

Unparalleled Salvation
February 1st, 2011, Kichijouji Bible Study Meeting
Gotthold Beck

Acts
4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Let's learn together about this subject, 'Unparalleled Salvation'.

One day, a bank owner was sitting with a merchant. The merchant had faith in Jesus, and they sat facing each other in the merchant's office. The merchant leaned over to the banker and started to talk about Jesus, very passionately and sincerely; however, the banker suddenly stopped the merchant.

'This is so ridiculous!' The banker got angry and interrupted with an arrogant tone.

'Why do you think it's ridiculous?' the merchant asked.

'Are you asking me why? Why do you need to ask that question to a man like me? Look at me! I am clever and educated. It is just absolutely ridiculous,' the banker said with a sarcastic smile.

'That is right. I am asking you the reason why you think it is ridiculous,' the merchant answered.

The banker began to get irritated. His voice was wavering because of his anger when he answered, 'Are you really trying to convince me with such a story of Jesus on the cross? Do you expect me to accept that Jesus died for me, and the God was satisfied by that? Please stop telling these ridiculous lies. The only one who can save me is me. It should be done by my own efforts!'

'Well, I understand very well. Now I know where your agony is. You think that you are qualified to walk on your own path. That is why you refuse the God's plan of salvation and despise it,' the merchant replied.

'What does that mean?' the banker asked doubtfully. The merchant answered his question. 'Please think about this. Suppose that someone comes to you and tells you that he is in deep trouble and asks you to lend him some money. Who, in this case, do you think will set the conditions to loan this man the money and

determine whether he meets that condition? Should it be a wealthy bank owner, which is you? Or the man who is in trouble? Which do you think it should be?'

'It is me. It goes without saying. That man has to accept my conditions before receiving my money,' the banker answered.

'You are right, and this is exactly the same situation you are in now. You are a miserable and hopeless sinner who just is going to perish. On the other hand, the Lord God is the very wealthy bank owner. You go to see the Lord God and beg for his blessing and forgiveness. In this case, who do you suppose decides the conditions to receive the salvation of God and who is qualified to give directions? Suppose that you are the miserable man, and God is the banker,' the merchant said.

'I have never thought about it that way until now,' the banker answered with a touch of surprise. 'Of course, in that situation I am not qualified to decide. It is only the Lord God who is qualified to give directions.'

'Actually, you have been building the way to the salvation of your own. You forgot that you cannot give directions, but can only receive what was offered. Lord God, the owner of the huge bank, is always ready to offer you, and each person in the world, his plan of salvation. Why don't you try stepping onto the path of the Lord God instead of walking on your own way? The Lord God is waiting to see you on the road he prepared by himself. [Why don't you prepare to meet the Lord now?]' It was then that the banker was illuminated by this new light. 'Yes, the Lord God saves me,' the banker answered in a faint voice.

I. Plan of the Salvation by God

What is the plan of the Lord God? When I think of the plan of our Lord God for our salvation, some very well-known verses from the bible come to mind.

Isaiah
45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Luke
19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Acts

16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Ephesians

2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

1Timothy

1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Romans

10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

No other word in the bible is interpreted differently by readers than the word 'saved'. What is the true picture of salvation? People explain it in so many different ways. Let's try to find out what the Lord God says about it.

Proverbs

14:12 There is a pathway that seems right to a man, but in the end it's a road to death.

They say 'All's well that ends well'. But what a tragedy will it be, if it is not so. [What a tragedy it will be if you kept walking on the pathway that seemed right before your eyes, but the road actually led you to the death at the end]. In the early churches, very often, people were taught the wrong pathway. It is also described in the scripture.

Acts

15:1 Then some men came down from Judea and started to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the Law of Moses, you can't be saved."

This was a teaching against the belief of Paul. He proved that circumcision is not required to be saved, and moreover, it is not required to obey the laws of the bible. Even today there are so many people who misunderstand the salvation of the Lord God. Let's look at some typical examples of this kind of misinterpretation.

