

“FOR US AND FOR OUR SALVATION”
Romans 3:21-26, Luke 1:30-35, Hebrews 1:1-3
August 26 & 27, 2023

“In Eugene O’Neil’s play, *Days Without End*, John Loving, a Roman Catholic boy, prays that his parents, both of whom had been injured, might not die. But their lives were not saved by the kind of miracle he had expected and he loses his faith.

“Outwardly, at least, he grows up to become a skeptic and a cynic. Inwardly, however, John Loving keeps searching deeply for some answers. He tries Oriental religions; he tries philosophical cults; he joins secular meditation groups; he even becomes a member of an atheist club for a while. A friend of his - a priest - stands by him through it all.

“One evening, when John Loving and his priest friend are discussing the situation, John says, ‘A new savior must be born who will reveal to us how we can be safe from ourselves.’ The priest replies, quietly, ‘You are forgetting that men have such a Savior, Jack. All they need is to remember Him.’

“But John Loving is not to remember Him until much later. The setting was a small chapel silhouetted against the sky at dawn. John has been out walking. God is much on his mind and yet he is still in a state of rebellion. And so, it is partly against his will that John reluctantly opens the door of the Chapel and walks in. Then, almost before he knows what he is doing, he kneels before the cross and, for the first time since his parents’ death, he feels peace within himself, and he offers this simple prayer: ‘Thou hast conquered, Lord. Forgive the tortured soul of John Loving.’

“A beautiful example of someone who comes to that once-and-for-all moment of being able to say ‘Yes!’ to God.”¹ Amidst all the searching for answers from every other source of hope, John finally found the love and peace he so desperately desired from the One he had been avoiding the most - the Lord God Almighty.

Many people today are traveling a similar journey as John Loving did. They have for some reason given up on God and they are searching for something to replace Him. Their hearts are empty,

¹ (James F. Colaianni, *Sunday Sermons Treasury of Illustrations*, [Pleasantville, N.J.: Voicings Publications, 1982] pg. 278-9)

yet they know down deep that nothing can replace God, but they still rebel against Him, trying everything else first before finally, if at all, they come back to the Lord and seek His peace and presence in their life again.

No one can satisfy the human heart like the Lord Jesus. Nothing can bring peace like God Almighty. Wild parties and one night stands cannot bring satisfaction to the human heart. Gender transformation cannot bring peace to a confused soul. Alcohol and drug abuse cannot ease the troubles of a person in anguish. Sex trafficking and prostitution cannot provide true satisfaction for the longing of an intimate, stable relationship. Abortion of healthy babies cannot bring freedom from the guilty conscience brought to a person due to poor decisions. Pornography and internet sex chats cannot establish long-lasting loving relationships. Transcendental meditation does not bring quiet and peace to the soul. Empty religious practices cannot fill a soul with encouragement and hope. The abundance of riches and material possessions does not bring happiness. The dependence on government handouts does not provide healthy self-esteem and a positive outlook on life. Illegal immigration does not provide abundant new life to those searching for a fresh beginning. All of the things we do to try to replace God and find happiness and peace and contentment and security all fail when they are outside of the Lord our God. Nothing can replace a close walk with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

You see, God understands our need for Him. He knows that there is nothing else that can satisfy the human heart, so in order to provide us a Savior who can “save us from ourselves,” He sent Jesus to us so that we could draw near to Him, fall in love with Him, follow His commands and live as His disciples. The full embodiment of God was given to us in His Son, Jesus, so that we might find our hope and rest in Him.

Yet our world is so offended by the things of Jesus, that they do not want to recognize Him as the Savior of the world. In fact, many do whatever they can to eliminate any reference to Jesus, and to do away with Christianity altogether. They are so convinced that they can live their lives successfully without the presence of the Lord, yet they come to a shocking conclusion at the end of their lives that all

of their pursuits outside of The Lord God Almighty are empty, “*a chasing after the wind*” as the writer of Ecclesiastes states it (Ecc. 2:17), “*for without Him, who can eat or find enjoyment?*” (Ecc. 2:25).

However, those who find hope and life in Jesus Christ are forever changed and are given eternal hope for their life. When we grow close in our relationship with Jesus, we find His peace, His patience, His love, His forgiveness, His provision, His security, and His protection on a regular basis that quiets our fears, tranquilizes our anxiety, and stills the worries of our lives. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, the only Son of God, transforms our lives by His presence with us as we open up our hearts to let Him come into us and rule in us as Lord. He came to earth so that we could come to know and love God the Father, and that we might have the abundance that only He provides.

