratory today, sure! But I want us to be celebratory in considering the weightiness of what this cost Jesus, and what it means to the world...

Consider how Jesus is referred to in the Scriptures. Mark 10:45 says He's our ransom. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 says Jesus defeated the powers of sin & death, bringing us victory over them. In Philippians 3:10-12, we're extolled to become like Him in His death as our moral example. Galatians 4:4-7 states Jesus bought us back from the law enabling us to be adopted as sons & daughters! John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him & said, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (Jhn 1:29) Amen to all that, but still the question is, saved from what & how? You know the answers cognitively, but let's linger here longer looking at this as we would appreciate all the facets of a well-cut diamond.

Listen to this passage from Zephaniah 1:14-18 describing the Day of the Lord [the Day of Judgment]...*The great day of the LORD is near; / It is near & hastens quickly. / The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; / There the mighty men shall cry out. / That day is a day of wrath, / A day of trouble & distress, / A day of devastation & desolation, / A day of darkness & gloominess, / A day of clouds & thick darkness, / A day of trumpet & alarm / Against the fortified cities / And against the high towers.*

*I will bring distress upon men, / And they shall walk like blind men, / Because they have sinned against the LORD; / Their blood shall be poured out like dust, / And their flesh like refuse. / Neither their silver nor their gold / Shall be able to deliver them / In the day of the LORD's wrath; / But the whole land shall be devoured / By the fire of His jealousy, / For He will make speedy riddance / Of all those who dwell in the land.*

The day of the Lord doesn't sound fun! But this was the message of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Amos, of every prophet of God. Amos came to the people declaring...*Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! / For what good is the day of the LORD to you? / It will be darkness, and not light. / It will be as though a man fled from a lion, / And a bear met him! / Or as though he went into the house, / Leaned his hand on the wall, / And a serpent bit him! / Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? / Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18-20)*

You probably came to Easter service thinking it'd be flowers & sunshine. I lived in Indonesia for over 8 years, it was sunny all the time, I lost appreciation for it. To appreciate flowers, warmth & sunshine you have to experience rain, cold & darkness. One of the greatest points of unbelief of our day regards the concept of God's wrath upon sin leading to eternal separation from Him. In our pride, we no longer need salvation & God's shrunk from being a god of immeasurable holiness & greatness to something we can put in our pocket & take out when we want to feel better. A genie in a bottle to grant our wishes. A lifeless amulet. Which means we can't appreciate what Jesus did...

We forget, according to the Bible, there's no saving ourselves. As Ephesians 2:1 says, *you were dead in your transgressions & sins. And (v3), we were by nature deserving of wrath.* Every one of us was the object of God's wrath of which those prophets spoke! And with modern progressive Christianity cutting the heart out of the Gospel, we don't even need to listen to God any longer. We sift & choose only what we want, the sense of urgency's lost, since sin's become only an archaic notion. We think now, people aren't that bad...everyone will come around eventually, since they're all basically good...but according to God's Word, they're not when juxtaposed with a holy God.

For those still regarding God's Word as God's Word, it's like meeting our neighbor on the street. And while standing there talking, we notice his house burst into flames & scream, "Call a fireman!" But he says, "Why...my house ain't on fire." Because he can't see his own need. But anyone unfettered by pride can see, the world will always need Jesus. Salvation...but by what & from what?

RC Sproul explored the notion that the term 'salvation' is used in various ways in the Bible. When God delivered Paul & Silas from the jail in Philippi by the earthquake, the jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you & your household" (Acts 16:30-31). Paul's concept of salvation was probably eternal in nature, but what was in the jailer's mind? The law said, if prisoners escaped, whatever penalty they were to suffer for their crimes, the jailer had to take the penalty in their place! So, was he looking for eternal salvation? Maybe he was after listening to Paul & Silas, but maybe he was just asking, how can I get

outta this? Thankfully, no matter his intention, he & his household did find salvation in Jesus as evidenced in the passage.

But every time the Bible talks of salvation it's not necessarily referencing what we consider to be the doctrine of salvation. RC Sproul, in his book, "Saved from What?" Points out... "The Bible says that women will be "saved" through childbirth (1 Tim. 2:15). Paul also teaches the Corinthians that "*the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband*" (1 Cor. 7:14). He asks, does this mean that the New Testament teaches three ways of salvation: (1) having personal faith in Christ; (2) marrying somebody who has faith in Christ; and (3) childbearing for women? You don't even have to marry somebody who is a Christian; just have a baby & you're in!?! Obviously, we know that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible uses the term salvation in many ways. Not every time the word is used does it refer to reconciliation with God. The common thread that's found in the many uses is that, at root, salvation means rescue or deliverance from some calamity or catastrophe."<sup>1</sup>

The term salvation is used in several senses & tenses in the Scriptures. But when we speak of the doctrine of salvation we speak to a specific salvation from God's wrath on the day of the Lord. The problem right now is people don't see the great catastrophe before them - the very reason for which we celebrate the death & resurrection of Christ each year; our spiritual death, or sinful state, the separation from our Creator. Remember, we are not sinners because we sin, rather, we sin because we're sinners. People are too used to being sick, tired & angry. As Jesus said, they don't recognize the peace offered in His coming. As CS Lewis said, we're like ignorant children who want to go on making mud pies in a slum because we can't imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We're far too easily pleased.

