

Saved From, By, and For What

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[0:00] 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21.

! May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word.

Would you please be seated? Some of you may be aware that a new study was recently published by a man who serves as a professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University.

This man is also a bivocational pastor, and he did a study about the religiosity of people in the United States of America. And what he found for the first time was that those who identify as non-religious were the bigger group than those who identify as belonging to some kind of religious faith.

Just barely edging out Catholics who were in second place and just barely edging out evangelicals, which we would be in that category, we followed in a close third.

[1:29] Now, I don't know how accurate that study is, but I'm not surprised by the results of that study. If those who consider themselves to be non-religious don't already outnumber those who identify as being religious, they soon will.

It's only a matter of time. Again, another research group, Barna Research Group, conducted a study last year, and they found that atheism, which is the belief that there is no God, is growing in younger generations.

I want to read to you an excerpt from their study. This is what they found. It said, It may come as no surprise that the influence of Christianity in the United States is waning.

Rates of church attendance, religious affiliation, belief in God, prayer, and Bible reading have been dropping for decades. Americans' beliefs are becoming more post-Christian, and concurrently, religious identity is changing.

Enter Generation Z. Born between 1999 and 2015, they are the first truly post-Christian generation.

[2:42] And they go on. More than any other generation before them, Generation Z does not assert a religious identity. They might be drawn to things spiritual, but with a vastly different starting point from previous generations, many of whom received a basic education of the Bible in their churches.

And he concludes, And it shows, The percentage of Generation Z that identifies as an atheist, understand this, is double that of those who are adults in the United States of America.

The time has come, I believe, where people don't understand why as Christians we celebrate Easter.

And I think some Christians don't understand why we celebrate Easter, unfortunately. And I believe that the time is also upon us where if you ask somebody, Are you saved?

Their immediate response to you is going to be, Saved from what? Saved from the Republicans? Saved from the Democrats? Saved from global warming?

[3:57] What do you mean? What are you trying to talk to me about? Saved from what? Now imagine that's you. You as the Christian ask that question. Are you saved?

And they respond in such a way, Saved from what? What would your answer be? Could you give one? When I began in seminary, I was a mess.

In many ways. But especially when it came to my theology. Theology, which is the study of God. I grew up going to a Nazarene church. At that time, I worked in a United Methodist church as a youth pastor.

And I was attending a Southern Baptist seminary. So I refer to myself as a denominational mutt. But the core principles in many ways were the same.

But I'd never really been encouraged to read my Bible like I was in seminary. Never really encouraged to search the Scriptures and seek to grasp them with understanding.

[5:04] It was in seminary that I gained a greater appreciation for the Word of God. And for books written by different theologians about the Word of God. Some of those theologians made reading the Bible easier.

And some of them made reading the Bible harder. But I'll never forget that there was one name that I kept hearing about. One name that kept coming into our conversations.

That name was R.C. Spruill. And so there was a used Christian bookstore close to our seminary.

And I just wanted to know. I was so hungry for the Word of God.

I was so hungry to read what some of these other great men, great theologians had to say about it.

And so I went in search of a book written by R.C. Spruill. And I found one.

Very small, not very thick book. About 120 pages or so. And the title of that book was called Saved From What? And I'll be honest with you.

[6:04] When I got that book, I was disappointed. Like, saved from what? Isn't that obvious? Don't we all know what we're saved from? R.C. Spruill, you're going to write this book.

You're this great theologian. This is an issue that is for Sunday school classes, for little children to talk about. Of course I know what I'm saved from. But I bought that book.

And let me tell you that the Lord used that book to rock me. Changed me. Things that I knew but I couldn't really put into the right perspective.

I'd been saved. But I was so profoundly amazed in reading that book to understand fully what I'd been saved from.

How I'd been saved from it. And why the Lord in His grace gave me that great salvation. I believe that our Christian witness is lacking so much because we're no longer amazed by grace.

[7:13] We're without understanding. Churches have become so consumer driven. They offer watered down messages. They do whatever they feel like they need to do to draw a crowd.

And so people go to church expecting to get something instead of to give something. And so I don't think that it's any wonder that right now in our world so many Christians would struggle to be able to answer these three questions.

