

**THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY
EPHESIANS 5:23**

NEED: TO LOOK TO JESUS ALONE AS THE GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP AND SAVIOR OF THE BODY.

PROPOSITION: JESUS ALONE IS THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH.

OBJECTIVE: TO FOCUS THE ATTENTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH UPON JESUS AS THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY. THE CHURCH.

INTRODUCTION:

I had an unforgettable experience with the Lord while I was praying about returning to be your pastor nine years ago. I was aware of some of the problems and needs that were in this congregation. Because of my love for you, there was a natural inclination to want to come and to help solve those problems. While I was in Corpus Christi, Texas, doing a prayer conference, I was praying about you and my relationship to you. It was during that prayer time that the Lord focused my attention upon the text of the morning and helped me to see Jesus as the Savior of the Body.

The Word the Lord showed me that morning was first a rebuke to me. There had been an inclination to see myself as the savior of the Body. I thought, "I will go back to First Baptist Church and use my skills and experience to meet the needs of that congregation and every thing will be well." The Lord demonstrated to me clearly that morning that I was not to be the savior of the body—that role was already assigned in God's plans. He and He alone is the Savior of the Body. He might use me in some way to contribute to the welfare of the Body, but He and He alone would be the Savior.

But it was more than just a word of rebuke. It was also a tremendous word of encouragement. This meant that I could come back to First Baptist Church with strong confidence. It would not be my responsibility to save the church. It would be my responsibility to serve the Savior of the Church and to allow Him to save His church in any way that pleased Him. So as we begin to draw to a close these nine years of ministry, I want to remind you of this truth -- D. L. Lowrie has not done anything that will make any lasting difference. D. L. Lowrie is not the Savior of the Church. Jesus Christ reserves that title and that work for Himself. He and He alone is the Savior of the Body.

I want to share that Word with you, but I have another purpose in sharing it with you. It is the inclination of a church like this one when it begins the search for a new pastor to begin to look for a Savior. They look for a man who has had a remarkable record some place, who will come and replicate in their church what he has done where he is. They look at the work that has been done where he is and draw a false conclusion. They see it as though it were a work of man, when if it has any value, it is the work of the true Savior. I want us to take this word from Paul that is found in the context of admonition to Christian wives and to see its relevance to us in our situation.

It is such an encouraging word when you know that Jesus is the head of the church and the Savior of the Body.

What are the implications of this title? What can we look to Jesus to be and to do as the Savior of the Body?

I. JESUS IS THE REDEEMER OF THE CHURCH.

It is obvious that the reference to "the body" is a reference to the church. In the context, it could be nothing else. It is that corporate group, bound together by the indwelling Holy Spirit, that constitutes the body of Christ. And Jesus has this special relationship with this corporate group, He is not only the Savior of the individuals that make up the group, He is also the Savior of the Body. He has redeemed the individuals, but He has also redeemed the body.

1. The price of redemption.

The word redemption carries with it the idea of the payment of a price. While Paul does not use this particular word in this passage, he does make reference to the redemption of the body. In this context he says, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless." "Gave himself up for her" --with these words He points us to the price of the redemption. The price of redemption was the life of the Lord Jesus laid down upon the altar of the cross.

In a message recorded in the book of Acts to some of the leadership from this same Ephesian Church, Paul spoke this word: "Be shepards of the church of God which He bought with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Oh, what a word about the church! This corporate body, this body of Christ, was bought with the blood of God, even Jesus the

Son of God. This we must never forget. I have given to you some of my years of life in ministry, but Jesus gave Himself as the sacrificial Lamb for this body.

2. The purpose of the redemption..

In this same word to husbands and wives we find an indication about the purpose of His redemptive work. The Apostle is still referring to the church as the corporate body of Christ when he says, "Just as Christ loved the church and give himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself a radiant church." Did you catch the verbs that are used in this passage? His purpose was "to make her holy." The word "holy" reminds us that He did what He did at the cross to set the body apart to Himself. We must never forget the One to whom we belong. This church has a lot of relationships. It has a relationship to this community. It has a relationship to different denominational entities, such as the Lubbock Baptist Association, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Southern Baptist Convention, but in the ultimate sense this church does not belong to any of these entities. It serves the community and cooperates with the denominational groups for world evangelism, but it does not belong to either of these. This church has been set apart as the exclusive property of the eternal God by the blood of His Son poured out on the cross. He did what He did to make her holy.

