

When Jesus Christ was born 2,000 years ago, an angel appeared at night to some shepherds and said, "I announce to you good news of great joy, which will be for all the people, because today a Savior has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). The announcement of a Savior is indeed "good news of great joy . . . for all the people" because what we human beings need is salvation. Unfortunately, many do not realize that we need to be saved. Others do not fully comprehend what we need to be saved from and what God's salvation brings to man. In the Gospel of John, Christ is presented as the Savior of the world (John 4:42) in three marvelous aspects: the Lamb of God, the bronze serpent, and the grain of wheat. If we see Christ in these three aspects, we will understand what kind of Savior He is and what His salvation is all about.

The Lamb of God

One day when John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus coming to him, he declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Christ is the Lamb of God, who took care of our problem of sin. If we are honest, we will have to admit that all of us have the problem of sin. In this day and age, we do not like to hear about man's fallen condition, preferring rather to believe that man is basically good. Yet the evidence of man's sinful state is overwhelming. Violence, corruption, and immorality are rampant in our "enlightened" society. All around us we see the compelling manifestations of man's degraded state. And if we turn our eyes inward, we see our own personal corruption and degradation. Our exterior may be

polished and pleasant, but inwardly our hearts are impure and unrighteous. The apostle Paul quotes the lament of an Old Testament psalmist concerning man's inward state: "'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks out God. All have turned aside; together they have become useless; there is none who does good; there is not so much as one'" (Rom. 3:10-12, quoting Psa. 14:1-3).

Regardless of the seriousness of our offenses, all of them are our sins. These sins deserve and require punishment, especially in the eyes of God, who alone is righteous in this universe. Yet God's great love for man compelled Him to save man from that punishment. Hence, the requirements of His righteousness and the constraints of His love motivated God to save man in a way that only He could. This aspect of His salvation is accomplished by Christ as the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God is a symbol of Christ as the perfect offering for the sins of mankind. According to Isaiah 53:6, when Christ was dying on the cross, God took all our sins and laid them upon this Lamb of God. In taking away our sin, the Lord did not simply command the sin to go away; on the contrary, on the cross He worked to pay our debt, to appease God, and to remove sin.

The Bronze Serpent

The terrible actions that people commit are not mere lapses of basically good people; there is something corrupt in man's nature that serves as the source for such actions. And in this matter, what is true of one human being is true of all: we all have the sinful nature. This is actually our

real problem, while our sinful actions are the symptoms. We need to be saved not only from our sinful deeds but also from our sinful nature that motivates our sins.

In the Gospel of John, Christ is presented as the Savior who saves us from our fallen nature. The Lord Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that every one who believes into Him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Here the Lord refers to an event in the Old Testament when Israel sinned against God. At that time, God sent serpents, and these bit the people, and many died. Then God instructed Moses to lift a bronze serpent upon a pole, so that when the people looked on the serpent, they would live (Num. 21:4-9). This typified Christ the Savior. Today we are "poisoned" by a serpentine nature; in God's eyes we are no more than serpents ourselves. The real problem is not what we do but what we are. Hence, Christ came to be what we are and to bear the punishment for what we are. Yet, like the bronze serpent in the wilderness, Christ does not have the serpentine element that we have. The apostle Paul says that He came "in the likeness of the flesh of sin" (Rom. 8:3); that is, He was a genuine man but had no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). When we look on Him by believing in who He is and what He has done, we live; that is, we have eternal life. Hence, Christ is our Savior who saves us from the sinful nature in man and who enlivens us with His divine life.

The Grain of Wheat

In John 12:23-24 the Lord Jesus spoke of a third aspect of His salvation: "The hour has

come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Christ is the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died. After His death, He resurrected from the dead (1 Cor. 15:4), and in resurrection He bore "much fruit"; that is, He brought forth His many believers in resurrection with Him (1 Pet. 1:3). This refers to the positive aspect of His salvation. Normally, we think of salvation as a rescue from a negative situation, but God's salvation is also an entrance into a positive realm. Christ as the Lamb of God and as the bronze serpent primarily saves us from sin, but Christ as the grain of wheat saves us into the realm of the divine life. His death rescued us from the negative situation of man's fall, but His resurrection ushered us into the positive situation of the eternal life. The apostle Paul speaks of these two aspects of God's salvation: "For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled" (Rom. 5:10).

Because Christ fell into the ground and died, He no longer abides alone but has borne much fruit. Formerly, Christ was the sole Son of God, the only begotten Son (John 1:14; 3:16), but through His death and resurrection He is now the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). We who believe in Him are the many brothers of the Firstborn; we are the sons of God (Gal. 3:26; Rom. 8:14; 1 John 3:1). We become sons of God not merely because we are declared so by God but because we have received His life through believing in His Son (John 1:12; 1 John 5:12) and now partake of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). All

who believe in Christ are the sons of God in life and nature. Today He does not abide alone; we are His many fruit, the many sons of God. In His divinity, Christ is forever the only begotten Son of God, but as the unique God-man, who passed through death and resurrection, He is the first-born Son of God among many brothers, among many sons of God.

All who repent of their sins and believe in Christ will receive this salvation. It is a salvation from sin and from punishment for sin, but much more, it brings us into the enjoyment of the eternal life. God's salvation through Christ is to make sinners the sons of God. By enjoying His life and partaking of His nature we are being transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). Today God is leading His many sons into glory (Heb. 2:10), so that ultimately we will be the sons of God not only in life and nature but also in expression. This is the salvation of Christ our Savior!

Christ the Savior

*Concerning
His Status as
the Lamb of God,
the Bronze Serpent,
& the Grain of Wheat*

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