

## DIFFERENT WAY OF SALVATION

There are a lot of things people do that are common, but they are in fact completely wrong. To work into these let's consider the English language. One of the common mistakes is a misuse of the word its or it's. Which is the correct sentence? Incorrect: I don't believe its finally Sunday. Correct: I don't believe it's (it is) finally Sunday. Incorrect: The cat was licking it's tail. Correct: The cat was licking its tail. Better still: Cats are gross. Or maybe you can tell me what is wrong with this sentence. *The man came to Amazing Love and he did not eat a donut before leaving.* What is this sentence missing? A comma So correct: The man came to Amazing Love, and he did eat a donut before leaving. In Chicago traffic there is something common, but completely wrong. When someone is trying to merge into traffic, it is common for the other person who sees you better than you can see them to speed up and cut you off. Thinking all the while I got here first, and my life is better for the .5 seconds I just saved myself for cutting you off. When comes to hot dogs. There is something common to do with them, but for Chicagoans is completely wrong. And that is ketchup.

I remember being confronted with something very common, but wrong in my own life. I had been experiencing incredible lower back problems. And I went into to get it checked out, and medical expert was able to point out my problem. See it is common for me to slouch as I sit all day. It's also common for me to sit to low in my chairs and have my knees to high. But what was common bad posture was completely wrong.

Has this ever happened to you, you had it pointed out to you by a doctor, a friend, an English teacher something you did and it was very common, but was completely wrong.

We've come to consider spiritual matters this morning. And I especially wanted to welcome you if you're new to this environment. It may be common to feel nervous or scared in a new place, but you are completely welcome here. And as we turn our attention to spiritual matters there are ways that seem common to mankind that are completely wrong when it comes to salvation. Common is: *My salvation depends on me.* And this is so common that innately people are on quest to prove that who I am is good enough to get to heaven.

So common is comparison to someone worse, to prop me up. Like these 2 flowers. I know I may have some brown spots. But I'm not this flower (dead). Like look how beautiful I am in comparison. And so I prove my goodness when I prop up my beauty vs the worst of this world. And we have conversations about corrupt politicians, scandalous neighbors and co-workers, and failing friends and relatives. And sometimes it's a quest or part of it is to prop ourselves up and be like - look at my beauty compared to those. I'm good to God.

Or common is God the cosmic collector of all my good. Like I know someone is watching and someone sees. So God is collecting our good works like candy in a jar. God you saw how well I worked today. Booyah. God, you saw me forgive and try to love the difficult one. God you see my mad parenting skills. God I volunteered for church. God I gave to the orphans. God I, I, I. And hopefully there will be enough candy to get that jar filled. But let's

not talk about the ramifications about the evil have done, and what they deserve. Let's not talk about God's cosmic eye when I was in college, or strung out, or having a bad day, or at my worst.

Concerning our approaches there is a proverb that strikes us. Where God would meet us, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12) There's a common approach. That salvation depends on me. And these are the ways I prove my goodness, my acceptance to a holy God.

Well today we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. And let me give you a background of what was common 500 years ago. Common was still my salvation depends on me, and common was buying your way. Not comparing your way, but buying your way. The Catholic Church was selling "indulgences" which were pieces of paper you could buy so that you, your loved ones, or ones who had already passed away could go to heaven. And they were so common that they even had a jingle. Reminds me of Pepsi, they're current slogan is Live for now, when I grew up it was the choice of the next generation. And they have the sponsorship now of JT. Justin Timberlake who is doing the Pepsi Super Bowl halftime show. So also with indulgences they had a jingle a slogan, "When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." And they too hired a JT as their representative. Johann Tetzel was their poster boy going around to sell these pieces of paper to buy your way to heaven. All fueling this idea that my salvation depends on me. But 500 years ago on October 31st, 1517 Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. These theses were written arguments against the Catholic Church, and particularly against the sell of indulgences to buy your salvation. Consider a translation of thesis 33, "Do not believe those who say a papal indulgence is a wonderful gift which allows salvation." And this was the start of the break away from a common but wrong form of salvation. Into a different way to salvation.

