

## NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

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### 2 Corinthians 5:17-6:10

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

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The title of our message today is "Now is the Day of Salvation." That phrase is usually spoken of by preachers in basically saying that you are not guaranteed tomorrow, and to make sure you are saved today. Sometimes that passage of Scripture then is used just prior to an altar call, when there is a calling and invitation to accept Christ. Not only is THAT message essential to us, that each person here today needs to make sure they are right with God, but there's also a double meaning to that. The other meaning that we can extract from that is that we should be living every day as though we are saved but also that it is every day that we are being saved. We are being saved each and every day, in ways that we can't possibly imagine. Remember how Jesus told Simon Peter, "**Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.**" (Luke 22:31) You see, I'm not referencing eternal life specifically, although we are presently in the process of the early stages of what God has planned for us to have eternal life in His eternal kingdom. Every day though, we should

be living as unto the Lord (**Colossians 3:23**). This is the day that the Lord has made. Today, that has been ordained by God, as His day for us to dwell in. The miracle in that alone should lead us to give, thanks, praise and glory to God. Sadly, most people never get to that place of realizing that "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein." (**Psalm 24:1**) When Jesus said to not worry about tomorrow, not worrying about how you'll get by tomorrow, He said "but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (**Matthew 6:33-34**) To paraphrase what Jesus is saying, "today is your day of salvation and it has enough to be concerned about, tomorrow may or may not come for you in this lifetime, concern yourself with the salvation you must take hold of today."

We are to be living out our faith in the here and now. That speaks to one of my favorite verses of Scripture. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In **all your ways** acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (**Proverbs 3:5-6**) What that should be saying to each of us is, that we were created by God for His plan and purpose, He alone knows what He intends to accomplish through each of us, "for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (**Ephesians 2:10**) and that as we put our trust in Him, He will not only get us to where we are going but He will richly bless us and make us a blessing to others, not only in the here and now, but in His eternal kingdom. Yet along the way in our walk with God, as He leads us, we are guaranteed to have trials, tribulation, and tests, that we will go through, but praise God, we aren't intended to go it alone.

When God called Abraham out of the land of Ur that was in ancient Mesopotamia, Abraham and Sarah his wife, Terah his dad, and Lot his nephew left Ur and made it to Haran which was way far north of the land of Canaan and it was in Syria (of note is that Haran was the name of Abraham's brother, that is, Lot's dad). Abraham though, didn't just get near the land of Canaan and then that was it. Abraham continued in the faith to when he was 75 years old, Terah his father died, then God told him leave Haran and go the the land of Canaan, the promised land, the land that was to eventually be the inheritance of his grandson Jacob, of whom God changed his name to Israel-and he become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet it wasn't for another 24 years, when Abraham was 99 years old (and Sarah was 90), that he finally had an heir to the promise of God that he would be a father to many nations and that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (that seed was referring to: Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world-which wouldn't happen for another 2000 years). One last important thing about that story that

needs mentioning is what God told Abraham in the covenant with Abraham. God said, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." (**Genesis 15:1**) Take a moment to meditate on that and put your name in that Word from God. "Do not be afraid, (your name). I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

We find God to be our exceedingly great reward in God's New Covenant through His only begotten Son Jesus the Christ. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (**John 3:16-17**) Jesus died on the cross for our sins, that is, the sins that we have committed against God. Sinning against God is disobeying God. Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment and He replied, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (**Mark 12:29-31**) I would venture to guess, that we've all missed that mark. "For all have sinned [against God] and fall short of the glory of God." (**Romans 3:23**) Just prior to what Jesus said of what we know of as John 3:16-17, Jesus said that one must be born-again, that is, born of the Holy Spirit, that is the Spirit of Christ in order to inherit eternal life in His eternal kingdom. The Apostle John explained the process saying, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (**John 1:12-13**) "Do not be afraid, (Jesus is telling you). I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." That sounds rather personal doesn't it?

While most of you may already know the story of Abraham, it is still a good practice to run through the telling of those stories in the Old Testament because there is always a possibility that there is someone before you that doesn't have an understanding of God's Word, and how the Old Testament was a shadow of what was and is to come, and they are truly an image of what would come in the New Testament. Not only that, but each time one goes through the Old Testament and then the New Testament it can become clearer and clearer as to how the whole Bible, all 66 books, is the testimony of God in dealing with His creation-mankind, and how He tries to bring His people back into His blessings, to stop rebelling against Him, and to honor Him as He is God Almighty, the Creator of all things, and that we are created for His purpose and pleasure and then, if we honor Him, He will honor us.

The Old Testament, as we looked at last week, is the Old Covenant that God initiated with Abraham that was passed down to Isaac, his son, then to Jacob or Israel his son, then to all of the children of Israel. Incidentally, Abraham is still called the father of our faith. Just as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (**Genesis 15:6**) we too are led by God through His Holy Spirit to believe on God and His promises. We are called into the New Covenant that is in Christ Jesus that He is our Righteousness. One thing I am reminded of each and every day is what Jesus said in **John 15:5**, "**I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**" Without Jesus we can do nothing. We can't save ourselves, we can't save anyone else, we can't deliver ourselves from addictions, bad habits, or spiritual strongholds. In Christ alone we can overcome!

