

What is Salvation?

Sermon 3– The healing of the universe

Passages: Psalm 139:1–4, 13–17

Romans 8:12–25

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

The Bible talks a lot about salvation. In fact, it tells us that we all need to be ‘saved’. And it tells us that there is only one name given under heaven by which we can be saved...the name of Jesus. He is ‘our Saviour’!

But what does He save us from? What is the object of His salvation?

Most of us tend to think of salvation as something in the future. We speak of Jesus one day saving us from hell, from God’s wrath and judgment. Salvation is about ‘getting into heaven when we die’. But what about ‘now’? Isn’t there anything that Jesus saves us from in the present?

It’s interesting, when you start examining the NT Scriptures, just how much the Biblical focus of salvation includes the present! This is borne out by the fact that the Greek word for ‘salvation’ (sozo) is the exact same word used for healing! In the ancient mind, salvation and healing were strongly connected to each other. And so, although the early church was aware that Jesus would perfectly heal them from the brokenness of sin when they were finally with Him in heaven, they also knew that, even now, Christ’s salvation was working in them, healing them from the brokenness of sin in their present life.

That’s why we are currently undertaking a series of sermons entitled, “**What is salvation?**” I want to show you how much Jesus’ salvation was always meant to be experienced in the present. Today, we are going to look at the present work of God in the salvation (healing) of our universe.

Let’s pray.

In today's baptism, Michael Hammond was 'recruited' into the fellowship of Christ's church. I hope you understand just how incredibly important this event is! You see, today, Michael (through the help of his parents, godparents, extended family and church family) has become part of a universal team of people whose job it is to participate with Jesus in His cosmic battle to make this world a better place! Through his baptism, Michael has been recruited into Christ's universal army of love and peace. He is now a soldier of God's glorious Kingdom as it expands throughout the world.

Of course, Michael can't see the Kingdom of God yet. Jesus said that 'No one can see the Kingdom of God until they are born of the Spirit'. And that, we pray, will come one day, when Michael has a personal encounter with Jesus. But that does not discount the fact of what has happened today. Today, Michael's name has been registered on the side of righteousness...on the side of faith, hope and love. In his baptism today, Christ's covenantal promises have been activated over Michael, supernaturally empowering him to resist the forces of evil and sin in this world. As he listens to the voice of Christ in his parents, his family and his church, Michael will grow into his vocation and take his stand alongside Christ.

Now, it may sound strange to talk about baptism in this way, as if it were a recruitment into the cosmic battle between good and evil. But, you know, Jesus certainly pointed in this direction. I mean, he talked quite openly about the devil; He even called him 'the Prince of this world' and the enemy of God's Kingdom.

Look again with me at today's Gospel reading from Matthew 13. Jesus is telling another one of His parables about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mt 13:24-28 ***Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' " "An enemy did this,' he replied.***

Clearly, the farmer here is Jesus, Himself. The field is the world. And the seed that Jesus is sowing is the Word of life, love, joy and peace. You see, every time that someone receive the Word of God in their hearts, it produces good fruit in them—that is, they become good people who do good deeds in the world. That is how life was always meant to be. The world was created to be a good place; and human beings were created to do good works, inspired by God's good commandments.

So, why is there evil in the world? Jesus explains it in this parable: He tells us that there's an enemy in the world...one who stands against God's good purposes by sowing weeds among the wheat. These are seeds of distrust, and hatred, and greed and jealousy; seeds of envy, and malice, and anger, and conflict. The enemy operates under the cover of darkness, deliberately sowing his weeds to choke and disrupt the good purposes of God on this earth.

That's why we have a battle going on in the universe today—a battle between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false. And the most important question we can ever ask ourselves is this: Will we let the weeds choke us, or will we align ourselves with Jesus against the enemy of God?

As I said, today, Michael has been recruited into the army of Jesus Christ. He may not know it yet, but his parents and godparents, extended family and church family have all accepted their responsibility to help Michael learn how to trust in Christ and, in His power, to resist the corrupting forces of the evil one. After all, only Jesus is **the Saviour**! Only He can **save** us from the evil one; only Jesus can **save** this planet from the corrupting forces of evil that are already at work within it. His salvation is bringing **healing** to the universe.

Will we join Him in His battle?

As a pastor, I hear a lot of people complaining that God isn't doing enough to eliminate the evil from this world. They say to me, "Why doesn't God fix this mess? Why doesn't he stop the

crime, alleviate world hunger and bring an end to all the wars?” My answer to them is simple: “He’s doing it as we speak!” **But, He may not be doing the way we think He should!** You see, He doesn’t want to do it alone! Indeed, when Jesus came into the world 2000 years ago, His first task was to recruit disciples; people who would follow Him and work with Him...in His authority and empowered by His Spirit... to overthrow evil! He called men and women, saying, **“Come, follow Me!”**

Even today, if we hear His call of discipleship and dare to follow Him into battle, Jesus promises to use us to make this world a better place by overthrowing the strongholds of Satan! Of course, the first place in which the battle happens **is in me**—in my selfish heart and fallen mind—as I yield my life to the good seed of the Kingdom!

But that’s just the beginning of my recruitment. The more I give in to following Christ, the more He will use me to do His purposes on earth! Just listen to what the Apostle Paul says in our second Bible reading for today—from **Romans 8**.

*Ro 8:19-21 **The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.***

The whole creation is groaning because of the presence of evil. Groaning implies suffering. Groaning also implies ‘waiting for release’. Tell me-- **Who is the creation waiting for?** Who will come and set the planet free from this unnatural affliction of evil and sin?

Paul says that the answer is **us!** The creation is groaning for us—it is waiting for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed...one at a time... through their baptism! The creation is waiting for us to bring it **“into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”**

Friends, one more liberator of the planet has been **revealed** this morning... in the baptism of **Michael Christopher Hammond!**

Michael-- This Hebrew name means "who is like God?". In the Book of Revelation, the archangel Michael is the leader of heaven's armies.

Christopher-- From the Greek words **Χριστος** and **φορος** it means "bearing Christ" It was used by early Christians to express the idea that they carried Christ in their hearts.

Both names speak of this child's calling to stand with Christ against the enemy of God.

Now, of course, let us be extremely clear that the battle against evil in this world is not up to us. That is, in ourselves, we have no strength to fight or resist evil. But, because Christ is in us...and as we remain attached to His life of goodness and love...we are given the power and authority to bring down Satan's strongholds, one small skirmish at a time.

In another of Paul's letters, he instructs us to **"put on the full armour of God that you may stand firm against the schemes of the devil."** This armour includes things like faith, hope, peace and love...each of them, a gift from Jesus, put on with prayer.

Yes, it may sound strange to talk about baptism in this way, as a recruitment for joining Christ in the battle against evil...but that is, essentially, what Christ gave His life for on the cross! He came to liberate us from the evil one so that, in turn, we might fight with Him in His cosmic battle to defeat the powers of darkness.

To God be the glory for every small part we can play as we participate in Christ's cosmic healing of our planet.

Let's stand and pray the **Lord's Prayer** together.