II. Wrong interpretation of the God's salvation

[1] Religion

The first misinterpretation is religion. So many people believe that they can be saved by their religion. What about us? Do we rely on any religion? I want to make this clear. No man-made religion, including Christianity, whether it is Catholic or Protestant, Judaism, Muhammadanism, Shintoism or Buddhism can save the souls of men. This is what I want to say. The true salvation is only in Jesus Christ himself.

Matthew

1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

There is another verse from the Acts, which we read before:

Acts

4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

If you need someone to save you, you have to be saved by Jesus Christ. There is no other way. Lord Jesus is the only Savior for you. No religion can give you a life. You need to be given 'a new life' to be saved. Jesus said:

John

3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Let's look at a few examples from the Bible. A man called Nicodemus appears in Chapter 3 of John. He was a very religious man. However, he was not saved. Jesus clearly told him that he had to be born again into a new life. I am not going to read it today but the Pharisee, who appears in Chapter 7, verses 37 to 50 of Luke, was not saved either, although he was also a very religious man.

Cornelius was also very religious. He worshipped the Lord God, donated generously, never forgot to pray and even fasted (Acts 10:2). He was also well-liked by the people. However, Cornelius also had to be saved.

Paul must have been one of the most faithful men of his time. As a child, he was raised by very religious family. He could tell anyone that he was devoting his life to the Lord God, and he was so proud of it. He was circumcised, respected all laws in the bible and

obeyed them. Nevertheless, in the eyes for the Lord God, he was just one of those sinners. He was a 'lost person' who did not realize that he was a sinner. He also needed salvation, because he had not yet found the righteousness of God. Paul was no doubt a very faithful man. Actually, he was a faithful sinner. After he came to know Jesus, he was totally changed, and he called himself the chief of the sinners. He testified:

Philippians

3:4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

We can see from these verses that religion could not save Paul, Cornelius or Nicodemus. So, how can we expect it to save us? We shouldn't. We should think about it. Do you still rely on a religious life, believing that it will lead you to the salvation? If you do, you are just clinging to false and delusional hope. If religion can save men, why did Jesus have to die? If we can be saved by religion, there would have been no need for the cross.

There is only one savior. It has nothing to do with any religion, but it is Jesus himself.

[2] Ethics

The second wrong interpretation is ethics. Many people believe that they are saved because they are leading ethical lives. These people rely on their own moral acts to be saved.

If ethical life and sincere attitude can save us, why did Jesus have to die? If we can save ourselves, we do not need Jesus. If we could get to heaven by our own efforts, we would say when we get there, 'Look at me!

I came here because of my great life. I was very good man. I always have been a very ethical and sincere man, so God brought me in here! I did not need any savior. I made it without the help of Jesus Christ. I saved myself.'

Of course, this is not true. Absolutely not. No one can say something like this in this world. It is because nobody can lead a life ethical and good enough to satisfy God.

Isaiah

64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;

Romans

3:10 There is none righteous, no, not one:

It is written in the bible that everybody is a sinner. This is why everybody needs a savior. If we are totally ethical and have our own righteousness, Jesus would not have had to come down to this world for us.

Luke

5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Jesus also said:

Matthew

9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Are we whole? Are we righteous? If so, we do not need Jesus.

Luke

18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The Pharisee thanked God that he was not like other people; thieves, dishonest people, adulterers, or even that tax collector. He fasted twice a week and donated a tenth of his entire income. The Pharisee claimed to God how righteous he was, while the tax collector would not even look up to heaven. Instead, he beat his chest and asked for the Lord's mercy. Jesus justified the tax collector and accused the Pharisee. Do we really recognize that we are not righteous at all? Don't we try to hide what we have in our minds from our friends or other people? Do we belong to the people who can stay in the presence of the Holy God?

