

**SALVATION IS THE ULTIMATE BELONGING**

Question: If you were out walking, passed a house that was on fire, and saw that the owners hadn't noticed, what would be more loving?

- To tell them their house was on fire?
- Or not to tell them?

To me, while it might be an upsetting thing for them to hear it, I still think telling them about the fire would be the nicer, more loving thing to do.

- What do you think? Are you sure? What if they got mad at you for saying something?
- That might make a good little family discussion later. Learn what everyone thinks.

Our Ascension overall worship theme this fall has been "Belonging."

- We were made with a need to belong.
- "Going it alone" was never God's plan for us. We were meant to "Go it Together."
- Even more importantly, we were meant to "Go it with God."
- You were meant to walk the journey of this life not alone but with God at your side.

The most important kind of belonging there is is belonging to God.

- Sure, everything already belongs to God in the "God Almighty" sense of things.
- But we're talking about the relational belonging of a saving relationship with God.
- It's the difference when in those last moments of life, knowing that you'll soon be face-to-face with the Almighty, you die not with a grimace of terror on your face but with a smile of anticipation knowing you are about to see your loving Heavenly Father.
- That kind of belonging! The belonging of salvation!

We Christians talk a lot about Salvation.

- That's because God's word talks a lot about Salvation.

It's not just talk. Salvation is something real.

- Everyone needs Salvation. But not everyone has Salvation.
- Check the Bible on that one if you doubt me.

Salvation is a good thing, a loving thing.

- Salvation is meant for everyone.
- But no one automatically has it.

We're not born saved.

- As Jesus says, salvation comes when we are born again by being born from above.
- We all need to be saved.

Check the Bible on that one if you doubt me.

Do you know why we call the message of Salvation good news?  
Because there's some bad news that comes first.

Here's how the Bible lays it out:

- Good news is how it begins. A good God creates a good world and even humanity is originally created as good.
- Bad news comes quickly. Humanity disobeys God. Creation itself falls into sin - nature, biology, genetics, human nature itself, the human heart, human reason and desires, all of it, all is broken, the good is still there but shattered, everything is tainted by sin.
- More bad news follows. Sin has consequences. Sin brings even more brokenness and ultimately death. The holiness of God burns against sin. God judges sin.
- Really Good News comes to the rescue. Salvation. God provides a way to be saved from our sins, saved from God's own judgement on our sins.
  - It is the way of sacrifice and atonement. It's the way of the cross. Jesus is the way.
  - There is no other way, but this way is enough for everybody; just don't reject the way.

I encourage you to take home today's bulletin and study the Bible verses in this service.  
Our opening worship litany began with Isaiah 13 and ended with Isaiah 53.

- The first part is the bad news. The second part is the good news.
- It begins, "*Wail, for the day of the Lord is near.*" God warns, "*I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity.*" This is the bad news.
- It says that we all are guilty of having gone astray doing what we think is right instead of what God says is right. Not only do we sin pursuing what is bad, we sin pursuing our own incorrect ideas on what is right for us. That's more bad news.
- It ends, "*But the Lord has laid upon him the sin of us all.*" That's the best news.

As Romans 3 says, "*All have sinned and fallen short.*" That's the bad news.

It also says, all can be "*justified*" (saved) by the "*redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood* (saved by the cross) and made ours how? Made "*effective by faith.*" That's the good news, the gospel word itself.

I find it absurdly odd how the Good News of God's Salvation in Christ is claimed by some people to be somehow judgmental and exclusive.

- It's not judgment; it's salvation.
- It's not exclusive; it's for everyone.
- **It is particular but not exclusive.** Particular, in that it happens through Jesus, but nonetheless inclusive of everyone, for everyone when it is made effective by faith.

Imagine a rough rushing river, roaring rapids running down a rock ravine:

- 10-foot sheer cliff walls. You're standing safe on the side.
- Suddenly there's a man in the water coming down the river, pummeled and tossed like a rag doll in the raging current.
- He's headed toward a stretch of boulders; he'll be smashed and drowned.
- You have in your hand a rope with a life-saving ring attached.

- You make a perfect throw landing the ring right in front of him!
- Instead of gratefully taking hold of the ring, he raises his fist in anger and shouts at you, “How dare you judge me!”
- It’s not judgment; it’s salvation... or it could be if it is not rejected.
- The life-saving ring is Jesus. The rope is God’s grace. It’s salvation.
- I also think it’s loving, not judgmental, to let someone know if their house is on fire.

The ultimate belonging that there is can be yours, the belonging to God that is given through salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.