

## Salvation (Part Two)

### *“Salvation is found in no one else”*

Reflection 37 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

When Peter declared of Jesus that “salvation is found in no one else” (Act 4:12), it’s in the context of a remarkable healing now publicly known throughout Jerusalem. It’s not about deliverance from apocalyptic flames. In fact, in the New Testament with Jesus, and the way Peter uses it here, salvation has a more holistic meaning, a larger meaning that includes: to deliver, to rescue, to bring safely through a difficult situation, to snatch from danger, to save from illness or harm, very specifically to cure, to heal. In this holistic, broader sense, salvation, healing and wholeness is found in no one else (other than Jesus).

And, yes, this at first still sounds sectarian. Certainly it was read that way before the globalism of our time. And it may have persuaded our grandparents who, after all, in most cases never knew that there really are Hindus and Buddhists, Jews and Muslims, even people completely unaffiliated from religion, who are more devout and pious than many of us are. But today it seems small-minded to claim that there is one absolute against which everything else is to be measured. It seems wrong-headed, maybe mean-spirited.

But I would submit that the reason it sounds this way is because Jesus has been so badly misrepresented by his own church. He has not been taught, understood or revealed as he really was and is: the most inclusive person who ever lived. In fact, he is far too often understood to be the very opposite. Churchmen for centuries, driven by their own need for power and control, obsessed with darkness and depravity, have largely pictured God – and with God, Jesus – as primarily angry and tyrannical and coming in judgment.

So many people, and churchgoers most of all, do not know that Jesus reveals to us a God who loves us enough to become one of us and die for us, who goes out into the wilderness to look for us, who runs to us when we are still a long ways off. Many people do not know that it is Jesus who cautions us against anger and judgment and incessant moralizing, who condemns self-righteousness in all its forms, who calls us to turn the other cheek, to forgive those who wrong us, and to love the enemy. So, tell me, is there any other way to find salvation, rescue, deliverance, healing on planet earth – any other way than through the teaching of Jesus against anger and judgment and for forgiveness and love, even love for the enemy? It is no surprise then that just before our text (back in 3:25) Peter declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that through his offspring all peoples on earth would be blessed.

The truth is Jesus is the defense against all forms of arrogance. It is Jesus who eagerly commends and celebrates faith wherever he finds it. It is Jesus who lovingly welcomes those whom others cast out. It is Jesus who on his own cross prays for God-killers to be forgiven! It’s Jesus who stands up against all coercion, against doing things by force. It’s Jesus who tells his disciples that they are not in a position to know God’s final judgments. It’s Jesus who calls his disciples to sacrificial service, to a love for others that leads – if need be – to a cross.

There is, however, still more to understanding why Peter says what he says. It's been an amazing month or two for Peter, one night drawing his sword to defend Jesus, later that same night denying he even knew Jesus three times, witnessing Jesus' crucifixion that dark Friday in Jerusalem, then stunned by the unthinkable, a risen Jesus, and blown away by this risen Jesus welcoming, forgiving, accepting him, commissioning him to feed his sheep. So now in the afterglow of the resurrection and filled with wonder, Peter is not envisioning a future when all who never hear the name of Jesus are thereby damned. He is not thinking theologically at all. He speaks not the language of dogma and doctrine but the language of the heart. He seeks to exclude no one. He seeks to include everyone.

So when Peter said this then – “salvation in no one else” – and when we say it now, we are saying something extraordinary, something that inspires and attracts. We are not speaking the language of theology but the language of love. There is no one like him. No one has so touched us. No one so speaks to us. No one so heals us. No one so fills us. No one so saves us. And now our hearts filled to overflowing, we have the courage to do all that we are called to do.

Consider what it was about Peter and John that most struck the Sanhedrin. Verse 13: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” Peter and John had found the courage to defy the Council, and then when released under threat, to pray for what? In verse 29, to pray for boldness, not deliverance but boldness. That's always the story in the book of Acts. Whoever it is speaks boldly, fearlessly for Jesus.

Picture the scene again. Peter and John are standing before the same council that had condemned Jesus to death just weeks earlier and they defy it. This is Peter short weeks ago skulking around in the shadows of the high priest's courtyard denying he knew Jesus. Now he's found confidence. Now he sees clearly. Now he speaks with certainty and passion, with wonder and love, and with no hint of apology. He's found the courage that comes from knowing that you have locked in on the salvation, the welfare, the healing, of the world – that the welfare of the world and every precious baby born in it depends on what this risen Jesus taught and how he lived and how he died. And so Peter summons his courage and says to the Sanhedrin (“the Seventy”) what he now knows to be true: salvation, rescue, deliverance, healing, is found in no one else.

Aglow in the light of the resurrection and amazed that Jesus had called him again, Peter speaks the language of love. No one has so touched me. No one so speaks to me. No one so heals me. No one so fills me. No one so saves me. There is a vast difference between the language of theology and the language of love. And what I would emphasize is that if you cannot speak the language of love about Jesus, the language of love about God, it does you no good at all to speak the language of theology.

Back to Peter. To the Sanhedrin he's saying: Salvation, rescue, deliverance, healing cannot be found in Rome. It cannot be found in the mastery of law. And you will not find it in yourselves. To us he might say: It's not found in the nation, in medicine, in science. It's not found in government, or at the office, or in things, or in some profound insight, or even in family. The saving of the world is not going to happen in any of these ways. It's Jesus – his way, his way of

love and forgiveness, of trust and reconciliation. From now on truth has a name and a warm, vital loving presence, and that name is Jesus.

And when all this is understood, when it is finally realized just how inclusive Jesus is, we will see that claims in his name are not arrogance. They are our only protection against arrogance. And when people see this again, when they see past the centuries of legalistic, sectarian thought to the warm, vital, loving presence of Jesus, they will come. They will get it. And they will see it for the good news it is – the good news of great joy for all people.

We are called then to come with our heart and with our life to this Jesus. He and who he was and what he stood for is the way to healing, to rescue, to salvation. Do whatever you can to know what Peter knew in those first weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, and to see what he saw, and to feel what he felt – to know this of Jesus.

No one has so touched me.

No one so speaks to me.

No one so heals me.

No one so fills me.

No one so saves me.

– Dale Pauls