You may not see any dust in your room now. However, when sunshine comes in, through the light from the sun, you will see dust everywhere in the same room. We might say that we are righteous, but when the light from the glory of the Lord God enters into our hearts, what will we see? You will see that it is filled with downfall, impurity and filthy stains. In simpler words, our hearts are filled with sin.

Peter cried out, 'Lord, I am a sinner' (Luke 5:8), [when he was amazed at the number of fish he caught and fell down at Jesus' knees]. Isaiah cried, 'How terrible it will be for me because I am ruined! I'm a man of unclean lips.' [He said this when he was in the presence of the Lord: 'My eyes have seen the King; the Lord of the Heavenly Armies' (Isaiah 6:5).] Job screamed that he was impure. [In 42:5-6, he said, 'I've seen you with my eyes. As a result, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'] These were men of good will, and they belonged to the most ethical and sincere people of their time.

However, when they saw the Lord they saw themselves too. The same is true for us. Can you say that your life is as righteous as that of Paul, Cornelius or Nicodemus? Or is it better than theirs? We all know that our lives are not righteous. Just like they could not be saved by leading ethical lives, we will never be saved by our ethics. We have to be born again.

Do we recognize that we are not righteous at all? Sometimes, we compare ourselves with others and think that we are better than them. However, if you are judged by the standard of the Lord God, you will see how iniquitous you are. Lord God seeks the perfect righteousness. And there is only one man who is perfectly righteous. It is Lord Jesus. If you obtain the

righteousness of Jesus, you will be accepted by the Lord God. Otherwise, you are doomed to perish forever. Your righteousness is useless. Your righteousness is never sufficient. We can only do the best we can. However, the best efforts we can make will never ever satisfy the Lord God.

It is only Jesus' righteousness that can save us. You have to take off your filthy clothes as the prodigal son did and ask for the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus. You have to confess from the bottom of your heart, 'I am a sinner, nothing but a filthy sinner. Lord Jesus is everything for me.' At a time in the past, Queen Victoria of England decided to forgive all army deserters and acquitted them, once they admitted what they did. They had to confess that they deserted the army. Just like this, we have to confess our sins if we want to be forgiven.

[3] Deeds

The third misunderstanding is deeds. Many people believe that they can be saved by their efforts or good deeds. These people devote themselves to things like repentance, abstention or charity. Sometimes, they offer sacrifices and pray. They also preferably visit sick people and prisoners. They plan very long pilgrimages or even whip themselves. These people believe that they go to heaven by doing these kinds of good deeds.

Think about the thief who was crucified along with Jesus. What did he do to be saved? The thief could not do anything good, because both of his hands were already nailed to the cross. There was nothing he could do. Nonetheless, Jesus saved this man.

When people plan to save someone, they emphasize that they would 'do' something, while the Lord God always mentions that he 'has done' something, instead of saying he 'does'. People desperately want to make some effort, to pay some price. People try to grab the salvation in their hands by their own means.

However, the Lord God said it was 'done' already. There is nothing left for men to do. Jesus has done all that has to be done. The real salvation is a 'gift'. It is a present.

Romans
6:23 The free gift of God is eternal life in union with the Messiah Jesus our Lord.

Do you need to work hard to receive a present? If you have to pay for what you get, it is not called a gift. If you receive something as a reward for your efforts, it also shouldn't be called a gift, because you deserve to take it. A gift is what you get for free. The same is true for salvation.

What did the prodigal son pay to his father? Please tell me if you know the price, the prodigal son paid and I will give you an estimate for the price you need to pay to buy salvation. The prodigal son did not pay a cent, because he did not have anything. He went broke and had nothing in his hands. The same is true for us. You can be saved without paying any money, with no charge. You can never actually buy salvation. Let's look at the words of our Lord God and see how clear it is, how meaningful it is.

Ephesians

2:8 For by such grace you have been saved through faith. This does not come from you; it is the gift of God.

It is a present from God.