And what we get to consider today is a phrase "the righteousness of God", and a book that changed Luther and the landscape of religion. That presented a different way of salvation. We consider the book of Romans which when properly understood Luther said this book and his translating of the righteousness of God led to the gates of heaven being opened to him. Consider this quote from Luther's study on Romans 1, "At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I ... began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith... Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open." See in this book called Romans it revealed a different way. And that different way, than any other religion, than the thoughts at Luther's time, than the religious thoughts of this day, and that different way of salvation revealed is this: *My salvation depends on Jesus*. Which is backed up by the words of Jesus himself who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

So let's dive into the book that set Luther free, and by which we too are set free. We read from Romans chapter 3. There it is. Salvation as a gift from Jesus, by Jesus to be received through faith. Can you turn to your neighbor and give them this tongue twister. Say "His propitiation is your peace." His propitiation is your peace.

How many of you have ever been indoor rock climbing? It can be a lot fun if you have done it. This past week I took our girls to skyzone that trampoline place, and among other things

they had this rock climbing wall. Now the instructor was kind enough to point out the easy rock courses to climb, and direct us away from the hard ones. They were color coded, and so red was green was easy, and red ok. But the neon blue that was hard. And it was a blast. Nadia, Bella, and I were able to get up some of the easy tracks and then fall back into 5 feet deep of a foam pit. But I pretty sure they made some of the rock trails impossible, like the neon blue. The type were unless you Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible, there is no possible way you are going to get up. Have you ever come across the impossible?

What the word of God sets up is an impossible course, an track that no one, not even Tom Cruise has climbed up. And the impossibility is salvation through the law. And if you don't believe me let's consider the laws and ways of God. The course he set out that if you reach the top of it will lead to God.

"Love your family and your friends." Ok you might say. Here's the easy coarse. The red rock path. I think I might actually get to the top of this one. In fact I would imagine that there are many of you gathered here today who sincerely love your family and your friends and you do your best. Let's step it up, "Love the needy." Jesus said believers will cloth the naked and feed the starving. And some have done this. It's commendable. Green path. Nailed it. We're not done yet, "Love the stranger and the outsider." Jesus told a parable about a Good Samaritan who cared for someone he had never met. Well, this is getting harder. I usually love those who show love to me first. And here's the hardest, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44) Here's the neon blue path. And we're like I'm not sure I have the spiritual muscles to do that track. You're saying to the bully who picked on me, to the co-worker stealing my credit, to the family member who hasn't changed. Ah, Uh, this seems impossible. And if it wasn't impossible yet. God reminds us through Paul, "Love never fails." (1 Corinthians 13:8) Can you go back to all those relationships and say I have always been perfect love to my family and friends. I've always been perfect love to strangers, the needy, and enemies. And I have set up a course through Scripture hard enough. Let me show you a climb that goes straight up and backwards completely flat with nothing to hold onto. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." (James 2:10) I can go most of my life doing all those things well, but if on my 50th birthday I wake up and don't. I'm done and haven't made it.

So here's the first take away. *Salvation that depends on me is an impossibility.* It's trying to climb a wall that goes straight up and backward with no footholds. It's not going to happen. Ever. And so Paul said to us, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin." All we know through the demands of God is this, that we have failed. And that we will stand in front of God someday for all we did. And it won't work to say but I was better than most, it won't work to say you remember that day, that week, that season of my life where I got it mostly right? That counts right? And the answer is no. Later on it says no, For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. ALL! Each and everyone of us.

Luther felt the weight of his sin, and the impossibility of the being perfect in God's eyes. And because of this he was tormented. Peace was not with him. When he thought salvation was

up to him, he was restless and thought of God as an angry impossible God to please, 'cause he couldn't do it. He was known for being a spotless monk. Exemplary in prayer, enduring extreme cold without a blanket, flogging himself, fasting. He was so good that at times of confession to a priest, he would hear come back when you have some real sins to confess. He said about himself, "If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I." But still there was no peace. For as good as he was. He knew deep inside he missed the mark of perfection. He knew he had stumbled at one point, and that punishment was due him.

You ever been there? Tormented by the weight, the guilt of your sin and shame. See we like to put on a good front, and we're good at it. We convince other people we are good to go, we even convince ourselves at times nothing wrong here, nothing to see here. "These are not the droids you are looking for." I am a perfect picture of peace. But in sober reflection we know the truth. That the times of our failing haven't been little, but a lot. The seasons of sinful activity as great as any season of personal righteousness. So we too find ourselves accountable to God, and wondering how in the world can we get to place of peace.