Saved from what? Saved by what? Saved for what? Saved for what? Your kids.

Your grandchildren. Probably belong to generation Z. That generation as I mentioned is becoming increasingly atheist.

And non-religious. They have questions. Do you have answers? Here's the thing.

[8:20] I believe that if you know the answers to these questions. Not only will you be able to give good answers. But your worship will be so much better. Your witness will be so much better.

And you will know the true meaning and purpose of your life. And you will experience the abundant life that Jesus said is available to those who follow Him.

So here's the main idea for this morning's message. If you are a Christian, you are saved from God. From His just wrath. You are saved by God.

By His perfect sacrifice. And you are saved for God. For His eternal delight and pleasure. This is what should occupy our thoughts today.

This is the truth. This is the truth that we should constantly rejoice in. Not just on Easter Sunday. So I'm going to seek to drive this point home.

[9:23] I'm going to hit you with some scriptures that may be of surprise to you. But I want you to understand.

And I want you to keep in mind that this is what God's Word says. These aren't my opinions. These aren't my thoughts. This isn't based upon my feelings of who I think God should be.

Because let me tell you, those things are not on the same level as Scripture. I've thought wrong.

I've felt wrong. But God's Word is true. In fact, if my opinions, thoughts, and feelings about God contradict what God says He is in the Bible, then I'm in danger of breaking the second commandment.

Of trying to make God into something that I'm comfortable with. But though I may feel comfortable, my belief would be in a lie, not the truth.

And so I believe that as the Bible says, all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[10:40] So with that in mind, let's look at how Scripture answers this first question. Saved from what? And so the first Scripture that I want us to look at together this morning comes from John 3,

verse 36.

And here this is John the Baptist, and he is speaking with his disciples about Jesus. And they're concerned. They're concerned that, you know, they were baptizing a lot of people, and now Jesus is baptizing more than them.

So understand that 2,000 years ago, churches had a problem with competing with one another, just as they do today, forgetting that, guess what? We're on the same team.

But they were concerned about this. They weren't happy about this. And so John explains to them. He gives a long response. He speaks about how it was his job to prepare the way for Christ's ministry.

And that he's done that. And so now he says, you know what? I must decrease while he increases. And then he concludes by saying these words. He says, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

[11 : 49] Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life. Understand this. But the wrath of God remains on him. Saved from what?

Well, we need to be saved from the wrath of God. Now, I know that some of you hear that and you're tempted to tune out automatically.

That's not something that is comfortable to hear. Many people in our culture and even in our churches today don't believe that there is such a thing. But we just read that there is such a thing. We just read it. People who don't believe that we need to be saved from God's wrath or who are uncomfortable with the thought of God having wrath suffer from having too high a view of themselves.

And too low a view of who God is. This was Isaiah's painful discovery. Remember? When he got a glimpse of the unveiled holiness of God.

[12 : 54] 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. And he cursed himself.

Remember? He said, woe is me. For I am undone. For I am a man of unclean lips. Isaiah's vision of God shattered his self-image.

He crumbled in a heap to the ground in terror of what he saw. In fact, every other person in the Bible who has had a similar experience with the living God has the same reaction.

They suddenly lose their self-composure. And they experience a crisis of identity. Their egos are shattered into a million pieces as they are confronted with the reality of their depravity in the presence of the one who is holy, holy, holy.

I think we so desperately want to reject this notion of God having wrath towards us because we live in the most narcissistic culture of all time.

[14 : 04] In Greek mythology, narcissists saw a reflection of himself as he was passing by a pool of water. And he fell in love with his reflection. Let me tell you, what narcissists did was mythical.

What we do is real. We live in a society where everybody wins. Everybody gets a trophy no matter where they finished that year in their win-loss standings.

Everybody has their own truth. You do what makes you feel good. You do your thing. And don't let anybody get in the way of that or tell you different. We're not worried about the wrath of God because we have discounted the severity of our sin.

Even that word sin. That's not a popular word in our world. In our churches even. We prefer a word like mistakes. Or poor choices.

Or oopsie daisies. Because these terms are less offensive. These terms don't hurt our feelings. These terms don't affect our self-image.

