

All Can Be Saved

1 Timothy 2:1-7

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We're exploring a summary of Wesleyan/Methodist teaching called "The Four Alls": all need to be saved, all can be saved, all can know they are saved, all can be saved to the uttermost.

Last week we saw that we all need to be saved because sin has infected and corrupted God's good creation, including each of us. We all sin and fall short of God's glory. We can't cure ourselves or rescue ourselves or save ourselves. We need a Savior, a rescuer, a healer. In today's Scripture, the apostle Paul says that God is our Savior.

Sin puts a barrier between us and God. Sin distorts the image of God we're meant to bear. Sin corrupts and enslaves us. We couldn't get out of this mess on our own, so God comes in Jesus Christ to set us free, heal us, restore us, and break down the barrier so we can be reunited with God. In the Holy Spirit, God makes salvation effective in us when we trust him and ask him to save us.

Everyone is under the power of sin, but God offers salvation to everyone. In this section of Paul's first letter to Timothy, we see an emphasis on *all*. Three times Paul shows God's concern for all people.

He says, "I urge *all kinds of prayer for all people*." We're called to pray for everyone. I use a notebook to record Scripture I read, along with prayers, insights, and ideas. I also keep a prayer list in it. Sometimes I've listed "the world's peoples and leaders." I left that off the last time I started a new notebook. But this week, studying this section of Scripture, I've added to my prayer list "All People" and "All Those in Authority." That's the example Paul gives here of praying for all people: rulers and all those in authority.

How do we pray for all people, other than just saying, "God bless everybody"? That's a good thing to do. We can also pray for specific groups of people. This morning we committed to supporting students and teachers. One way to do that is to pray for them. At one time, Nancy and I had a child in each building: elementary, middle school, and high school. As

I would drop off Eric at the middle school, I'd silently pray for him and his school. Then I'd pray, "Also bless Eli and Nancy and everybody at the elementary school." Then I'd go on, "And bless Rachel and everyone in the high school." I'd start praying for administration and staff—the whole school district and all the families in it. Later, I'd pray for Rachel and OU, then Eric and UNT, Eli and Durant High School, and now Eli and OU. I pray for Nancy and Northwest Heights. I aim to be more intentional about praying for the whole district and everyone who's part of it.

As you drop your kids off at school, or send them to school, lift them to the Lord in prayer with faith and love. Pray for their friends and teachers. If saying, "God bless so and so" doesn't seem like much, remember that the meaning of blessing in the Bible is rich and deep and full. Of course, our prayers can become more specific, but this is one way to start praying for all people.

Praying for everyone is good and pleases *God our Savior who wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*. Our prayers for all people are rooted in God's concern for all people. John Wesley comments on this passage: "Do you ask, 'Why are not more converted?' We do not pray enough" (*Notes on the New Testament*). Do you have any unchurched friends on your prayer list?

This is an amazing claim: "God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God's desire is for everyone to be forgiven, restored, healed, redeemed, set free. This text doesn't say, and I'm not saying, all *will* be saved. We're saying that all *can* be saved. God makes salvation available to everyone. So why isn't everyone saved? Because God doesn't coerce us into salvation. God doesn't force it on us. God values the freedom and responsibility he's entrusted to us.

We don't earn or achieve salvation on our own. It's a gift. But we receive the gift. God has to show us our need for the gift and God has to make us able to receive it—and that's what God does. Still, we accept it and thank God for it.

God is our Savior. God wants to be the Savior of all. The Lord is the one God of all. God has provided the way for everyone to know him as Savior. There is one mediator, one who brings humans together with God.

The Messiah, Jesus, is himself human and *he gave himself as a ransom for all people.*

Jesus died for everyone. Jesus died for you. His death is the basis for our freedom from sin. We were enslaved, but he ransoms us. Spiritually, we were like the Israelites in bondage in Egypt. But Jesus brings us out, delivers us, brings us into a new life, and defeats the enemies that tried to keep us in bondage and away from God. Jesus' death and resurrection are like Passover and Exodus for us.

In another letter, Paul says that we are saved *by grace, through faith, for good works* (Ephesians 2:8-10). When we say *all need to be saved and all can be saved*, what do we mean? What is this salvation? Since we're looking at a Wesleyan summary, let's explore some of what Wesley says about salvation.

Salvation isn't just forgiveness of sins and it's not just going to heaven when we die. It also includes transformation, a changed life now. It involves being restored to right relationship with God and having God's image renewed in us. All this is by grace. Because of sin, because we can't save ourselves, we need grace. But because of grace, we can return to God and receive the salvation we need.

Wesley said that God's grace or love is the source of our salvation and this grace is "free in all and free for all" (sermon, "Free Grace," point 2). God's grace is free. God doesn't have to save us, but God chooses to. And God's grace is offered to everyone.

Grace is God's love for us and the power of God's Spirit working in us. Grace comes before we know God or are aware we need God. Grace shows us our need, convinces us of our sin, and enables us to repent. Grace makes the sacrifice of Jesus effective in our lives and puts us right with God. Grace makes us new people and transforms us more and more into the likeness of Jesus who is the image of God. We sometimes talk about experiencing all this in terms of prevenient grace (grace comes before we accept it), justifying grace (grace puts us right with God), and sanctifying grace (grace transforms us).

