

What is Salvation?

Sermon 4– Healing of the mind

Passages: Psalm 105:1–15
Romans 8:26–39
Matthew 13:31–35, 44–52

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 involves 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 meant to be worked out and experienced in the present.

Today, we are going to look at the present work of God in the salvation (or healing) of our minds.

Let's pray.

Our minds are very fragile things. Just this past Sunday night, a Japanese woman named Mika suddenly showed up at our prayer meeting. She was looking for a place to sleep. You see, on Saturday, she had had a serious blow-up with her Aussie husband and she decided that she had to leave. But she had nowhere to go! Worse still, the trauma of the conflict with her husband meant that she couldn't think straight. Fortunately, a colleague of hers was kind enough to pick her up and get her out of the situation; but he (a single man and a Catholic who lives in a tiny studio apartment in Hurstville Grove) didn't know what to do with her-- so he dropped her off at our church!

I took her over to our house, introduced her to Kim, got her settled into her room, and then we began to talk. She was terribly confused and (quite literally) talked in circles for over 2 hours about her situation.

After staying with us for two nights, she was feeling much better and a bit more coherent, so we helped her make some basic decisions about where she could go and who might be able to help her. She is now in a Women's refuge where she has legal and psychological support.

Now, just think about this: How many people are there in Sydney who are like Mika? How many people, right at this moment, are traumatised by bad relationships? How many feel lonely and isolated, overwhelmed and unable to make decisions about the basics of life? Our mind is a fragile thing!

This is probably why one of my favourite stories in the Gospels is when Jesus healed a man known as 'the Gerasene demoniac'. Here was a man so confused and psychologically tormented by demonic thoughts that he lived in a cemetery, far from town. His psychological condition meant that he was also a violent man; so violent, in fact, that chains could not hold him down. When Jesus approached him, we're told that demonic forces within him

reacted negatively to Jesus' presence. Jesus persisted with him, however, eventually casting out the demons and setting the man free. Now, here's the part of the story that I love: The text says that people from the nearby village came to see what had happened to the man; **"...and they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind..."**

I think we all know what that means. To be **'in my right mind'** means that I am able to think clearly about myself and this world...to believe that I am a worthwhile human being and a valuable contributor to society. To be **'in my right mind'** means, generally, that I have a positive outlook on life and see myself as part of a healthy web of supportive relationships. It is to know that I am loved and that I am secure. This, of course, is how God designed us—He created us with healthy minds, and anything less than this was never God's intention for humanity.

So why are there so many people out there with unhealthy minds?

This is a very complex question. Some mental illnesses can be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. In these cases (which include depression and bi-polar disorder), healing requires treatment with drugs. (Lithium, for example.)

Other mental disturbances, however, are nothing short of demonic, as the story of the Gerasene demoniac so vividly illustrates. What that means (I believe) is that the enemy of God plants seeds of despair, helplessness and hopelessness in our vulnerable minds, thereby dragging us away from a normal, positive outlook on life. You see, we become vulnerable to Satan's lies whenever we lose our confidence in the goodness of God and the life He has given to us. This may stem from the fact that, from early childhood, our parents gave us nothing firm to stand upon...no ground to believe that life is good. They may have told us, for example:

- You're hopeless

- You're worthless
- You're useless
- You're ugly
- You're bad
- You're guilty

Because of this upbringing, we really have no idea who we are; no firm foundation upon which to stabilise our minds.

Another way we can be de-stabilised in our minds is through an insecure childhood. Poverty, violence, abuse and numerous other family issues can so undermine our sense of personal security that we become easy prey to Satan's lies about the world around us....and that God will not protect us.

The result of all this trauma can be a voice that we constantly hear in our heads—a negative, demeaning, and, ultimately, self-destructive voice. The devil has begun to control our minds.

The Book of Romans acknowledges how important our minds are to God. From the very first chapter, Paul speaks about how our ancestors, Adam and Eve, “**knew God**”. Paul quickly goes on to say, however, that “**their thinking (soon) became futile...**”

“**Claiming to be wise, they became fools**”. Of course, the entire human race has followed in their footsteps. Paul makes this clear when he says that God has “**given us over to a depraved mind.**” In other words, we have all allowed our minds be controlled by the devil, to some degree. None of us thinks perfectly clearly. None of us sees ourselves and our world as they really are.

So, what's the solution to this problem? Is there any way for the human race to be restored to ‘**a sound mind**’? The answer lies with the Gerasene demoniac! You see, the only way that he was restored to a sound mind was through deliverance from his demonic oppressors...the voices in his head that forced him to withdrawal from human contact and caused him to be physically violent and self-destructive. In a most obvious way, he needed to

be set free from his fallen mind and given a new mind...a new way of seeing himself and his world.

In Romans 8, Paul speaks about how this same mental transformation experienced by the Gerasene demoniac is available to us all.

*Ro 8:6 **The mind** of sinful man is death, but **the mind** controlled by the Spirit is life and peace... Ro 8:9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

Paul's argument in chapter 8 is a direct conclusion to chapter 1. In chapter 1, Paul was saying that every human being has allowed their minds to be controlled by the devil. Through the traumas of our childhood, as well as the insecurities and bad experiences of our early life, we have all allowed the lies of the devil to control our thought patterns. None of us thinks clearly! None of us sees reality; particularly the reality of God and His love for us. And so, the question that Paul raises in Romans 8 is of paramount importance to the healing of our minds. In verse 9, Paul makes a basic inquiry of us all—**Have you allowed your mind to be controlled by the Spirit of God?**

*Ro 8:9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, **if the Spirit of God lives in you**. And if anyone does **not** have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

If you haven't given your mind over to the Holy Spirit, Paul says, then you still do not fully belong to Christ. Yes, you may be a Christian...but, by not giving your mind over to God's Spirit, you are holding yourself back from the full embrace of His love; you are missing out on His salvation; you are not fully experiencing His healing touch upon your thought-life. This is critical! After all, unless your mind is given over to the Spirit, **you will never be able to fully believe what the Scriptures are telling you about who you are and how much God loves you!**

Indeed, unless you give your mind over to the Spirit, you will never be able to believe a whole list of Gospel truths about you and your world. To start with, look at Romans 8:15.