Ephesians

2:9 Not the result of actions, to put a stop to all boasting.

It is clearly stated that it is not a result of any deeds. Our deeds, our efforts, nothing we do will ever be taken into account for our salvation. Only Jesus saves us.

If we come to Jesus, if you surrender to the work of Jesus, what he accomplished on the cross, and if you totally rely on Jesus, you will be saved at the very moment. [Jesus is the only one who can save you.]

[4] Commandments

There is another wrong interpretation. The fourth is the commandments. Many people believe that they will be saved just by following the laws of God described in the scripture. However, Jesus said to the people in his time that not even one person of them followed these laws strictly. We are worse than the people of Jesus' time in that we do not follow these laws. We realize that we do not keep these commandments at all. We have to admit that we very often break these laws in our daily lives.

James wrote in the Bible:

James

2:10 For whoever keeps the whole Law but fails in one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

It is written in the scripture that if you fail to follow just one of the laws, even though you follow all other laws, it is equivalent to breaking all laws. You will be sentenced for breaking the laws, and you will have to be destroyed. All men are sinners for being so selfish and making mistakes. There is no exception. We are guilty because we broke the laws of the Lord God. So then, is there anything we can do for ourselves?

The Lord Jesus suffered for all men and died upon the cross to expiate our sins. Jesus was crucified, and he bore our sins on his body on the tree. The Lord Jesus sacrificed himself to redeem us for our sins. What we need to do is so clear now: we must accept Jesus as the savior of our own kind. How simple and easy it is for us to be saved! Anybody can accept Lord Jesus no matter where they are or what their situation is. We can be saved in less than 3 minutes.

It is pointless to visit someone in a hospital suffering from serious cancer and give him a book called 'How to live a healthy life'. What he needs is medical treatment to stop the pain. It is also meaningless to tell someone who want to be saved, 'You ought to keep all laws listed in the scriptures. All people suffer from the cancer called sin. We all need someone to bear the sickness of our sins and make us healthy, but it will never start from the books of laws. This is how the gospels were brought in.

Jesus bore our sins on his body. The burdens of our sins were carried by Jesus in his own body to the Cross. And now, Jesus is offering to all mankind the life of himself, an eternal life.

Galatians

2:16 yet we know that a person is not justified by doing what the Law requires, but rather by the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. We, too, have believed in the Messiah Jesus so that we might be justified by the faithfulness of the Messiah and not by doing what the Law requires, for no human being will be justified by doing what the Law requires.

2:21 I do not misapply God's grace, for if righteousness comes about by doing what the Law requires, then the Messiah died for nothing.

[5] Rites

The fifth and the last wrong interpretation is in Rites. It is widely believed that people will be saved by keeping to the rules of their churches, by following rituals, such as baptisms or communions. But again, was the thief crucified with Jesus baptized? [Did he ever attend a communion service? Never.] If one thief could be saved without being baptized, without attending communion, anyone can be saved the same way without formal rituals. The thief was definitely saved. Why can we say so?

It was because Jesus said to him, on the cross, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise. [Luke 23:43]' If one man was saved without being baptized, then anyone can be saved without being baptized.

Thus, baptism in water is not required to be saved. Those who are forgiven for their sins by Jesus are already saved. People are baptized when they are saved. But, we were not baptized because we want to be saved.

The same is true for the Holy Communion. We are allowed to attend it, because we are already saved, not because we want to be saved. People participate in the communion because they are already saved. People are considered as baptized the moment they are saved. We are allowed to take the bread because we are saved by the Lord's compassion, although we are all sinners and are far apart from the Lord God. These rites held in churches cannot save men [although these may not be totally meaningless]. Men are saved by Jesus alone. The only savior is the Lord Jesus himself.

III. The Only Savior

So far, we have pursued the ways men believe the ways to salvation, which are religion, ethics, deeds, commandments and rites. And finally, we learned that all of them are false. Then, what are the ways the Lord saves us? Where is the road to salvation that the Lord God prepared for us? There is only one man who can save. He is Jesus.