Most of you have heard lots of preaching and teaching about grace and salvation. But maybe it's never "clicked" for you and you haven't made

your response of faith to God. These ideas may be new to some of you. You can hear and respond to God's invitation today. Hearing the gospel again and again is good for all of us. It reminds us of how we came to know the Lord, it nourishes our spiritual growth, and it helps us know what to say to people if they ask us about how they can know God.

The gospel is that the Lord God, who created us and the world we live in, who wants genuine relationship with us so that he allows us freedom and responsibility, has come to us in Jesus Christ to rescue us from the results of our misusing freedom and responsibility. Jesus shows us who God is and what God is like. Jesus shows us what human life is meant to be. Through his life, he redeems every stage and aspect of human life. He dies on a cross and, somehow, he dies for us. As Jesus dies for us, he takes into himself all the evil, all the sin, all the brokenness of every one of us. Then he becomes the source of forgiveness and life for all of us. After Jesus dies, God raises him from the dead in a new kind of life—a transformed, glorified body that's a preview of what God plans to do for all of us. After being raised from the dead, Jesus is exalted to the place of highest honor where he rules. At the same time, he continues to be present to us in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God who applies to us all that Jesus died to provide. The Spirit enables us to die with Christ spiritually and then raises us up to walk in newness of life. The Holy Spirit empowers us to follow Jesus, to serve and witness, to grow into the likeness of Jesus. Our inner lives become like the inner life of Jesus so that we live as Jesus would live if he were in our place. Someday, the process of transformation will be complete and we'll be raised up and glorified to live in God's new creation. Dallas Willard says, "The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons, with Himself included in that community as its prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant"

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/721457-the-aim-of-god-in-history-is-the-creation-of>.

How do we enter that community? How do we experience for ourselves what God intends, what Jesus lived and died and rose to provide, what the Holy Spirit makes available?

Realize that God has been working in your life to prepare you to hear and receive this message. Because of sin, we can't turn to God and get right with God on our own. But through grace, God gives us enough freedom and God empowers us to repent (return to God) and believe. God doesn't do our repenting and believing for us, but God enables us to repent and believe the good news. Believing here doesn't just mean we acknowledge that the gospel is true, though that's part of it. It means we trust God, we rely on him, we commit ourselves to him, we align our lives with God's kingdom, God's will.

When we yield to God's grace, turn to God, say yes, we experience conversion. To convert means to turn around. We turn from going away from God back to God. We turn from living out of our own resources to relying on God. We exchange the kind of world where we're at the center for the kind of world where God is the center.

Through conversion we begin to enter God's kingdom. A new life under God's rule opens up to us. There are two major aspects of what God does for us and gives to us in salvation: Forgiveness and New Life or, Justification and New Birth.

Jesus once told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector who were praying in the temple (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee was confident in his own righteousness and bragged about it in his prayer. The tax collector just said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Jesus said that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home justified before God, in right standing with God.

We don't get into right relationship with God by swaggering into God's presence saying, "Look how good I am!" We enter right relationship with God by humbling ourselves as we look to God.

An artist sculpted a statue of Jesus in prayer. One of his friends complained that he couldn't see Jesus' face. The artist replied, "To see his face you must be on your knees."

We need to be humble enough to trust God. We receive grace through faith. Faith and repentance are our response to God's grace. But they're not "what we do" in contrast to "what God does." Even faith and repentance are gifts of God. They're not works we do to gain God's favor.

Faith and repentance are simply receiving the gift. They allow God the opening to bring his justifying grace into our lives.

In the moment we say yes to God and yield to God's grace, God justifies us. The Holy Spirit rushes in, forgiving and cleansing us. That's what God does *for* us. We don't *get* right with God. God *puts* us right with himself. God forgives our sin, pardons us, restores the broken relationship and makes it a right relationship. God's grace overcomes the guilt of our sin. All of this flows from what God did for us in Jesus at the cross.

In another scene from Jesus' ministry, he tells Nicodemus and others listening in, "You must be born again (or born anew, or born from above)" (John 3:1-21).

Renewing us, giving us new birth is something God does *in* us. We experience a real change as well as a change in relationship with God. God is beginning to restore his image in us.

Jesus says this new birth is made possible because God gives his only Son for the world that God loves. The death of Jesus on the cross provides forgiveness and new life for everyone who believes, who trusts, relies on, and clings to Jesus.

This is the salvation that God wants all people to have. We're all called to experience and receive it. There's a great passage in C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* where he talks about this transformation and living this new life:

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system.... When He said, "Be perfect," He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering for is harder—in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad. (169)

How do we receive God's gift of forgiveness and new life? How do we get hatched? Again, God's Spirit leads us and draws us to God and makes us aware of our need. Then we repent and believe.

One person's experience may be of a sudden and dramatic change in their life—deliverance from some addiction or a radical turning from one way of life to another. Other people kind of ease into this experience. They may not stray too far from God's way, so it's not a huge leap to entrust themselves to Jesus as Savior and Lord. But what's important is that we come to the point where we recognize that we *do* have faith in Jesus, we *do* trust him, and we *are* committed to him.

Have you had a time in your life when you prayed for God to forgive you and give you a new start? Do you repent of your sins? Do you trust Jesus as Savior and Lord? Then you are justified, put right with God, in a new relationship with God. You're born anew and beginning to be transformed; the image of God is being restored in you.

If that's not your experience, it can be right now. As God's Spirit shows you what separates you from God and you feel sorrow for that separation, be willing for God to take it from you. Tell God that you're putting your faith in Jesus. Accept the gift of life that God offers to all people, including you.