

The Salvation That Almost Never Was

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And he saw that it was all good. But he wanted to receive praise and worship. He receives glory in praise. We sing the song “Ain’t No Rock” about how the rocks will cry out in our place if we don’t worship God. When wind blows through the trees or when the birds sing; they’re all giving God praise. That praise is directed because that’s the way they were designed. God desires praise, glory and honor from someone or something that didn’t have to do that. So, he created man and gave him the choice: serve and praise God, or not. When he created man, he knew that man would fall because man is not perfect.

But, he had a plan so that mankind could receive salvation and return again to fellowship with him thru the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. But sometimes we take that so much for granted. Many of us who have grown up in church for years have stood up and said, “I thank God for being here tonight. I thank him for saving me”; then we set down. But, what does that mean to us? We say it so casually and flippantly sometimes, it becomes mere words to us. Have you ever thought about what that means? The plan of salvation? What it really means? As I speak here tonight I am going to talk to you about what it means.

I hope that those of you who have not made the decision to accept Jesus Christ will understand the tremendous sacrifice he made and accept him as the Lord of your life. Hopefully, those of you who have made that decision will appreciate more the salvation that Jesus Christ provided for each one of you. You will be able to get that joy in your heart because you can know what he did for you.

We are going to read a couple scriptures. I call this message “The Salvation that almost never was.”

John Chapter 3, verse 16: “For God so loved the world [*and its people*] (*not just the earth but He loved the people*), that he gave his only begotten son that who so ever should believe on him would not perish, but would have everlasting life.”

John Chapter 19, verse 30, “once Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, “it is finished.”. Then he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. That is so key to what we are going to talk about tonight

John 3:16 says that He gave his only begotten son. Have you ever thought about what that means? I have a son and many of you have sons or daughters. If someone came to me and said that, “Brother Jones has committed a crime and the sentence is death, but if you will die for him, we will let him go free”, I might find it within myself to consider it. But, if they said that I would have to send my son to die for him, he is on his own. I couldn’t do that. But, that is exactly what God did for us when he gave his only begotten son? Can you imagine him doing that? The love that God had for you and me is beyond measure.

Most of you have raised children. Can you imagine sending your only child, your only begotten son that you raised, that you love, that you've nurtured, to die for someone else who did not deserve that salvation. But out of love, you did just that? The love that God had for us was great indeed.

But that is not what I am going to talk so much about tonight, but I wanted to start out with that.

You see, the plan was that Jesus, or the Christ, would come to this earth. The Holy Ghost would move upon Mary and she would conceive and bear a child and his name would be called Jesus.

Jesus Christ would be born. He would grow up. He would go through the same things that you and I go through and then he would die on the cross. He would shed his blood as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could enjoy a fellowship with God.

Have you ever really thought deeply about the cross? Most churches have a cross in the sanctuary. Most also have one on the steeple on the roof. We look at those crosses every time we come to church. But do you ever wonder about that cross? What is it really? What is the history of the cross?

The cross was a form of punishment that the Roman Empire brought to the Middle-East before the time of Jesus. To be crucified means that after you are beaten so that your back and sides have little skin left and the muscle is exposed and cut, you hang on the cross with your arms outstretched so that weight of your body presses down on your lungs and diaphragm, making it difficult to breathe. To catch a clear breath, you lift up with your legs, as the cross digs into the wounds on your back. Then, your legs grow tired. Unable to hold yourself up, you drop down again feeling the cross cut into your open flesh, and begin to suffocate once more. You repeat this cycle until you die.

Because crucifixion was such a terrible death, it was reserved for the worst of criminals. There was a lot of shame associated with dying on the cross. The Romans were cruel people. They knew how to torture and hurt someone before they died.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth, some distance from Jerusalem. His dad was a carpenter. Jesus grew up as a good little Jewish boy in a good Jewish home. The family went to synagogue on Saturday, where Jesus was taught the scriptures. As all young boys like to do, I am sure many times Jesus would go into the carpenter shop to visit his father.

When our government wants to buy something or wants someone to build something, they issue a contract for the purchase. We can choose whether or not we want to earn the money and participate in the contract. But, the Romans didn't work like that. They would come into the shop and say, "Mr. Carpenter, we need three crosses built. Build them. We will pay you, but you don't have a choice not to participate."

So I wonder if Jesus ever went into the carpenter shop and said, "Hey daddy. What are you building?" Joseph would answer, "Son, I am building a cross." Jesus might ask, "Dad, what is that cross for?" You know how young lads are curious. Joseph may have replied, "Well, son this

is what the Romans use to execute their criminals. It's a punishment. It's shame and reproach is unreal." Jesus probably answered, "Oh, OK dad." He probably went outside and played with some sticks, chased the chickens or something.

He probably went down the road to the blacksmith's shop. He probably asked the blacksmith what he was making. "Well, Jesus I am making some large nails for the Romans. They are going to be used to crucify some condemned criminals in a few days."

Jesus knew about the scriptures and the heart of God. He knew that someday that he would die on the cross. So he grew up knowing what the cross was all about.

Jesus wasn't the first person to die on the cross, because the Romans used it for execution.

I have no doubt that Joseph, Mary and Jesus walked down the road to Jerusalem many times, at least every Passover. We have a record of at least one time where Jesus and his parents went to Jerusalem, after which he was left while Mary and Joseph began the trip home. During those many trips, they no doubt passed by people dying on crosses. Imagine your children seeing someone die like that. Jesus knew the scriptures. He knew that one day he too, would die on the cross. He knew what the cross was all about. He knew it is going to be painful He knew that there was going to be shame associated with that death. He knew all that going in. Jesus, the man, did not look forward to dying on the cross.

Now you may say, "Wait a minute! That was God's plan." Yes, it was. It was God's plan. That was how the sacrifice was supposed to be done. But Jesus did not look forward to it. He knew what it was going to be like.

Jesus grew up and had his ministry in the last three and a half years of his life. He knew it was coming down to the last few days.

We celebrate washing of feet and communion and talk about how Jesus washed the disciples' feet and had the last supper before going into the garden.

Mathew Chapter 26, Verse 36: "And then cometh Jesus with them into a place called Gethsemane and said to the disciples, 'Sit ye here while why I go pray yonder.'"

Verse 37-38: "He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even to death; tarry you here, and watch with me.'"

Jesus became sorrowful; he became heavy. The Gospel of Mark says the same thing in Chapter Fourteen, verse 34: "My soul was exceedingly sorrowful unto death." He knew what was ahead of him. He knew what was going to happen. He knew then just a few hours he's could be betrayed by Judas. He knew that he would go to Pilate's court. He knew that he would be scourged. As I said earlier, the Romans were cruel. They knew how to beat someone to within an inch of death. They would put pieces of bone and metal in the whip. They would beat someone until the flesh peeled off the bone. He knew all that was going to happen. He knew that there was

going to be a lot of pain and torture associated with what he was going to have to go through. He knew that there was going to be a lot of shame and all his friends would leave him. He did not look forward to it at all.

In Mathew 26:39 he began to pray. “And he went a little further and fell on his face, and prayed saying, ‘O, my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done.’” He prayed, as Mark records, that if it were possible that this hour might pass from him. Luke says, “Father if thou be willing, remove this cup from me.”

Jesus, who knew the plan of salvation, who knew that his purpose for coming to earth was to provide salvation for mankind, is now saying here, “Father, I don’t want to go through this. Is there any other way? Can we work something else out? Father, all things are possible to you. If you so willed, you could work this out some other way. You can make this cup pass from me.” In Mark he says, “Abba, Father.” Abba is word we use today like “daddy.” Daddy, can you do something? Daddy, can we do this any other way?

How many times have your children come up to you and said, “Daddy, can you do this for me?” Jesus was speaking to his father in the most personal and intimate manner when he said, “Daddy, can we do this any other way? I don’t look forward to this. I don’t want to go to the cross. You have in your power to change this.” All the gospels talk about how Jesus prayed in the garden. Some only record two different times, but is generally accepted that he prayed three times.

In all four Gospels, the Bible says that he went again and prayed, saying the same words, “Father, let this cup pass from me. Is there something we can do to work this out some other way?” Twice he did that.

We think sometimes when we pray that the heavens seem as brass and we just don’t seem to be getting through. Well, here is the Son of God who prayed the same prayer, twice, and even three times he did not think he was getting through. He was saying, “Father, let this cup pass from me” and wasn’t getting an answer. So the next time you think the heavens are brass, remember that and know that God hears you.

The third time that Jesus prayed in Luke, Chapter 22:44, “And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly so that his sweat became this great drops of blood, falling down to the ground.” Have any of you ever prayed so earnestly about something that your sweat became as great drops of blood? Jesus was really in real agony. He was not in agony the first two times. The first two prayers were, “Father let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.” Then he would go to where the disciples were and chastise them for falling asleep. These first two were very similar prayers.

During prayer number three, he was in agony. He was praying so hard that his sweat became as great drops of blood. What happened? There was something that happened. There was an event that occurred that made prayer number three different. We read this so much that we never understand what happened. You have to go back and begin to read in Luke Chapter 22, verse 42. This is prayer number two. “Saying Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.”

In verse 43 we find one of those little hidden scriptures that we read over all the time, never really seeing it and never really understanding it because it doesn't mean anything spectacular to us. But, verse 43 says, "There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." Then in verse 44, "And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly." Now, I don't know what this angel said to him. But whatever this angel said to him (and the Bible doesn't tell us), caused him to be in agony about his prayer. It caused him to pray more earnestly.

If you look forward a couple of verses, he goes back to the disciples. If you remember, between each of the first two prayers, he went to the disciples and chastised them for falling asleep. "Can't you say awake a little while? What's wrong with you?" Then he goes back to pray again. However, after prayer number three he says, "Go ahead and sleep. It's all OK now. Get your rest. Everything's fine now. The decision has been made. I am at peace with my destiny. My Father will be with me throughout my ordeal."