But the purpose goes beyond this — "to present her." When He made her holy in time, He had eternity in view. The presentation to which the apostle refers is an eschatological event; one that will take place when time is no more. He, by the redemptive power of His

blood, set us apart so that in the consummation of all things we could be presented to Himself as a beautiful bride dressed in perfect righteousness — "holy and blameless." This is all the work of the Savior. He is the Savior of the body.

II. JESUS IS THE PROTECTOR OF THE BODY.

Scholars who give us the background of this word "Savior" emphasize the role of the protector. Some believe that this is the primary emphasis in this passage and the one that models a role for a husband for he is to be the protection around his wife.

The Scriptures makes it clear that the church needs a savior. The church has enemies without and within from which it needs protection. There is vulnerability on the part of the church if it is not under the protection of the Savior.

1. He protects from enemies without.

To this same group of spiritual leaders from Ephesus, in the message he delivered to them at Miletus, Paul referred to these enemies without. He said, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come among you and will not spare the flock" (Acts 20:29). As I studied this passage, it occurred to me that wolves and shepherds have something in common. The pastor is an undershepherd looking after the welfare of the body. He loves and cares for His sheep. But wolves love sheep! They love them for what they can get out of them. They love them for selfish, lustful reasons. They want to use them for food. Paul was warning the leadership of the Ephesian Church that there would be "savage wolves" that would come against the flock and would be a threat to the welfare of the flock.

The wolves are still with us. There are those who will look upon First Baptist Church and see in it an opportunity to gratify themselves or to accomplish some selfish agenda that they may have. They will not be interested in the welfare of the Church, but only in their selfish and misguided agenda. Who is to protect the church? Anyone who would come against this congregation from without to do it harm needs to remember that this congregation is under the protectorate of the Savior Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. He protects from enemies within.

In the address that he gave to the Ephesian elders, the Apostle referred to the enemies within. He said to them, "Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). Paul recognized that it is possible for a member of the Church to be a threat to the welfare of the Church. He warned these spiritual leaders that there would be some who would surface right in the midst of the fellowship itself to misguide and misuse the congregation.

Every church still faces such a threat. One of the tragic, tragic things that have happened over the last twenty years is the break up and division of so many churches. So many times the break up was not caused by some outside force, but rather by some misguided members within the congregation itself, members who have lost sight of the ultimate purpose of the church and sought to push it in directions that the Lord of the Church would not want His church to go.

We need to be reminded that Jesus is the Savior of the Body. Anyone who will do harm to the Body of Christ will be in trouble with the Savior of the Body. They will bring down destruction upon themselves because of the harm they have done to the Body. Jesus is the protector of the Church.

This is a tremendous source of encouragement to me. I know that these are treacherous times for the body. I know that there are those who would do harm to this body. But as a member of this church, along with you, I want to look to Jesus to be the Savior of the Body. I want to remind Him in my prayers day by day over the months to come, "Jesus, you are Savior of the Body. You are the protector of the First Baptist Church! I put your church under your care so that you can protect them from any enemy that may come from without or from within.

III. JESUS IS THE PROVIDER FOR THE CHURCH.

We must not see this word "Savior" in just a narrow sense. To be the Savior of the Body is a broad concept. It means that Jesus is the one who ultimately provides for the Church what ever the Church may need to function as His body in the earth. This again is a tremendous source of encouragement.

1. He provides the leadership of the church.

Do you know where a church finds a new pastor? Do you know who is responsible for providing this church a new pastor? You do not find God's man in consultation with Nashville, or Rome, or Dallas, or any place else. You find the shepherd for this

congregation by looking to the Savior of the Church. It is a part of His responsibility to provide the leaders that this Church needs, including the pastoral leader.

