

## Session 3

March 15, 2020

### HOLY VOCABULARY: THE WORD *SALVATION*

#### Romans 3:20-28

The country preacher shouts, “Brother, are you *saved*?”

The billboard along the highway declares “Jesus *saves*!”

The Sunday School teacher announces happily, “Hey everybody, little Timmy just got *saved*!”

To the outside world, we Baptists must sometimes sound like a bunch of religious radicals. What is all this passionate talk about “*getting saved*?” Far from an invention of the rural backwoods, salvation is the central message the gospel...which is the central message of God’s word. It’s the very reason Jesus came to earth to begin with: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to *save* that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

While the entire Bible tells the story of God’s saving work, the book of Romans is Paul’s great doctrinal treatise about salvation. This week’s focal passage covers some of the highlights.

**God’s standard (vv. 20-22).** The most prominent religious belief in the world is that good works get us into heaven. Ironically that same belief is also the most erroneous! If it were true, how many good works would it take to satisfy God? And how would we know when we had done enough? In reality, works could never get us into heaven, because no one could live up to God’s standard. The absolute righteousness that God requires was revealed by Jesus when He said, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:47). So where does the Old Testament law come in? Weren’t the Old Testament saints saved by the law? NO! That’s the point of verse 20 (and nearly the entire book of Galatians!) Neither keeping the law nor making sacrifices *ever* took away sin (see Heb. 10:4). The law was the written expression of God’s standard. By comparing ourselves to it, we see just how far we miss it. For this reason, we need the righteousness of Christ—which *does* meet God’s standard—apart from our own good works or our efforts to keep the law.

**Man’s sin (v. 23).** In verses 9-18, the apostle drew from various Psalms his vivid description of man’s sin. Our very nature is sinful: no one is righteous; no one understands; no one seeks God; no one does good (vv. 10-12). Our speech gives evidence of the evil in our hearts: there is decay in our throats, deceit on our tongues, poison on our lips, and hatred in our mouths (vv. 13-14). Our actions are arrogant and destructive: feet that run to shed blood, following wretched pathways with no thoughts of peace (vv. 15-17). Our pride fearlessly shakes a fist in the face of Holy God (v. 18). Verse 23 then summarizes our universal condition (all have sinned); our universal failure (all fall short); and God’s universal expectation (His glorious ideal).

**God’s solution (vv. 24-28).** Fortunately for us, God has provided a means of reaching His standard apart from our human efforts and despite our utter sinfulness. He provided His perfect Son as the source (and demonstration) of His perfect righteousness; and He did it by an act of *substitutionary atonement*. Simply put, here’s how it works:

- All have sinned (Rom. 3:23)

- The penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23)
- So...the sinner must die (Ez. 18:20)

BUT: God, by His grace, allows a substitute. He declared that the innocent may die on behalf of the guilty. This was illustrated for generations in the Old Testament sacrificial system, then fulfilled once and for all by the death of Christ (Heb. 10:11-12), the sacrificial “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). So, when a lost sinner trusts in Christ by faith, God accepts the perfect righteousness of Christ as a substitute for his weak, failing, insufficient efforts to be “made right” to a holy God (v. 26).