[15 : 17] Everyone makes mistakes. And mistakes aren't really that bad because we understand that that's truly how we often learn. Now I don't disagree with any of that at all.

But there is a huge difference between making mistakes and committing sinful acts. As long as we discount the severity of our sin, we sense no fear of God and no understanding of His wrath.

We are content with our performance as it is, thinking that we've been good enough to satisfy a God who is holy. You know, compared to Adolf Hitler, we're all pretty good people.

I hope that you can say that this morning. But compared to God, who is perfect, who is holy, holy, holy, how do we compare?

Not very well. In Luke 18, Jesus encounters the rich young ruler who approaches Him. And he thought he was doing pretty good.

[16:22] Thought he was a good guy. He had all this under control. Understand too that this man had everything that we would want in our culture. He was rich. He was young.

He was a ruler. He had wealth. He had the time to spend it. And he had the authority to do a lot of whatever it was that he wanted to do. But this man was excited to meet Jesus on this day.

And so he approached Him and he asked Him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? So at some point he had heard Jesus talking about eternal life. And so naturally he thought, as many of us would, that that sounds good.

I want to live forever. And he was ready to sign up. So he went to Jesus and Jesus looked at that man. Heard his question and he responded in this way.

He said, why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. Jesus' response reveals that the rich young man had no idea who he was speaking to.

[17:27] He didn't recognize that Jesus wasn't just a teacher. But that Jesus was the living Son of God. And perhaps he called Jesus good because he was trying to flatter him.

Trying to butter him up. Trying to charm him. Trying to win him over. But you know Jesus, he wouldn't have any of that. This man had a high view of himself.

He had a low view of God. And so Jesus brings the truth of things into focus for this man.

And you remember, he takes him back to the Ten Commandments. He points him to the standard of righteousness and perfection that God requires. Do these things and you'll have eternal life.

And for most people you'd think, well, sorry. That's not me. I've done those things for a little while, but not always. What can I do? Is there any other hope?

[18:29] But not this man. He said, I've done that. That's good news for me. I've been good in all those ways. I've kept all of those commandments from my youth.

And anybody who's spent time working in the church nursery or in Awana or in youth group knows that that's impossible. Though we love our children. Instead of telling the man just how wrong he was, Jesus showed him.

Again, he took him back to the commandments. He showed him that he was lacking. That his God was his wealth. That he wasn't as good as he thought that he was.

He says, go and sell all that you have. Give it to the poor and come and follow me. And unfortunately that day, the man walked away from Jesus full of sorrow for he had failed.

He'd been brought face to face with the reality of his sinfulness and worthlessness of his good works to save him. Let me tell you today that I feel that the church is filled with many rich young ruler types.

[19:41] People who think that they've been good enough to inherit eternal life. And without understanding that by works of the law, no flesh will ever be justified in the sight of God.

We live in a culture where all of us are encouraged to do what is right in our own eyes. People reject the thought of a God who has wrath because that means that he's not tolerant.

And that doesn't jive well in our culture today or with what we would want to believe. Now you might be thinking, why all this talk about wrath on Easter?

This guy's going to ruin Easter for my family if he just keeps talking about wrath the whole time.

Well, there's good news and we will get there.

I promise. But it's because so many people reject the wrath of God and don't talk about the wrath of God. That's why I feel like it's so important that it's preached about.

[20:47] Because it's a real thing. But before I go on to the good news, let me give you two biblical truths about the wrath of God that we are desperately in need of being saved from.

The first is this. God's wrath is to be feared. Romans 3.23 Romans 2.7 and 8 2 Thessalonians 1.7 and 9 through 9 The wrath of God is something to be feared.

Secondly, we see from the Bible that God's wrath is just. The wrath of God is owing to our sin.

When we seek to exchange His glory for our own glory.

Again, Romans 3.23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 1.23 And they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Romans 3.9 and 10 For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. As it is written, none is righteous.

[22:48] No, not one. And then Paul says in Romans 3.19 Therefore, every mouth is stopped.

Meaning there is nobody who can rightly fault God for His wrath.