You will remember that instructive word that Paul wrote earlier in this same letter: "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastor and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11, 12). Could anything be clearer? It is the risen and ascended Lord who gives the leaders that the Church needs so that the Church can be built up. He is the one who has provided for the leadership of the congregation.

This is one of our Lord's most important ministries with reference to His Body. It is more important than many of the things we focus on. It is more important than budgets and building programs. It is more important than other decisions over which we struggle. The most important thing the Lord Jesus does for this Church is to provide for it His appointed and anointed leaders that can be used in the building up of the body.

2. He provides guidance for the body.

This brings us back to one of our Lord's favorite metaphors that He used when He called Himself "the good Shepard." In that famous passage in John 10, Jesus described the role of the shepard. We usually interpret that passage in a personal sense, and that is not inappropriate, but much of the passage is in the congregational, flock, plural sense. He says in that passage, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them

also. They, too, will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." So Jesus is not only the shepherd of the individual, but He is also the shepherd of the flock. And it is in this contest that He says, "When He has brought out all of His own, He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. But they will never follow a stranger, in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice" (John 10:4-5). What does a church do when she needs an undershepherd? To whom does she look for leadership? Who will be their counselor and guide? I am not trying to be over dramatic or mystical, but you look to the Lord Jesus. He has reserved to Himself the title, the "Savior of the body." You must never forget this! He is committed to guide His sheep into the paths of righteousness for His namesake. For this reason over the weeks to come we need to come, we need to humble ourselves in prayer before the Savior of the Body and position ourselves to be led by Him as we select a Search Committee as they go in search of the man that God has been preparing for the place of pastor in this body.

3. He prospers the body.

As the provider for the Body, it includes bringing grace and prosperity upon the Body. The students of the Greek language indicate that this word Savior includes this thought. A savior is one who brings blessings and prosperity upon another. This is the work of the Lord Jesus. This reminds me of a descriptive word that is found in the Acts of Apostles: "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in number, living in the fear of the Lord" (Acts 9:31). What does it take to prosper the work of a local congregation? What is required for

a church to be successful in its ministries? What is required is the work of the wonderful Savior of the Body, the Lord Jesus. He is the one who grants to the Church a time of peace. He is the one who pours out upon the Church overcoming strength. He is the One who gives encouragement to the Church by the Holy Spirit. He is the one that causes the Church to multiply in number as it walks in the fear of the Lord.

Do you see the implication of this from where we are as a Church? In some ways, this is an hour of tremendous opportunity for us. Sometimes it is not until God removes a human leader that the Body is able to focus upon the Savior of the Body like it ought to. Nothing that is essential to the life and ministry of this Church was changed by my retirement announcement the last Lord's Day. Undershepards come and undershepards go, but the great Shepard of the Sheep, the Savior of the Body, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The only threat to the welfare of this Body is that some way we would trust someone else to be the Savior, or we would turn to some other source besides Jesus. As long as this Church keeps its focus upon the Lord Jesus and gives itself in trust and obedience to Him, this Church is safe. It is as safe as it is possible for any thing to be on the earth because it is under the care of the omnipotent Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ!

I am ready for Jesus to be to us all that He is and as the Savior of the Body. Are you ready?

IV. JESUS IS THE HEALER OF THE BODY.

The Greek verb that we translate “save” can also be translated “heal”. In fact, it is so translated a number of the times in the Gospel. The savior heals!

1. He heals the wounds of the church.

The wounds can be deadly if they are not healed. The wounds may be self-inflicted, and usually are in the case of the church. The wounds may come from the hands of the enemy. Satan is set upon your destruction.

2. He heals the sicknesses of the church.

The sicknesses may manifest themselves in different ways. Sometimes it is manifest in the relations in the church. There is an absence of love that causes a sickness. Sometimes it may be doctrinal—sick thinking. Sometimes it may be manifest in worldiness, and over-indulgence in the stuff of the world can cause sickness.

In the gospel record we are told that Jesus came to heal the sick. He will heal your church if you will bring your wounds and your sickness to him. I am speaking of spiritual wounds and spiritual sicknesses.