Ro 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Unless your mind is controlled by the Holy Spirit, you will be unable to say, “**Abba, Father!**” with any true conviction!

Now, jump down to Romans 8:28.

Ro 8:28 **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

Where does this knowledge that ‘God is working all things out for the good’ come from? It comes from the Holy Spirit who controls our minds. But if you don’t let the Spirit control your mind, you will never be confident that God is working out all things in your life for the good!

Look at verse 31 of Romans 8.

Ro 8:31 **What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?**

Or try verse 35.

Ro 8:35 **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?**

Or what about verses 38–39?

Ro 8:38 **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,**

Ro 8:39 **neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Unless your mind...unless your thoughts are controlled by the Holy Spirit, it will be virtually impossible to believe that God loves you so much in Jesus Christ that nothing can separate you from Him...that he will always defend you, protect you, shelter you from the dangers of this world. You see, our natural mind (our fallen mind) will always default to **doubt**. The mind controlled by the Spirit is the only mind that can truly believe in the essential goodness of God.

Let me finish today’s sermon by going back to our Gospel reading from **Matthew 13**. In this passage, we have five, very short and simple, parables. Now, do you realise that, at their most basic level, these 5 parables all teach the same thing? They teach (or

reinforce) **the basic value of human beings**. You see, they were given by Jesus to fuel the minds of His disciples with the truth that they were God's beloved children. These parables were given to fill their imaginations (and ours!) with the delight of knowing that we are loved; that we are precious; that we are of great value to God. Ultimately, they were given to combat all the false images built up in our minds by the devil.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (vv 31–32) tells us that God loves us so much that He is creating a place of rest and shelter for us. We are the birds of the air. And although the tree God offers us may not, at first, look like much, it grows and becomes the best shelter for us. That shelter is Jesus! And so, Jesus says, **“Come to Me; trust Me. Rest in my branches...in my arms! Believe that my Father loves you.”** But, will we believe Him?

The Parable of the Yeast (v 33) tells us a similar story. This earthly life may often feel flat and lifeless. It may feel meaningless and painful. But, if you turn and allow God to inject the yeast of His Kingdom into you (and into your world), He will raise you up until every aspect of your life is filled with His goodness. The yeast of His Kingdom is His abundant love for the human race. But, will we receive it?

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (v 44) takes a slightly different approach, but essentially says the same thing. Who is the treasure in the field? It is us, human beings, who have been wonderfully and fearfully made ‘in God's image’! The trouble is, however, that our glory has been buried and hidden from sight. Fortunately, there is someone who has come to find us, uncover us and wash off the mud; someone who realises our value and worth. In fact, this Person is Jesus, who sells everything he has in order to buy us back! Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost; the One who gives up His own life to reclaim our true value before God. But will we accept the fact that we are His treasure?

The Parable of the Pearl (v 45) says pretty much the same thing. Even though we may not realise it, we are the pearl of great price. Sure, we are lost to ourselves; undervalued and unappreciated. But Jesus, ‘the international pearl merchant’, seeks us out and finds us. And what does He do? He sells everything He has...He gives His life on a cross...to purchase us! We are that valuable... that precious to God! But will we believe it? Can we believe that we are His pearl of great price?

Finally, **the Parable of the Net** (vv 47–49) tells us about fishermen (the angels) who bring a huge catch of fish onto the shore and begin to separate the good ones from the bad. The point is not to question whether the disciples were bad or good fish, but to reassure them that all that is bad ‘fish’ in this world will be destroyed. As God’s beloved people (the ‘good fish’), they would finally be liberated from the ‘bad fish’ at the end of time. In other words, the message of the parable is simply that God loves you and will eventually deliver from everything that troubles you. But, will we really trust this message? Can we really believe that we are that precious to God?

Now, if you’re not convinced that I’ve accurately interpreted the central message these 5 parables, then ask yourself why, halfway through these parables, Matthew interrupts them in order to quote from **Psalm 35**? Listen again to Matthew’s commentary:

Mt 13:34 **Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.** *Mt 13:35* **So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”**

What truths have been “**hidden since the creation of the world**”? Is it not true that, ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, the human race has always had immense trouble believing that we are loved...believing that God wants to nurture and protect us... believing that God wants to forgive us and heal us? Our minds have been so screwed up that, even when God comes to us and

calls us out of the bushes, we (like Adam and Eve) are so fearful of His punishment that we run away from Him and from His life, down the road of our own self-destruction.

Friends, Jesus has come to bring us all back to ‘**a sound mind**’. Like He did with the Gerasene demoniac, He wants to deliver us all from the demonic voices that keep telling us that we are worthless and hopeless and unlovable...and that God is angry and distant from us. Jesus has come to cast out our old, confused ways of thinking and give us a new mind, controlled by the Holy Spirit. The only question is; **Will we let Him take our thoughts captive?**

I remind you again of what St. Paul said:

(Romans 8:6) ***“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;***

(Romans 12:2) ***“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”***

Let’s pray.