

SALVATION IS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST ALONE

Romans 3:20-24

(NCV) "[N]o one can be made right with God by following the law. The law only shows us our sin. ²¹ But God has a way to make people right with Him without the law, and He has now shown us that way which the law and the prophets told us about. ²² God makes people right with Himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same: ²³ Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard, ²⁴ and all need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ. "

INTRODUCTION

The Washington Monument testifies to our enduring gratitude to "The Father of our Country." Its base spans nearly 56'. It became the tallest structure in the world, at over 555' high, when completed in 1884. When workers completed a year-long cleaning and renovation of the Monument in 1994, these words were discovered inscribed on its base: "Whoever is the human instrument under God in the conversion of one soul, erects a monument to his own memory more lofty and enduring (sic) [enduring] than this." It's signed "BFB." Gary Scott, a National Park Service regional historian, says the unknown BFB probably carved the message between 1854 and 1880, when construction stopped on the monument because money had run out. It can still be viewed by visitors to the lobby of the Washington Monument today.

As a pastor drove past a department store one day, he had a distinct impression to talk to the owner about his relationship with Christ. He told him, "I've talked beds and carpets and bookcases with you, but I've never talked my business with you. Would you give me a few minutes to do so?" The manager led him to his private office. The pastor took out his New Testament and showed him passage after passage that brought home to this businessman his need to embrace **Christ**. Tears began to roll down his cheeks as he told this pastor, "I'm 70 years of age. I was born in this city, and more than 100 ministers and more than 500 church officers have known me as you do, to do business with, but in all these years you are the only man who ever spoke to me about my soul." He called out upon **Jesus** to become His Savior and Master that day!

To celebrate today's baptisms, our sermon theme is Salvation Is through **Jesus Christ** Alone.

SALVATION IS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST ALONE

Harry Ironside (1876-1951) was a Canadian-American Bible teacher, pastor, and author. Though limited to an 8th-grade education, he wrote books, pamphlets, and articles on Bible topics. They are filled with his practical wisdom gleaned from encountering people on the streets during thousands of sermons in public places. He'd often be interrupted by people making objections along these lines: "There are hundreds of religions in this country and the followers of each sect think theirs is the only right one. How can ordinary people find out what really is the truth?" Ironside would reply, "Hundreds of religions you say? That's strange. I've heard of only two." People would insist there were clearly more than two religions. He'd then explain, "I admit many shades of opinions" among these "two great schools" of thought, but they still boil down to just two: "The one covers all who expect salvation by doing [something]; the other, all who have been saved by something done." You either believe "you can be your own savior," by your own merits, as every other religion but Christianity claims, or you confess you *need* the merits of Christ to save you.

In his book, *Except Ye Repent* (1937), Harry Ironside underscored why everyone needs **Jesus** to be their Savior: "Repentance is the very opposite of meritorious experience. It is the confession that one is utterly without merit, and if he [or she] is ever saved at all it can only be through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, [For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus] who gave Himself as a ransom for all' [**I Timothy 2:5-6**, NIV]. Here is firm footing for the soul who realizes that all self-effort is but sinking sand. Christ alone is the Rock of our salvation."

Years ago a man presented himself for baptism in a mission station in India. Church leaders hesitated. He could hear and read but could not speak. How could they learn from his speechless lips if he truly understood the Gospel? When brought before the church, he was asked this question: "What is the ground of your belief that there is salvation for you in Jesus Christ?" He instantly started to answer them by signs. He put his hands on his breast with a gesture of loathing, then stepped forward and looked down as into a pit, from which he shrank back in terror. Drawing near again, he seemed to see something just beyond. He then made the sign of the cross to signify **Jesus** was there! Again he looked into the pit and smiled. He then pointed to Heaven with a glow of ecstasy upon his face. He was at peace with God because **Jesus** had died for his sins and had secured his place in the Heavenly presence of God the Father. The church joyfully baptized him!

The biggest obstacle to many of us crying out to God to save us mercifully by Christ's merits is we don't really believe we need a Savior. We tell ourselves, "I know I have some faults; I know there are some things I'm ashamed of doing; but that's just being human. I want to be good; I try to be as good as I can. Isn't this good enough to please God? My brother, best friend, mom, neighbor, or the guy on TV agrees with me, so this must be true." We're entitled to our opinions. We're also entitled to be wrong. At the end of our lives, only one opinion matters: God's. God's opinion is found in **Romans 3:20-24** [reread]. We can only hope all of us and everyone we know and love will heed God's warnings in time to abandon all hope of pleasing him and gaining eternal life by "being good enough" instead of by Christ's merits. [True story] Years of smoking finally caught up with a man named John, who'd ignored the advice of all who'd urged him to stop. One morning at work he keeled over while clutching his heart. While being rushed to a hospital, he was peppered with the usual questions. "Do you smoke?" asked a paramedic. "No," John whispered, "I quit." "That's good. When did you quit?" John gasped, "Around 9:30 this morning."