That it's totally warranted. It's totally righteous. And it's serious. It's a fearful thing to exchange the glory of God for the glory of man.

And so I hope you see we are without excuse. All of us have sinned against God. All of us. And the loving truth is that whether you like it or not, if you don't know Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are subject to His wrath.

We need to be rescued from the wrath to come. We need a remedy. We need an atonement. We need the cross.

So here, let me tell you, is the extreme supreme paradox of the Bible. Now, we are saved from God by God.

[24 : 19] God has provided salvation to those very same people, you and I, who by their sin are exposed to His wrath and judgment.

As we read together, 2 Corinthians 5.21 For our sake, He made Him, Jesus, to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

God the Father made the Son to be sin. Now, understand this, that Jesus was not forced into this role.

Never was there a time when the Father and the Son were at odds when it came to this plan or any other time. Jesus spoke often and frequently about how His will was to do the Father's will, and He understood totally that that meant going to the cross and dying there for sinners.

Please understand this. Jesus didn't go to the cross because fickle people turned on Him.

Remember? Remember, beginning of the week, shouting, Hosanna, Hosanna, rescue us, save us.

[25 : 32] And then at the end of the week, shouting, Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Jesus didn't go to the cross because of fickle people, though they did turn on Him.

He did not go to the cross because demon-deceived false religious leaders plotted His death, though they did. He did not go to the cross because Judas betrayed Him, though He did.

He did not die because an angry, unruly mob intimidated a Roman governor into sentencing Him, though they did. Jesus went to the cross because this was God's plan to reconcile sinners to Himself.

Remember, in the first Christian sermon that was ever preached by Peter, the disciple, He pointed to this very thing in Acts 2.23 to the nation of Israel. He says, This Jesus delivered up according to the infinite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

This was God's plan. Only God could design an atonement for sin that would satisfy the demands of His justice, that would pacify His wrath, that would be consistent with His love and His grace and His mercy.

[26 : 57] Reconciliation flows from God. Remember, it was because God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. That whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

So on the cross, the Son became our sin. During the hours that Jesus hung on the cross, an astrological phenomenon occurred.

In the middle of the afternoon, when the sun should be at its brightest, it was dark. And darkness fell upon all of the land.

And in the midst of that darkness, Jesus cried out in agony. He said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

You see, at that moment, Jesus was experiencing the horror that He had been dreading the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane. Let's go back there and read that.

[28 : 02] Mark 14, 33-36. And He took with Him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And He said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

Remain here and watch. And going a little farther, He fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible for You.

Remove this cup from Me, yet not what I will, but what You will. And then in Luke 22, Luke adds another piece to how horrific of a time Jesus was experiencing in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It says, And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground. Have you ever wondered why Jesus feared His death so much more than others recorded in Scripture?

Have you ever wondered that? You remember Stephen, who was martyred in Acts? He preaches. He shares the Gospel. And the leaders want nothing of it.

[29:20] They rile the people up, and they take stones, big, heavy, jagged rocks, and they pelt Him with these stones until He dies. But as this is happening, Stephen looks up into heaven, and his face shines, and he says, I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

He knows that He's about to die, and He's about to go be with the Lord. Even Socrates, the pagan philosopher, He drank His hemlock, His poison, and He did so gladly without a twitch, not fearing death.

And let me tell you, as a pastor, I've been in the presence of godly men and women who were on their deathbed, and they were looking forward to dying. So many times I would go into a situation like that and say, what am I going to say, Lord, to encourage them?

And I would go in there, and they would be the ones who encouraged me. They weren't afraid of dying. So why was Jesus? Jesus, the perfect Son of God, who had never before shown the least bit of fear of any man, the least bit of fear of suffering any kind of pain or loss, was terrified.

He was horrified. Martin Luther says, Never man feared death like this man. Why?

[30:49] Well, as we read, because He knew that He was about to become sin. On the cross, Jesus Christ became the most grotesque, most obscene mass of sin in the history of the world.

The Bible says that God, who is too holy to even look at sin, when Christ was hanging on the cross, God, the Father turned His back on Him. He turned away from Him.

He removed His face from Him. He turned out the lights on Him. He cut Him off. There was Jesus. Suspended on the cross.