So, what did the angel say to him? I don't know, so let indulge my imagination a little bit. What I think that angel said I base on some later scriptures. I think that angel came to him and said, "Jesus, your father sent me down here to tell you that you thought your prayers were not getting through. You thought that he didn't hear you. But, he sent me to tell you that he heard your prayer, Jesus. And oh, how he loves you. And, yes Jesus, the plan of salvation for mankind requires that you die on the cross. Jesus, you are God's son. You are his only begotten son and he loves you. Yes, Jesus, he knows what you are going to go through in a few hours. He knows the shame that you are going to have to endure. He knows that all of your followers will leave you. He knows how the Roman scourging will be. But, Jesus, like any good father, he doesn't look forward to that either. But, he knows this is the only way for salvation. So, Jesus, God send me down here to ask you to remember a few days ago when you were talking to some people (John later recorded it in Chapter 10, verse 17 and 18) and you said, 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself.' Jesus, God sent me down here to remind you of that; how you said that you would willingly lay down your life. Jesus, the choice is now yours. You decide. If you choose not to go through with this plan, God will understand. Michael and the boys, 72,000 as a matter of fact, are up there waiting. They will come down here and we will just destroy this earth and start over. But, if you choose to go through with the plan, God will be with you all the way. The choice is yours."

You talk about laying a guilt trip on somebody. That is why Jesus prayed in more agony. Now the decision was all upon him. He could say no. You see, Michael and the boys weren't the average wimpy guys that you see floating around clouds playing harps. These guys were probably about 7ft 8 inches, weighing in around 380 pounds; wearing size 28 shoes with nails in the bottom of them. They probably looked like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chuck Norris, and Sylvester Stallone all rolled up into one. These guys were the "bad boys" of heaven – they don't mess around. It only took two to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Can you imagine what 72,000 angels would have done? You see, Jesus said later, "Peter, put your sword away. I don't need you to fight for me. Don't you know that presently, I could pray the father and presently, right now, he would send me 72,000 angels?" Twelve legions!

I imagine that the hills of heaven rang out with a loud noise when Jesus said those words. You see, these angels weren't in the back room polishing their armor. They were already in formation, fully dressed for battle. I imagine that when Jesus uttered those words, Michael turned and called, "Attention!" I imagine that, as we sometimes see on old movies where we see Greek or Roman soldiers lined up on the hillside ready for battle, when they came to attention, they uttered a great shout, armor clashed and boots snapped together. There must have been a terrifying noise that came forth from their ranks and echoed across heaven. They just knew that Jesus was going to call and they were ready, as we sing the song, "...to destroy the world and set him free."

So now the decision was Jesus'. He could say no. But what would have happened had he said no? But, he looked back in time to remember the words of all of the old prophets, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, David, Ezekiel, Daniel, and all of the others who all prophesied in the Old Testament that the messiah is coming; the redeemer is coming. They made all of those prophecies and said how it was gong to happen. They took that word of God to heart and by faith they wrote and said those things. So if Jesus had said no, then all of that your have been a lie.

But, he also looked down into the future and he saw me. He saw poor old Jeff Swain down here in Lexington KY, almost two thousand years in the future and he said if I don't go do this, Jeff will never have the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with my father. In fact, he won't even exist because Michael and the boys are standing ready.

He looked down and saw you. He said, "I have got to go through with this because I love them so much. I've got to do this. I have got to make the sacrifice that provides salvation so that they can enjoy the fellowship with the Father that I do.

He had a choice. He had the ability to say no. If he didn't, then the sacrifice would not have been as meaningful and would have been similar to the bull or the goat of the Old Testament who also had no choice when it was taken for the sacrifice on the alter. But he had a choice – he could have said, "No!" But, he chose for you and me.

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Scriptures References

- Matthew 26: 36-46 **Jesus prayed three (3) times. My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Let this cup, and hour, pass from me.**
- Mark 14: 32-42 **Jesus prayed three (3) times.** (Same words) **Used term “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me.”** - Informal term for “Daddy”
- Luke 23: 39-46 **Jesus prayed.** Did he think that he wasn’t getting through?
- Luke 23: 43-46 **Angel appeared to him, strengthening him, reminding of John 10:18 and giving him the choice. Being in agony, prayed more earnestly until his sweat became as great drops of blood.**
(decision)
- Matthew 26: 53-54 **If I asked, the Father would presently send more than 12 legions of Angels (72,000).**
(Arnold Schwarzenegger, Claude Van Dam, Sylvester Stalone, Chuck Walker, Shaq O’Neal, Michael Jordan) (Palace Guard, Delta Force, 82nd Airborne.) (Size 23 boots, 8’3”, 450 lbs.)
- Matthew 26: 56 **All this done so that the scriptures of the prophets can be fulfilled.**
- John 10: 18 **I lay down my life of myself. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it again. This commandment I have received from the Father.** (Jesus talking of being the Good Shepherd, the winter prior to the crucifixion.)

Jesus had a choice. He didn’t have to suffer death on the cross. But, because he loved you and me, he willingly paid the price for our redemption.