John

14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Not a road sign to show the way, but he said he was the way itself.

'I' in this verse, is the Lord Jesus. No one else. It is not any religion, ethics or good deed. Jesus the son of God is the only savior. The Lord Jesus is himself the way. As I just said, he is not merely a road sign to show you the direction. No one can reach the true God without passing through Jesus. Not by Moses, not by Buddha, Muhammad nor Confucius. Monks, pastors or the Pope cannot send a man to God. Only by the Lord Jesus can we come to see the true living God. What do you think? You still don't want to accept Jesus to bring you to salvation?

Acts

4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Such wonderful words of the Lord, aren't they? No other verse in the Bible clearly explains salvation like this one. There is no other way which leads you to salvation. Salvation cannot be found in any religion, not in any other person. Do you believe that? There is no other name by which we can be saved. 'You are to name him Jesus, because he is the one who will save his people (Matthew 1:21).' Are we prepared to turn away from all other paths and face Jesus only and rely on Him? Only the Lord Jesus can truly save men.

But does the Lord Jesus truly save you? [If you are not so sure, let's look at the next verse.]

John

6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

'In no wise' means 'Never'. He always accepts. Jesus promises so. Jesus would never refuse. What does he do to you? He would absolutely accept everyone who humbly comes to him. Shouldn't we thank the Lord God for sending such a savior?

Some people might think that because the Lord God has accomplished everything that has to be done for their salvation, there is nothing left for them to do. This is a terrible misunderstanding. These people do not understand that men have to grab what the Lord is offering. The bible says, 'Choose and receive'. Salvation was finished by the Lord Jesus. But men have to accept it.

I can pass you a glass of water, but you have to grab it in your hands to quench your thirst. Doctors can

prescribe medicines for you, but you won't be cured unless you swallow them. If you truly want to be saved, you have to accept Jesus into your heart. 'Be reconciled to the Lord God.' It says so in the bible.

John

1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Only those who have reconciled with Jesus are saved. Nobody has ever been saved without having the strong intention to reconcile. You can never accept Jesus unless you are determined to do so. In the same way, you will never be saved without realizing it. You have to decide to choose. So, please accept Jesus as a savior of your own. Please accept him today, now, at this moment. This is the call of the Bible.

There is a huge difference between the faith in your brain and faith in your heart.

For example, you believe that elevators bring you to the upper floors. If you do not put that belief into action, that is to say, if you do not step into the elevator, you can never go upstairs.

You also know that trains transport you anywhere you want to go, but again, you won't get to your destination unless you get on the train. It is same thing. You firmly believe that Jesus will save you. But to be saved, you need to put your faith into practice, which means that you have to rely truly on the Lord Jesus.

We all have to choose Jesus, accept Jesus, surrender to him and devote ourselves to him. It is this kind of faith that truly saves people. Why don't you start relying on Jesus now, today? It really has to be now.

You may know that you are not saved yet, and you are waiting for the best time to be saved. But for the Lord God, there is no best time which comes later. Jesus says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the favorable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2)' The time of the Lord God is now. This exact moment is the time for your decision. The most critical time has already come. It may be too late tomorrow.

Please absolutely avoid one thing: Do not hesitate and wait too long. Please accept Jesus now. You will receive eternal life at that very moment and you will be

saved. [Don't give the devil a chance.] If you allow the devil to let you hesitate, you might be lost forever. So, please come and accept Jesus now.

Isaiah

55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

The time will come when you will never be able to see Jesus anymore. So, please accept the Lord Jesus. Accept him now.

End

【訳注】本稿は2011年2月1日、吉祥寺学びで語られた『比類なき救い』の英訳ですが、ほとんど同じ内容である『主は生きておられる』21号の記事、『ただひとりの救い主、イエス・キリスト』で付加された文章も[括弧]付きで挿入しました。

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