Hanging. Between heaven and earth. He became our sin. surrounded in darkness.

He was also in the cross. He was in the cross. Surrounded in darkness. Isolated from the Father. Cut off from His fellowship. Fully receiving in Himself the curse of God for our sin.

[31:55] And He did it willingly. Let me tell you, I don't think that Jesus was aware of the nails in His hands.

Though that was painful. Though there was no more excruciating way to die than crucifixion. I don't even think Jesus was feeling that when He cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He was so overwhelmed by the outer darkness. Remember Jesus said? He compared that to hell. The outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. He's taken outside of Jerusalem. He's taken outside of the camp to the place of Golgotha. Into the outer darkness. Totally isolated from the grace and presence of His Father.

He became sin. He became a curse for us. So that someday we will be able to see the face of God. He was sent out into the darkness.

[32:57] So that we might dwell in eternal life. And if you're a believer, understand that on that day, Jesus Christ endured your hell in your place for your sins.

God's giving the Son and the Son's becoming our sin is then what saves us. Saved by what? Saved by Christ.

When repentant sinners acknowledge their sin, affirm Jesus as Lord and trust solely in His complete work on their behalf, God credits His righteousness to their account.

On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had lived our lives with all of our sins so that God could then treat us as if we lived the sinless life of Christ in pure holiness.

Romans 3, 23 through 26 again. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.

[34:12] This was to show God's righteousness because in His divine forbearance He has passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This was God's plan. In His wisdom, He allowed His Son to be punished in the place of sinners, thereby being able to save us, to justify us.

We are saved from God, by God, for God. 1 John 3, 1-3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us.

That we should be called children of God and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it does not know Him. Beloved, we are God's children.

And what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

[35 : 25] And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure. However, God the Father has saved us for His eternal pleasure.

Many of us have seen things that we wish we could see in person, but we've only seen them through a medium. For example, like all of us probably watched the Super Bowl, but I don't think anybody was actually there watching the Super Bowl.

You understand what I'm saying? I've always wanted to go to Hawaii. That's one of my dream vacations. I've never been there. I have friends who live there right now.

I've met with them after they've come back and they've told me their reports. I've seen their pictures. My father lived in Hawaii before he married my mother. I think, why don't you marry her and go back and live there?

But I have his stories. Stories of going up on these dormant volcanoes and looking inside and all of these awesome things about his time living there.

[36 : 38] So I have pictures. I have videos. There's shows based in Hawaii, like Hawaii Five-0, right, and different things like that. I have my father's stories.

I have secondhand knowledge of what it's like. I've never been there, but I can pretty much guarantee that should I ever be able to go, it will pale in comparison.

All those stories pale in comparison to actually being there and seeing it. And realizing it for myself. Let me tell you, I've never been to heaven.

Okay? You're not going to hear any of those strange stories come out of my mouth. But we have God's Word. We hear stories and testimonies of those who have.

But I can tell you that for those of us who are in Christ, that day will come. Now we see as in a mirror dimly. But one day we will see face to face.

[37 : 43] One day we will embrace our Lord and Savior. I believe we'll be able to put our fingers, like Thomas, into the wounds. The places where he was pierced for our sins and our transgressions.

One day that day will come. One day we will be made like him. One day we will be pure as he is pure. One day we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

One day there will be no more sin. One day there will be no more death. Don't you feel that in your heart? Don't you know? Can't you see that in our world?

That it's broken? Don't you know that you're broken? Don't you have this feeling that things should not be this way? This world should not be this way.

I should not be this way. My relationships with others should not be like this. Because it's not supposed to be like this. Jesus Christ has come.

[38 : 49] Jesus Christ has lived the life that we could never live. He died on the cross for our sins in our place. And he was resurrected on the third day.

As proof that he is victorious over sin and death. And as proof that for those of us who believe in Jesus Christ and know him as our Lord and Savior, we are too.

So I want to leave you with one final question. A question that Jesus asked one of the sisters of Lazarus. As he was on his way to that man's tomb to bring him from death to life.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? Do you believe this? Do you believe this? Do you believe this?

[40 : 00] I'll see you next time.