So as we look at the next section of the Nicene Creed that talks about who Jesus is and what He has done for us. We read, “*For us and for our salvation He (Jesus) came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human*” (Nicene Creed). He took on human form and became one of us so that we could become like Him. Jesus is the fullness of God, confined into the human form of a man, yet completely divine in all ways.

Today I read Luke 1:30-35 to remind you of God’s work of bringing Jesus here to the earth in human form. It was not through the power or desire of a man, but the power and desire of God to come be with us so that we might come to know Him and then seek Him. God worked outside of the natural way that a person comes to life in our world.

God invited a young woman to allow Him to do something miraculous in her. God inquired of Mary to let His Holy Spirit move in her and conceive within her womb a boy child who would be the One who would bring freedom to all who would put their trust in Him as their Savior. God did not force Himself upon Mary to make such a thing happen, but invited her to be a part of this wonderful event of bringing forth the Messiah to the world. He would be the fulfillment of all of the prophecies of the Messiah, and would become the King in the royal line of David, for not only the people of Israel, but for the whole world, so that we could be saved by Him. And Mary saw the majesty of it all, was willing to

be misunderstood and criticized and even condemned, because child birth never happened like that before. How could it happen like that then?

It was an amazing fulfillment of God's promise to Ahaz in scripture, "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7:14). It was something that only God could do, and He did it for us and for our salvation. On our own we cannot free ourselves from the stain and punishment of sin in our lives. So God provided a Savior in the most unusual way, to give us the chance to find eternal life.

The only one who can provide salvation for us is God, Himself. We cannot work hard enough to receive it. We cannot sacrifice enough to earn it. We cannot pray hard enough to merit it. We cannot pay enough to obtain it. We cannot gain redemption from our sins all on our own. Only God supplies a way for us to be fully released from our sin debt and find ourselves redeemed and forgiven. And it comes as we believe in, trust in, and follow Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son, our Savior.

But why would God do this? Why not just destroy all the wicked people of the world and then start over again as He did with Noah? Why not just focus on the righteous of the world and give up on all of the unrighteous and rebellious? Why not just give up on all of humanity?

It is because God loves us so much that He does not want anyone to perish, but that everyone might gain eternal life (John 3:16). God loves His creation and desires that we put our trust in Him and follow His ways so that He might bless us abundantly and help us to thrive so that we put an end to all of the wickedness and unrighteousness in our world. God desires that we let Him be our God so that He can give us all we need without any worry of disobedience or rebellion.

But sadly, sin came into the world and broke the perfect relationship that people had with God. As soon as there was sin in the world, everything perfect that God had made became tainted by that sin, and so death came onto the earth (Genesis 3). Ever since that time, there has been a separation between God and humans, and we have determined that we will be God. We've thrown God away from us, and without letting God be God and we being His servants, we come to destruction and ruin. Sin corrupted

our minds so that we want all the power and authority of God to do our own things without God.

Therefore we find a great chasm between us and God that can only be bridged by a perfect Sacrifice - Jesus Christ. Without Jesus, we are lost eternally, cast out from the presence of God because of our sins.

So God sent Jesus to us to bridge that gap. Jesus became like us so that we could understand God and stand in His presence, and not be overpowered by His magnificence and glory. Jesus confined Himself into a human body so that we could find God's way to Salvation. We cannot understand the fullness of God. We cannot stand in the glory of the Almighty and expect to live. We cannot comprehend His knowledge and wisdom. We cannot grasp His truth on our own, unless we humble ourselves and allow Jesus to touch our lives. So Jesus, becoming like us, leads us out of the deception of the darkness of this world and bring us into the safety of Heaven because of His willingness to take our sins upon Himself and pay the penalty for that sin so that we would not have to face that penalty on our own. I'll be talking more about this next week.

But Jesus came to us in our likeness, fully human in all ways, yet fully God at the same time. He resisted all temptation put out to Him by Satan so that we could have an example of how we might also resist evil. In chapter 4 of Luke's Gospel, we see that Satan tested Jesus with everything that we are tempted in as humans.

The first temptation was that of satisfying His human body. Jesus had been fasting for forty days in the wilderness, so He was hungry. Satan said, "*If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread*" (Luke 4:3). It was the temptation for all of us to satisfy all of the craving of this human body whenever we want to. Jesus had the power to do it - He was the creator of the Universe - so He could simply have said a word and the stone would have been transformed into something to eat. But Jesus refused, telling Satan that fulfilling the bodily cravings is not what is important. It is following the Word of God.

Then Satan tempted Jesus with everything in all the world. He said, "*I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship*

me, it will all be yours” (Luke 4:6). Think of it - having control of the whole world! Hundreds of men and women have lusted after that opportunity to have complete control over everything and everyone in the world. Power, authority, prestige, riches, dominion over the whole world - it was quite the opportunity for Jesus. But Jesus told Satan, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only”” (Luke 4:8).