But there is an answer. There is hope. The gates of heaven are opened to us and to all. Why? v.21 "But now *apart from the law* the righteousness of God has been made known." And this teaching changes everything. This teaching brings hope and peace to all who have heard it. And it's not only apart from the law. It's a gift. It says here in v.24 the literal translation, "being justified as a gift by His grace" So this different way of salvation compared to what is common is a gift. And so we have the impossible rock climbing course where we have to get to the top or we have a gift that is ours to receive by faith. I know which one I want. (Hold the gift).

What may then be common to hear about salvation is climb the highest mountain and swim the deepest sea, and only then can you be set free. But when I'm holding the gift of salvation through Jesus. Then I understand this Gospel, this good news. That he climbed the highest mountain called Golgotha. Where he gave his life for us on the cross. To pay for the penalty of all our sins. And he swam the deepest sea of the grave. And he came out on the other side, rising on the third day so I could be set free. So you could be set free. And Luther and us as Christians and me as pastor now have the wonderful privilege of passing around this gift. Do you know of Jesus works for you, his perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. Do you know this is for you. Receive it. Believe it. (Who can I pass this to) Pass it around. Let everyone know. Tell the world about this gift of grace. It's amazing. It set's captives free. It releases from shame, guilt and torment. It breaks the chains. This is the message that was revealed clearly again at the Reformation, and which we hold onto with tooth and nail. This message that *Salvation that depends on Jesus is the truth.*

For Jesus Christ is our propitiation. And some might wonder what is propitiation. Well, it's referred to in v.25 calling Jesus a sacrifice of atonement. But it is illustrated in a commercial that is being played even now. It is a Bud Light commercial. Now about this drinking alcohol is not a sin, but getting drunk is. Luther and monks were known for drinking beer. So I will show. But in this commercial there are many people trying to appease the king with gifts. There is one gift that gets commended another that gets rejected. Here it is. I think that is a knock on craft brew. But here it is. When we come before the King with our works. Salvation depending on me, which in this case is spiced mead. We enter the pit of despair separated from God. When

we though bring Jesus and the gift of his righteousness, we get the Father's approval. The declaration and acceptance from heaven itself.

So today we cling to the cross of Jesus and we say Father for this reason, and this alone accept me, forgive me, and welcome me into your kingdom. And the answer of heaven is yes. Not dilly, dilly. But with this I am well pleased.

And what is the result of all of this? One practical takeaway for this morning.

One of the greatest stories we tell in the church is the story of the Prodigal Son. The one son asks for all of Dad's money, spends it in reckless, wild living - and then has the gall to want to come home. He feels guilty, wondering if the Father will forgive. His struggle is feeling beat up by the weight of his sin. But how many sons are in the story. 2. The older brother stays at home watching what the younger son did, and how he wasted the Father's money. And he has this air of superiority. Father I've been here in the house all the while. Father why can't I feast like this with my friends - I didn't do anything wrong. His struggle is with boasting. But the Gospel is this. That the younger son doesn't need to feel beat up, he's forgiven by the Father's goodness. And the older son shouldn't boast, because he still needs the Father's forgiveness and goodness too.

And it makes me wonder which do you and I struggle with. Some of you might have such high expectations of yourself, that you realize how often you let yourself down. You come in with depressing self-talk. You say things to yourself you wouldn't say about anyone else. I'm such a moron, why did I do that, who could love me. You are the younger son. Some of you struggle with boasting. God you see me here today. God you saw what I've been doing for you as a volunteer and what I give. God I don't have to tell you how good of a neighbor, how good of a family member I am. God I'm so glad I am not like those uglier flowers in the world, that I am a bit brighter and shinier. Your struggle is as the older son.

And I don't know where you are. But here is the truth. *Salvation that depends on Jesus leaves no room for boasting or for being beat up.* v.27 says, "27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded." If I'm saved by grace and grace alone I can't claim anything before God or anyone else. No by the grace of God I am what I am. And the opposite is true of this as well. If I'm saved by grace of God. I don't have to go around feeling beat up and put down. I am right today before God, before the only opinion that matters. How good is this grace.

Friends I hope you see how there is a different way of salvation over what is common. It is something that God used Luther to reveal, and to which we hold onto. It props up the works and the name of Jesus, where we place all of our hope. And it leaves us in a beautiful spot - neither beat up or boasting. But simply saying what a Beautiful Savior we truly have. Let me pray for you.