

This Great Salvation

Introduction—the task of theology, reflecting on the Bible so as to make sense of it all.

1. Finding the Center

- With all their differences, it is true to say that all religious movements of the world (apart from Reformed Theology) have one feature in common: they allow the **objective** factors of salvation (Christ, Church, Word, Sacraments) to fade into the background and place the religious **subject** at the center. This is the difference between God-centered salvation and man-centered salvation. The Bible places God and His glory at the center of all things, including man's salvation.¹ At the center of God's revelation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- "It is perhaps clear to us that Jesus is the theological center of, at least the central figure in the New Testament. But both Jesus and the apostles also understood the theological center of Old Testament to be the same as that of the New Testament. The Old Testament is the shadow, and Jesus is the reality (Colossians 2.16-17)."²
- *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh. (Romans 1.1-3)*
- After identifying himself as an apostle set apart for the gospel, Paul describes the source and content of the gospel, not as something new but which had been promised beforehand. He says the gospel came **through the prophets, in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son.**³ Jesus, son of David is the content of gospel revelation. Thus, the OT as well as the New places Jesus at the center of it all.

¹Cf. J.I. Packer, "Saved by His Precious Blood": An Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, 1983.

² Miles Van Pelt, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, Crossway, Wheaton, 2016, p. 25.

³ Ibid, p. 26.

- All of reality, including salvation is about Him. It's *about Him*, but it's *for us* (cf. Luke 24.27, 44, 47). This is a subtle but profound difference regarding what must occupy the center.
- It's understandable that a baby thinks he is the center of the universe. It is only through many painful experiences that he grows to find that he is not the center. It may be said the journey from infancy to adulthood is learning to leave self-centeredness in order to arrive at the conclusion that God is all in all. In reality, through trials we are constantly learning the lesson that the world does not revolve around us, our desires or our goals. As long as we place ourselves at the center, we will not only miss God's purpose, but we set ourselves up for further disappointment and distress. Consider the "victim" mentality of much of popular culture. (This is not to deny there are true cases of victimhood, however.)
- But though God is the true Lord and center of all, He profoundly cares for His wayward creation, especially man, the crown of His creation. He has gone to the ultimate length in order to rescue/deliver/save; to the point of self-sacrificing love, the death of Christ on the cross. The Father gave His Son; the Son gave His life—for us. And why? To save us from the justified wrath of God.

2. The Universal Search for Salvation

- "I am the Bread of Life, he who comes to me shall not hunger; he who believes in me shall never thirst." John 6.35
- We are alive but life is difficult. We cannot survive on our own, so we band together in community for survival. Over time culture develops which not only protects but enriches our lives. Culture is that catch-all word we use to refer to shared language, values, customs, social behaviors, beliefs, etc. Culture is the cumulative deposit of all the products of human beings in community.
- But no matter how much people accomplish culturally, even when technology and science make our lives easier and the arts make us laugh,

cry and feel deeply, there still exists a sense that there is more. And we long for more. “If any man thirsts ...”

- There is within all of us a deep-seated sense of sin and misery. A hope for redemption/salvation/deliverance from all that threatens to destroy us; a desire for eternal, unending safety and happiness.
- You may be a very optimistic person, but optimism alone cannot overcome the fact that we all eventually die. Or you may be a pessimist, but the fact that you continue to live means you have at least some hope for some improvement.
- This is why, no matter how wonderful the achievements of human culture, there is still the longing for something more, something that only God can supply. This is the arena we call religion, man in relationship with God. It is the attempt to connect with some One or some thing beyond ourselves.
- At its heart, religion is attached to relationship, with the thought of reconciliation. This is because the idea of God—however you may conceive of Him—carries with it the desire to connect with Him and overcome the sense of alienation, the hunger and thirst for more, and that affects every human being.

3. Approaching Our Study

- A. Salvation is a big category encompassing all that God has done for us in Christ to deliver us. It includes:
 1. Earthly deliverances (Jonah 2.9; Exodus 15.1-2)
 2. Rescue from the wrath of God (Romans 1.18)
 3. Deliverance from the dominion of sin (Romans 3.9)
 4. Salvation from the power of death (Romans 5.21;)
 5. Overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil (Ephesians 2.1-3, 8)
- B. The means by which we are saved is Jesus Christ, his person and work.
 1. Dying for us; the reason He became incarnate (Hebrews 2.14-15)
 2. Living in us (Colossians 1.27)
 3. More specifically, in union with us (Colossians 2.12)

C. A helpful (but limited) framework: The Order of Salvation (*Ordo Salutis*)

1. Romans 8.28-30

- *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

2. Elements of the Order of Salvation

- a. Election
- b. Gospel Call
- c. Regeneration
- d. Conversion
- e. Justification/Adoption
- f. Sanctification
- g. Perseverance
- h. Death
- i. Glorification