

What is Salvation? Sermon 7– Healing our Hearts

Passages: Psalm 67

Romans 11:25–32

Matthew 15:1–20

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, **the early church was not only 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 is 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 **hearts**.

Let's pray.

Today's passages from Matthew 15 and Romans 11 have one strong theme in common– Did you pick it up? In both of these passages, we are told how God's chosen people, the Jews, had allowed their hearts to grow cold and hard.

- Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus says in Matthew 15:8 -- **'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.**
- Then, in Romans 11:25, Paul says virtually the same thing about his people, the Jews. **'Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.'**

In these two passages, Jesus and Paul are lamenting the fact that, as a result of their hard and cold hearts towards God, Israel's relationship with God was dysfunctional. God was no longer at the centre of their lives.

Now tell me-- **Why did this happen?** What made Israel's heart grow cold? What caused her, as a nation, to turn away from her relationship with God, allowing it to degenerate into a mechanical display of legalism rather than a passionate display of heart-felt worship and fellowship? I think the answer largely has to do two things: (1.) Disappointment, and (2.) Unfulfilled expectations!

You see, for years, Israel was waiting for God to save them from under the hand of the Roman Empire. For years, God's people were anticipating a new-found liberation, where they could once again rule the land of Israel in total freedom from their oppressors. This dream of freedom, however, never eventuated! Not only did Jesus not measure up to their nationalistic expectations of a powerful Messiah who would liberate them from Roman rule, but their hopes and dreams were further dashed to pieces in AD 70, when the Romans came and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem.

Think about it—Who could withstand that sort of disappointment? Whose heart could have survived the constant feeling...the constant suspicion... that God really didn't care about Israel? Whose heart could have remained hopeful through all the years of violence, injustice and oppression? Whose heart wouldn't have grown hard and cold?

We've all heard the horrible news these past few days of how England has descended into chaos and violence... of how a disenfranchised youth have been on a crazy rampage, city by city, openly expressing their frustrations and disappointments and unfulfilled dreams by burning and looting shops. Every day, commentators are trying to understand this unique phenomenon by writing opinion pieces in the daily newspapers and journals.

Listen to what Laurie Penny, a freelance journalist in London, wrote in the Herald on Wednesday.

I'm huddled in the front room with some shell-shocked friends, watching my city burn. The BBC is showing footage of blazing cars and running street battles in Hackney, of police horses lining up in Lewisham, of infernos that once were shops and houses in Croydon and Peckham... Most of the people who will be writing, speaking and pontificating about the disorder have absolutely no idea what it is like to grow up in a community where there are no jobs, no space to live or move, and the police are on the streets stopping and searching you as you come home from school. The people who do will be waking up this week in the sure knowledge that after decades of being marginalised and harassed by the police, after months of seeing any conceivable hope of a better future confiscated, they are finally on the news.

In one NBC report, a young man in Tottenham was asked if rioting really achieved anything. "Yes," said the young man. "You wouldn't be talking to me now if we didn't riot, would you? Two months ago we marched to Scotland Yard, more than 2000 of us, all blacks, and it was peaceful and calm and you know what? Not a word in the press. Last night, a bit of rioting and looting and look around you."...

Riots are about power, and they are about catharsis. They are not about poor parenting, or youth services being cut, or any of the other snap explanations that media pundits have been trotting out. **People riot because they have spent their whole lives being told they are good for nothing...** People to whom respect has never been shown riot because they feel they have little reason to show respect themselves, and it spreads like fire on a warm summer night.

Now, it sounds to me as if many of England's youth are suffering from a severe case of hardened hearts! As this commentator has pointed out, the problem is far deeper than simply a matter of unemployment or a lack of education. What these young people have experienced (and, I would add, what every human being has experienced to some degree) is a deep, personal wound. The longer that wound festers and goes unattended, the more the heart (the seat of our emotions and the most sensitive part of our being) becomes hardened **in direct protection of that wound**.

So many youth in England have been wounded! As Laurie Penny described it: "...they have spent their whole lives being told they are good for nothing..."

Once you've been wounded like that, you live the rest of your life protecting and defending that wound. Listen again to Laurie Penny: "People to whom respect has never been shown riot because they feel they have little reason to show respect themselves, and it spreads like fire on a warm summer night."