We are not to become the Lord of the earth; that is Jesus’ position already. Though God has given Satan temporary authority in this world, ultimately Jesus is the Lord of the heavens and the earth already. So why would He acquiesce to bow down to Satan first in order to have that position of complete authority that He already has? Again, Satan was addressing the human nature within Jesus by tempting Him just like he tempts us. We have all things through Jesus, so why do we need to bow down to Satan’s temptation and seek our own power and authority?

Lastly, Satan tempted Jesus with the ultimate power of giving life. Satan said, “*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone”*” (Luke 4:9-10). It was a test to see if God was true to His word to protect His own. But Jesus already had the power to give life and so he says, “*It is written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test”*” (Luke 4:12).

Therefore, in Jesus we can see that we need not test God about the greatness of His love for us. We are His children when we put our trust in Jesus Christ, so we need not be afraid, or have to have God prove His protection for us. God has promised it to us, so we need to have faith in Him and believe in His promise, and then live **in** that promise.

Jesus’ life is THE witness of God in our world so that we can see Him, believe in Him, and trust in Him, and receive Him as our Savior, and then follow Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

That is why Paul could tell us in Rom. 3:22-24, “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and

fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Jesus came to this world for us and for our salvation so that we can be justified through His grace.

But that demands that we humble ourselves under His authority to do what He has called us to do and to be. We cannot expect God’s protection and provision if we are adamantly seeking our own way. We cannot abandon all of God’s laws and commands and still be called “His children.” We cannot tell God to take a hike from our lives and then expect that everything will go well. We cannot just say that we believe in God and then expect Him to guide and direct our lives for His glory. Even the demons believe in God, yet they are condemned because they have rebelled against God and rejected His authority in them. How can we expect God to treat us any differently if we do the same thing?

Yet many within the life of the church call themselves followers of Jesus Christ, yet go out and do whatever they like in complete contradiction to what God’s Word says. They call out, “Lord, Lord,” but they do not do what He says (Luke 6:46). How can God bless them? How can God do anything for them if they are adamantly against Him? God still loves them, enough to provide a way for them to come back to Him through Jesus, but God allows them to go their own way so that at some point they get so low that all they can do is look up. And then it is the time that they see Him, just like John Loving in the opening account.

God does not condone sin - in fact He absolutely hates it. So when we come before the Lord God with all our sins hanging out and we ask Him to bless us, how can God go against His perfect nature and provide for us when we are absolutely against Him? No! God says “Depart from Me...” (Matthew 25:41)!

But out of His great love for us, He calls us back to Him through Jesus. He works in our lives by His Holy Spirit, nudging us, convicting us, consoling us, and leading us to the point where we also can give our once-and-for-all “Yes” to God.

And so the writer of Hebrews gives us this great explanation of God’s work for us. Listen to

Hebrews 1:1-3. (READ Hebrews 1:1-3) This is Jesus Christ, the Lord of all life, the One who Is and Was and who Is to come, the beginning and the end. He is the One who gives us life, grants us forgiveness, provides for us His grace, and reveals to us eternal life so that when this life ends, we will be with Him in the Father's house in heaven. No one else can give this to us.

A couple of months ago, "I was in a restaurant having lunch and it came time to pay the bill. I asked the waiter to come over and bring me the bill. He left only to come back a few minutes later and declare that I had no bill. He told me that somebody else in the restaurant had picked up the tab. Now, I would have been a fool to sit there and argue with the waiter. I would have been a fool not to accept the gift. All I could do was say thank you. I showed gratitude for a price that had already been paid.

"God wants us to accept His gift. He has paid our tab. Some people are fools because they refuse to accept God's free gift. The price of salvation has already been paid and God's Son, Jesus, has picked up the tab." (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 262)

"For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human" so that we might be free from sin and death, but have eternal life with Him. Don't reject His gift! Receive it, and make sure to thank Him for it, and then follow Him all your days. Let's pray.

Father, You have given us a great gift, Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. But we have to believe in Him, receive Him, and accept Him as our Savior in order that we might benefit from Your great gift. So many of us try to earn heaven on our own, in absence of You, and we want to do our own thing, not follow Your laws and commandments. Forgive us! Keep calling us out of the things of this world so that we might come to fully recognize that Jesus is the Only One who can give us the peace and joy that we so eagerly desire. Keep drawing us near to You so that we might humble ourselves to the authority of Jesus and find His protection and care. Continue to nudge us away from our own determination and willfulness, to find Your will and way for us. Give us the courage to submit our whole life to You, for Your glory, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.