Sin stands in the way of a relationship with our Creator, sin demands payment, sin must be rendered inert, being washed away by death & blood. That's why Christ's blood had to be shed. The only thing which will pay the price for our sin is a perfect spotless sacrifice, which He was - the only sinless human in history. We only have the sunshine of Easter due to the darkness of the crucifixion 3 days earlier. And not just a metaphorical darkness, but a literal one as well. The gospels record there was darkness from noon to about 3 in the afternoon, which some of those non-Christian historians confirm.

Oswald Chambers said it well... "The Cross of Christ is the revealed truth of God's judgment on sin. Never associate the idea of martyrdom with the Cross of Christ. It was the supreme triumph, and it shook the very foundations of hell. There's nothing in time or eternity more absolutely certain & irrefutable than what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross - He made it possible for the entire human race to be brought back into a right-standing relationship with God. He made redemption the foundation of human life; that is, He made a way for every person to have fellowship with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt From: R.C. Sproul. "Saved from What?." Apple Books.

The Cross wasn't something which happened to Jesus - He came to die; the Cross was His purpose in coming. He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). The incarnation of Christ would have no meaning without the Cross...The purpose of the incarnation was redemption [blood had to be spilt]. God came in the flesh to take sin away, not to accomplish something for Himself. The Cross is the central event in time & eternity, and the answer to all the problems of both...The Cross is God exhibiting His nature. It is the gate through which any & every individual can enter into oneness with God...

The heart of salvation is the Cross of Christ. The reason salvation is so easy to obtain is that it cost God so much. The Cross was the place where God & sinful man merged with a tremendous collision & where the way to life was opened. But all the cost & pain of the collision was absorbed by the heart of God."<sup>2</sup>

What we do not remember is that we're saved *by* God *from* God. RC Sproul points out, that our shock in "the idea that we're saved from God reveals two crucial shortcomings in our understanding. We fail to understand who God is, and we fail to understand who we are. Our view of God's too low, and our view of mankind's too high. This was Isaiah's painful discovery when he got a glimpse of the unveiled holiness of God. In that encounter, Isaiah understood for the first time in his life who God is. It was also the first time he understood who he was. He cursed himself, crying: "*Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips*" (Isa. 6:5)."<sup>3</sup>

The truth is that our culture is narcissistic to the extreme, we have an exaggerated self-image while our lives are in reality a train wreck! We avoid quiet moments, filling them with noise in order not to be confronted with the reality of ourselves - but we must see the darkness to be able to see the light clearly! Conviction brings freedom! We're made in the image of God, but that image has been tarnished. To see yourself in the reality of your sinful need before a holy God isn't to have a bad self-image, it's actually the opposite - the best of self-images! Only in Christ does a person become whole & find their intrinsic value!

For the unbeliever, the day of the Lord is a day of darkness, with no light in it. For the Christian, the day of the Lord is a day of light, with no darkness in it.<sup>4</sup> We've heard from Zephaniah & Amos about the day of the Lord. Now let's hear the other side as Isaiah prophesies about the future Messiah from the opposite side of the cross in **Isaiah 55**..."*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy & eat! Come, buy wine & milk without money & without cost. 2Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. 3Give ear & come*

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<sup>2</sup> Oswald Chambers, The Collision of God and Sin, Devotional entry, <https://utmost.org/the-collision-of-god-and-sin/>

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt From: R.C. Sproul. "Saved from What?." Apple Books.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt From: R.C. Sproul. "Saved from What?." Apple Books.

*to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.*

*4See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler & commander of the peoples. 5Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.”*

*6Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7Let the wicked forsake their ways & the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

*8“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. 9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways & my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 As the rain & the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth & making it bud & flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower & bread for the eater, 11so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire & achieve the purpose for which I sent it. 12You will go out in joy & be led forth in peace; the mountains & hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. 13Instead of the thorn bush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.”*

Jesus is that Word which goes out & doesn’t return empty! Salvation’s free for the taking now while it can be found in Him. He has & will accomplish what He set forth to do! Think again on that crucified man next to Jesus. Why him? He didn’t do anything good, his crimes had victims, he didn’t have to pay restitution, nor did he have time to climb down from his cross & apologize.

There were two of them you remember hanging to each side Jesus that day. It says... *39One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself & us!” 40But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? 41We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” 42Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

One man prideful & defiant to the end. The other had a repentant heart, he owned his sin, and recognized Jesus for what He was. These two are a visual image of the final day of the Lord. For the prideful unrepentant one it’s darkness, for the broken & repentant one it’s light, and it all rests on our acknowledgement of personal sin before a Holy God, that we’re saved by Christ from Christ - because He is alone is holy & worthy of praise!

It’s only because of the Cross that we have an empty tomb, and only because of Jesus that we can have eternal life & peace. Happy Easter, amen!