Romans 3:23 declares unconditionally, "Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard." Or, in the words of familiar translations, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The Greek word for "sin" in **Romans 3:23** originally meant "missing the mark." God is telling us, "All of us have fallen short of hitting the target of God's standards of right and wrong based upon His character, which He designed us to model." The longest archery shot on record under World Archery Federation conditions took place in 2005. Peter Terry of Australia placed two arrows out of six into a target 122 cm (4') in size at a distance of 200 m (656'), more than two football fields away. Suppose you were given the same quality of arrows and compound bow Peter Terry used. How far (and in what direction) would your arrows fly, even when you were at your peak physically? Even if you were promised \$1 million if you could hit this target once, what chance would you have to collect? As you watch others around you, you might pat yourself on the back if your arrows travel as far or farther than most of them. But your best would not be good enough to win you anything. You, like everyone else you knew, would be falling far short of the standard of archery excellence set by Peter Terry. Few of us have the physical abilities for archery excellence, but we all have abilities for moral excellence. And there's a lot more at stake than losing prize money if our arrows fall short. We are at risk of losing our eternal souls by falling short of God's standards for our behavior.

Here's a message from someone we all know by name: "You can you join the church, you can serve on committees, you can be baptized and receive communion, you can become superintendent of the Sunday School, and not be saved. I know; it happened in my life. There is an inner experience, a new birth, that brings peace. Morality and good works cannot accomplish it; it is the work of the Holy Spirit." His father died when he was five. His God-fearing mother walked him 2 ½ miles every Sunday to church. After a lifetime of jobs and often back-breaking work, he invested his savings in a combined motel and restaurant business. The state then moved the highway seven miles away, which left him nearly bankrupt at age 65. By age 75, his restaurant chain had made him a household name. All his life he tried to live by principles of decency, hard work, patriotism, and a high standard of morality. He tithed every dollar he earned and helped many individuals and churches in financial struggles. But all this was not enough. There remained a void inside him; the unanswered question, "How could a man know that his sins had really been forgiven?"

Then, at age 75, at a church in Louisville, he heard a sermon based upon **Jesus'** words to one of the most religious and upright men in all of Israel, Nicodemus, as found in **John 3:3, 6, 16-18** (NIV), "'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.'" For the first time in his highly moral life, Colonel Harland Sanders, the Kentucky Fried Chicken millionaire, bowed his head and admitted he still fell short of God's standards, despite his best efforts. He gave up trying to be good enough to go to Heaven. He asked God to have mercy upon him as a lost sinner and he placed his faith in the merits of **Jesus Christ's** death on the Cross in his behalf as his only certainty his sins were forgiven. Suddenly the Colonel lifted his head and the pastor related, "He looked at me and said it was the first time in his life he had ever experienced the presence of Christ within his heart." Colonel Sanders had experienced what **Acts 4:12** (NIV) proclaims: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

CONCLUSION

Jim Cymbala has served as pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle, in New York City's slums, over 25 years. His church has grown from 20 members to 6,000. At the close of multiple services on a recent Easter Sunday, he felt so tired he went to the edge of the platform, pulled down his tie, and sat down. Counselors continued to speak with many who'd come forward seeking God's mercy through **Jesus**. In the 3rd row, middle aisle, a disheveled, filthy man stared at him rather sheepishly as if saying, "Could I talk to you?" The homeless in large numbers seek money and help from this church. Pastor Jim said to himself, "What a way to end a Sunday. I've had such a good time, preaching and ministering, and here's a fellow probably wanting money for more wine." This wino got within about five feet. His stench grew so wretched Jim could only speak to him by turning away to inhale. In response to Jim's questions, he learned this man's name was David, he'd been on the streets six years, and he'd spent the previous night in an abandoned truck. Though just 32, his matted hair, missing front teeth, glazed eyes, and smell of alcohol oozing from every pore made him seem 50.

His church usually goes with the homeless to buy them a meal to safeguard how their money is spent, but Jim reached for his back pocket thinking he'd just give him money and be done with him. But David pushed his hand aside, saying, "I don't want your money. I want this Jesus, the One you were talking about, because I'm not going to make it. I'm going to die on the street." At that moment, Jim completely forgot about David and started to weep for himself. Here he was going to give a few bucks to someone God had sent to him to find **Jesus**. Jim didn't allow fatigue to excuse his actions. He writes, "There is no excuse. I was not seeing him the way God sees him. I was not feeling what God feels." Jim pleaded through his tears for God to forgive him and make him a better representative of the Savior. David at first stood by quietly; quite confused. Then, as Jim began to weep even more deeply, David began to weep. He fell against Jim's chest; soiling his white shirt and tie. Jim put his arms around David and they "wept on each other." David's stench somehow became bearable, to Jim, even fragrant, as he committed his heart and his life to the Lord **Jesus**.

Christ renovated David's broken life and his body. The church found him a place to live and hired him to do maintenance work at the church. They got his teeth fixed and placed him in a hospital where he detoxed in 6 days. He left the hospital as a "handsome man" who looked closer to his true age. He soon demonstrated an incredible ability to memorize portions of Scripture. A year later, David got up in church and gave his testimony about his conversion to Christ. Pastor Jim recognized God had gifted him to be a preacher. Brooklyn Tabernacle ordained him and he now serves as an associate minister of a church in New Jersey.

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