In his first epistle, the Apostle John said, "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." (**1 John 1:3-4**) Sound familiar? Jesus said, "**The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.**" (**John 10:10**) And so, in Christ our journey begins. The one element that hasn't been spoken of in that process of believing on Christ and receiving Him is the act of repentance. God leads us to repentance so that we can receive the Holy Spirit so that we can be born-again. The Apostle Peter, in addressing the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem spoke of God's grace leading to repentance which leads to receiving the Holy Spirit. "Him [Jesus] God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel [and to us] and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (**Acts 5:31-32**) John the Baptist prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus saying, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (**Matthew 3:2**) Jesus, when He began His ministry preached, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (**Matthew 4:17**) After Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave on the third day, and then appeared to His disciples, "Then He said to them, "**Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.**" (**Luke 24:46-49**) That promise Jesus was speaking of is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has several functions. One is that the Holy Spirit "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (**Romans 8:16**), and the Holy Spirit begins working in us God's Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and His Redemption (**1 Corinthians 1:30**), He works in

us the fruit of the Spirit of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (**Galatians 5:22-23**), He leads us into all Truth (**John 16:13**), and then the Holy Spirit also endues us with power for the ministry. (**Luke 24:49**)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That right there is God's Word telling us that once we become a new creation in Christ, by being born-again by the Holy Spirit that He gives us as a guarantee of His promise as being a child of God and eternal life (**2 Corinthians 1:22**) but that we have become ambassadors for Christ in the ministry of reconciliation. What does that mean? We are encouraging one another to be reconciled with God in Christ Jesus. That's where we as Christians, children of God, say that we are to share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ and to continue in praying for one another and forgiving one another. Jesus said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (**Matthew 6:14-15**) Jesus also said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." (**Matthew 5:7**)

Once again, Jesus said, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations." Each of us are Ambassadors for Christ! "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone [Christ], elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, [notice the comparison: belief vs. disobedience] "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (**1 Peter 2:6-9**) We are royal representatives, ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Going back to our Scripture today in **2 Corinthians 17**, "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." As God's ambassadors in Christ Jesus we are His representatives of His love and His Word, that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Paul says we are ambassadors for Christ He isn't just talking about the apostles. When Paul went on to talk about the much patience, tribulations, needs, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, in tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and fastings, he was describing what can be what any follower of Christ may have to go through.

Recently I had been led down a path by the Holy Spirit, I believe, in studying the eschatology (the study of the end times, last of days) in the New Testament. It is interesting that of those who I consider godly saints, that some believe in the Pre-Tribulation rapture, some the Mid-Trib Rapture, which would happen after 3-1/2 years of tribulation, and then some believe in post-tribulation rapture. A discussion of all of that is way beyond the scope of this message but the reason I bring it up is, as I've never settled on a confident absolute to my understanding of the Tribulation and the Rapture I've said and settled it in my heart that regardless, I know I need to be ready. Ready for what, you may ask, you mean the Rapture? No, I mean Tribulation or the Rapture. Yes, I do have my own opinion, but in all things we should be loving and encouraging one another in Christ. Yes, there are possible dangers to believing in an early Rapture and then when the Tribulation comes people could lose heart. There is also the danger of believing Jesus won't come back until after the Tribulation and then He comes back earlier than expected to which someone is not ready. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In **all your ways** acknowledge Him, and **He shall direct your paths.**" (**Proverbs 3:5-6**)

We've already been reminded that we must always consider every day to be our day of salvation since we don't know when the Lord will take us home. I wrote out a list of how many of our friends have gone home to be with Jesus over the last 2-3 years and I was stunned at how many there were. As the Apostle Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (**Philippians 1:21**) So, if I'm still to remain on this earth right now, "praise God, what's next Lord?" And if Jesus calls me home, "**PRAISE GOD, GLORY HALLELUJAH!**" Yes there was

a bit of an emphasis on the latter but nevertheless, I'll do my best to "do all things as unto the Lord." For the side of the Rapture-Tribulation issue on whether we will have to endure THE Tribulation we can be reminded of this: God's precious saints have already in times past had to endure great hardships. Just read through the Apostle Paul's resume of hardships in **2 Corinthians 11** if you need to feel better about yourself. Christians have been stoned to death, burned alive, boiled in oil, fed to the lions, and many other atrocities. Hopefully, by God's great mercy and grace none of us will have to suffer such evil. But what we find out pretty quickly, in our times of trial and sufferings we find out how much we truly are depending on God and how much we are still holding on to our precious comforts that help us get us through from day to day.

One thing is for certain, the Accuser will come against you from time to time. Sometimes that Accuser will work through other people trying to speak evil against you and to act in judgment against you. Yet there is one who we are said to cling to for He is your life and He is our Lord and Savior, Jesus or Yeshua.

Before the Lord I speak to Him His Word, His promises, saying, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ", "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure", "for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them", Christ is my Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption" and without You Lord Jesus I can do nothing! To go along with speaking that, acknowledging that to God I also confess my sins before Him and if I don't know what they are I confess that. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (**1 John 1:9**) I don't want anything hindering my fellowship with God and His people. And I'm looking for the promise that Jesus gives us, saying, "**By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.**" (**John 15:8**) I want God to be glorified in me, His creation, His child. Do you?

Finally, let us be reminded of what Jesus spoke as an example of prayer to His disciples. Let us say this prayer together, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." (**Matthew 6:9-13**) Yes Lord, Your kingdom come, not my will but your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen