

**THE RISEN CHRIST - THE ARK OF SALVATION
I PETER 3:18-22**

NEED: SALVATION

PROPOSITION: WE CAN BE SAVED FROM THE COMING JUDGMENT
BY PLACING OUR FAITH IN THE RISEN CHRIST.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD PERSONS TO CONFESS THEIR FAITH IN
CHRIST THROUGH BELIEVER'S BAPTISM.

INTRODUCTION:
SAVED!

SAVED OR LOST? It is not surprising that contemporary man is uncomfortable with these religious categories of saved or lost. If you ever took training to be a lifeguard, you will remember one of the first lessons. You were taught to anticipate that the person who was in need to rescue would in all likelihood resist your efforts to rescue them. Usually when a person is in danger of drowning, they resist anyone who attempts to rescue them. They seem to have an innate feeling that they will work it out themselves. Even though it is obvious to everyone else that the lifeguard is their only hope, they will refuse to avail themselves of his or her efforts. It is not uncommon that the lifeguard will have to immobilize the person he or she is seeking to rescue. Just as this is true in the physical realm, it is also true in the spiritual realm. We resist the idea of needing to be saved.

In the early history of the world when God sent the great flood that brought destruction to all of humankind, He made available a means of salvation. Noah worked for 120 years building an ark, warning his fellow citizens that a day of reckoning was coming, inviting them to join him in the safety of the ark, but when it was all finished only eight souls

were saved. The only ones availing themselves of safety in the ark was Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives...only eight souls were saved.

Peter wants us to understand that what the ark was in the day of Noah, the risen Christ is in our day. This is the basic thrust of the text that is before us in this very complex paragraph. God has made salvation available in Jesus, Jesus is the ark of salvation for all who are perishing.

On this resurrection Sunday when we are remembering the great triumph of Christ over death, it will be helpful to us to consider its implication for our salvation.

I. BECAUSE OF HUMAN SIN THE HUMAN FAMILY FACES A TERRIBLE JUDGMENT.

The first universal judgment from the hand of God came by water. God loosed water from the deep of the earth and brought torrential rains from the heavens above until the whole earth was covered with water. The water rose so high that it covered even the heights of the mountains. There was no place of safety on the surface of the planet. We are warned in scripture that there will be another universal day of judgment for human kind. However, the next judgment will not involve water, but will rather involve a manifestation of the presence of God in fiery indignation. Because of this coming judgment for humankind we are all in need of an ark of salvation.

1. Individually.

It is safe to speak of our individual need of salvation. The scriptures declare to us, "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment." If in the mercy of God we are not confronted with the judgment of God here on earth in our lifetime, after death there will surely be that inevitable encounter with God in judgment. The news has been taken up with the tragic suicidal death of the group of misguided souls out on the West Coast this past week. How ironic that they would call their cultic group "The Gate of Heaven." Evidently they anticipated that when they died they would be picked up in some space ship and ferried out into space somewhere. But as surely as we assemble in this room this morning what they encountered was not a spaceship. When they passed through the gates of death they found themselves confronted by the holy angels of God that transported them into the realm of the dead and they suddenly found themselves confronted with the life they had lived and the rebellion they had manifested against the one true and living God. They are in confinement this morning awaiting that final day when God shall set His great white throne up and will call all of the dead to stand before Him.

You and I need to be reminded that we have an appointment with God in judgment. God has already scheduled your day in court. You will stand before Him without any plea unless something is done to rescue you from that judgment.

2. Collectively.

Just as each individual is destined for judgment, so is the whole of the human family.

The scriptures make clear this planet on which you and I live will be the scene of another

great manifestation of the judgment of God. The first involved life destroying water, but the second will involve horrors even worse. As you read the words of scriptures you are warned, “the end of all things is at hand.” Our world is sailing along this morning with its indifference toward God as though things will always continue as they have always been. We need to be warned - judgment is coming. We need to hear the word of the prophet declaring, “Prepare to meet thy God!”

So, the truth that is in the background of this paragraph in this little letter from Peter is that because of human sin the whole family of man is moving toward a terrible judgment. Humankind is in desperate need of salvation from judgment.

II. THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION CHRIST JESUS BECAME THE ARK OF SALVATION.

After his word about that little group saved in the day of Noah, Peter begins to write about the possibility of salvation from the judgment to come. He begins then to refer to the water. He likens the water that submerged the earth in judgment in the day of Noah with the waters of baptism. The first reading of the passage might lead to the conclusion that salvation is in the water. Peter writes, “And this water symbolizes Baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.” However, Peter does not want us to make this error so he adds the word, “It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” It is the risen Christ who has the saving power - not the waters of baptism. Through His death and resurrection Jesus has become the ark of salvation for all who will believe.

1. By His death He has experienced the judgment of God for us.

It might be appropriate to say that we are saved by baptism. However, I would need to add quickly, not our baptism but his baptism. Jesus referred to the ordeal of the cross as being a “ baptism.” It was that moment when he was immersed in to the death of sinners like Noah’s ark was surrounded by the waters of judgment. It was the moment in which the judgment of our sin fell upon him.

We have already heard the word of Peter, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” On the cross he is experienced our judgment. On the cross he took the sinners place.

Someone asked this week if Jesus did not go to suffer for our sins while he was in the grave. We dealt with this last Sunday. Jesus did not go to Hell to suffer for our sins. The Hell that Jesus knew took place on the cross. It was in those moments of darkness when he cried out in the language of the Psalmist, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” that Jesus experienced the agonies and the realities of our Hell. In those condensed moments eternity and time came together as the incarnate Son of God was made to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. It was that death at the cross that made him the ark of salvation for the perishing.

That is the reason that Paul can write to the Romans, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” If you are in Christ there is no

condemnation from judgment because your condemnation has been already endured by Christ on your behalf. He has already experienced the separation from God as your representative at the cross. You were condemned in Him so that you may be saved in Him.

2. Through His resurrection He moves to the position to be the Savior for all humankind.

When Jesus Christ came forth from the grave it was an outward sign that God had indeed accepted what He did at the cross on our behalf. To further indicate that this was true God exalted Him to His right hand. Peter declares it like this: “Who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand - with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to Him.” This is a marvelous truth. This is an encouraging truth. Since He is at the right hand of God and all angelic and spiritual authorities are under His authority, there is no power in the universe to bring about our condemnation. If you are in Christ you are saved eternally.

You will remember the word of Paul in Romans again, “Who will bring any charge against those God has chosen? It is God who justifies.” Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? - No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” Since Jesus

Christ is exalted to the right hand of the Father he is using that position to guarantee our salvation. He sits there as our advocate and representative. He sits there to intercede for us as we stumble along this pathway.

“What a glorious truth! Through His death and resurrection Jesus has become the Ark of Salvation for all who will believe. This is the good news of Easter this morning. Jesus died and was raised from the dead and is now to this generation what the Ark was in that ancient generation of Noah. In that day you were saved if you were in the Ark. In our day you are saved if you are in Christ. He is the Ark of Salvation.

III. YOU CAN ENTER THE SAFETY OF THE ARK OF SALVATION

THROUGH THE FAITH THAT MAKES ITS CONFESSION IN BAPTISM.

Peter gives an emphasis in this passage that has been forgotten among us in our generation. In our attempt to make clear that baptism does not save, we have been guilty of discounting the value of baptism. We need to hear what Peter says in this passage. He declares, “And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.” The word translated “symbolizes” is the word for anti-type. It is something that corresponds to or is a counterpart to. In this case the reality is salvation and the symbol or the figure is baptism.

In relating it to the Old Testament of Noah and his family it is well to remember that the water in the day of Noah is the water of judgment. They were saved in the Ark and by the

Ark not by the water. However, the water did destroy the world of humankind that had become so corrupt and was a danger to Noah and to his family.

When a person is baptized they are symbolizing this great salvation of God. They are declaring in the act of baptism that Christ has passed through the waters of judgment on their behalf and is now their Ark of Salvation. It is the public way that one becoming a Christian allows the whole world to know that Jesus and Jesus alone is their savior. In that act of being immersed in water and coming up out of the water they bear witness to their confidence in the Christ who died and has been raised from the dead. A verbal witness to this is not enough. Jesus asked each of His disciples to give this symbolic testimony to their faith.

Another word used in this passage that is instructive for us concerning how we get into the Ark is “Not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.” Peter wants us to understand that this salvation involves more than just getting the body wet and removing from it some outward crust of dirt. It involves something that is basic to the whole person. He uses the word translated here “pledge.” He speaks of “the pledge of a good conscience toward God.” The word translated pledge has several possible meanings. It would appear that in this context the idea in the Word is a reference to an early practice when persons were baptized as new Christians. Evidently at their baptism a question was put to them. They made a response to the question before they were baptized. The question evidently concerned their placing their whole faith in Jesus Christ and concerned their commitment to be His disciples regardless of what the

price may be. When they were baptized, it was a visual, symbolic pledge of themselves to Jesus Christ as His disciple. They were erecting a monument to their commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In many cases in that ancient world just to be baptized could cost you dearly. This is still true in much of our world. Across that Islamic belt through the Middle East and across Africa to be baptized can still be the same thing as signing your death certificate.

The truth that we need to see is that baptism is the New Testament way of publicly declaring yourself to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. In our day we ask people to walk down an aisle, to pray a prayer, fill out a card, stand in front of a congregation, and we call that “making a public profession of faith.” While I do not think that practice is particularly wrong, it is less than the New Testament pattern. In the New Testament you demonstrated that you had become a follower of Jesus not by walking down an aisle, praying a prayer, signing a card, but rather by walking out into the waters and being immersed in water in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They did not see any saving power in the baptism waters themselves, but they did see saving power in the faith that that baptism symbolized. And those that were assumed to be in the Ark of Salvation, in Christ, were those who had publicly demonstrated it in believer’s baptism.

On this Easter Sunday there are numbers of people here who have never publicly or openly given that kind of confession of faith. You may have been sprinkled as an infant but that was not this kind of baptism. This kind of baptism is not something that your

parents choose for you, rather it is something that you choose to do yourself. Some of you have felt like everything was alright because you prayed in a meeting sometime and they told you you were saved. You feel like you have made a public profession of faith. But I declare to you on the authority of Holy Scripture that until you have been baptized in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit you have not given the New Testament confession of faith.

Have you come to that place in your life that you do believe that Jesus is the only Ark of Salvation? Have you come to the place that you are willing to stake your hope of eternal life on Jesus Christ and His faithfulness? Have you come to the place that you are ready for the whole world to know that for you Jesus is the only Savior? If the answer to those questions is “yes,” then the time has come for you to be baptized. If the answers to those questions is “no” then baptism would be only a religious gesture to you. We enter the Ark by faith and we declare that faith in the waters of baptism.

Thank God that there is an Ark of Salvation!