Now, it's also interesting to note that an overwhelmingly large percentage of the English looters and rioters were young men! In a book by author John Eldredge called "Wild at Heart", he explains why this is so often the case—

"Every man has a wound— I have never met a man without one. No matter how good your life may have seemed to you, you live in a broken world full of broken people...So there is no crossing through this country without taking a wound." But, the real question is— What do men do with their wounds? Eldredge continues: "There are two basic options. Men either overcompensate for their wound and become driven (and violent!), or they shrink back and go passive."

Those violent young men in the UK probably aren't aware of it, but they've simply been acting out the pain that is inside their hearts! This is exactly what Jesus was describing in Mathew 15:18–20, when He talked about how our wounded hearts become the source...the well-spring... of all sorts of destructive behaviour! **"The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality,**

theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’...

Wounded hearts are the source of both personal and social self-destruction.

So...Is there any healing for our wounds? Is there any way to cure a wounded (and hardened) heart?

I think there are **three essential keys steps** to take if we want to be healed:

The first is ‘self awareness’. We must admit that we are wounded. We must acknowledge that something is wrong deep down inside. As Brennan Manning says, “The spiritual life begins with the acceptance of our wounded self.”

Of course, this is the hardest part of the entire journey towards healing. “Most men deny their wound—deny that it happened, deny that it hurts, and (most importantly) they deny that it’s shaping the way they live today.” This denial only causes our hearts to be even more callous! But if we admit that we are wounded, we are allowing the healing power of God to begin its work. It is no shame to admit that you are wounded. It’s no shame to admit that you need healing. It’s no shame to admit that you’ve been overcompensating for your wound with aggression and anger, or that you’ve been running from your wound with a self-denying passivity.

(If any men here have trouble seeing their wounded heart, then I’ve got a wonderful book for you entitled ‘Uneasy Manhood’. Feel free to borrow it!)

Once we’ve acknowledged our wounds, **the second step** is to invite Jesus to heal our wounded heart. After all, if you remember back to the beginning of Christ’s ministry, while He was in the synagogue of His hometown of Nazareth, He was invited to publicly read the Scriptures. It seems that Jesus deliberately took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in order to read the following words: **“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim**

freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor.” Jesus then concluded His reading by saying, **“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!”** In other words, He knew that He was God’s anointed one who would save the world from sin. But this salvation was going to involve far more than getting people into heaven. It would involve the individual healing of our wounded hearts!

Will you take Jesus at His word? Will you invite Jesus to come and bind up your broken heart? Will you allow His salvation to heal your present life? As CS Lewis said, “Until you have given yourself to Him, you will not have a real self.”

Now, of course, there’s still an essential **third step** to the healing process that needs to take place. You see, when Jesus comes to heal us, He doesn’t tell us to wait outside while He operates a miracle on us, deep on the inside. No! He calls us to go with Him into the wound. This means we must allow ourselves to feel the pain of our past hurts. It means grieving over the wounds, admitting how much we were hurt by someone we loved. It also means giving that wound some validation by admitting that the wound really did matter to you and that it has forever affected the way you’ve lived. It means confessing how you’ve overcompensated for your wound through both aggressive and passive behaviour.

But, ultimately, “going with Christ into the wound” means allowing Him to lead you to a place of forgiveness...forgiveness towards those who wounded you. For the truth if the matter is that you can never be fully healed from that wound until you can forgive from the heart the person(s) who wounded you! Jesus said, “Unless you can forgive men their sins, My Father cannot forgive you your sins.” Of course, this is not a legal statement—this is a statement about the reality of bondage and freedom. Anyone who cannot forgive (apolo= to release) the sin done to them will never be free. You keep yourself in bondage to the perpetrator. But, as you allow God to bring up the hurt of the past...as you acknowledge that your heart was truly wounded...as you accept that it really did matter to you...and as you allow Christ to pour forth His grace in you..., then, you come to the

place where you can choose to extend forgiveness to the one who hurt you.

It's important that you stop saying things like, "It didn't really matter", or "I probably deserved it anyway". Rather, it's time to say (in the grace of Christ); "It was wrong; it did matter; **and** I forgive you."

Every human heart has been wounded...that is, except one, Jesus! That's why we need to attach ourselves so closely to His perfect heart and find His perfect peace. The healing of our wounded heart comes out of our union with Him and the overflow of His heart.

I want to finish here by quoting from Psalm 139. It's a prayer, so reflect on these words before God right now.

Ps 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Amen.