

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Why Did Christ Come?

by Dan Trygg

“Faithful is the word, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...” I Timothy 1:15

You can't ask for a more straightforward verse to interpret. It is pretty clear, isn't it? “**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**”. Simple statement. No elaborate breakdown of the language or context is needed in order to get the message. There is no need to get into the historical or political background of first century Palestine to make sense of this one. A child could grasp this. But *what does it mean?* **He came to save us, yes, ...but from what? ...for what?** This verse describes the most significant event that has occurred in human history, and yet the impact of what it is communicating has been all but hidden, ...pillowed and reduced by cliché, slogan and truism. Typically, we don't think about it beyond the surface acknowledgement that, yes, “Christ came into the world to save sinners. Isn't that wonderful?” If pressed, we may recount the facts, retell the Bible story, as we remember it. We romanticize about the “manger scene”, about the angelic visitation to the shepherds, and on and on, ...and in our recollection of the details *we totally miss the point*. We do not often weigh the significance of the statement that Christ came to *save* us. He came to save *me*. What does it *mean*? **What does it mean to be “saved”? What is the point?** More importantly, are we *getting the point*? Have we really processed it, ...and **are we living as if it is true?**

This is such a simple, direct verse. Is it possible to miss what is being stated? Let's start with the most obvious piece. **If Jesus came to save us, then there must have been something seriously wrong** to warrant His drastic action. I mean, we are not talking about borrowing a cup of sugar, here. You know the rest of the story. The Eternal Word of God put aside His heavenly glory (Phil 2:5-8), ...became a common human being, ...grew up in human society with all its ills, injustices frustrations and disappointments, ...worked a mundane, everyday job for probably more than 15 years, ...at age 30, began a three-year campaign to draw attention to Himself as the Deliverer sent from God, employing powerful signs and wonders to gather the crowds, imparting profound and challenging teachings describing His mission and calling people to find salvation in following Him, and training disciples to carry on, interpret and publicize His acts and message after He was gone, ...willingly gave Himself up to die a slow, tortuous death to buy our freedom and salvation, even to the extent of taking our place to bear the full punishment which was due us, removing every obstacle in order to make possible our full deliverance. This was *not* a picnic. **This was serious business. It still is, and most of us don't see it. The significance of what He did is lost on us. How do I know? Because we are living as if He never came.** For the most part, we are choosing to operate in our earthly sojourn as if none of this ever took place. In the practical outworking of our everyday choices many of us are just about as much in need of being saved now, as we were before we came to know Him, ...even though we know about Jesus and may even have some semblance of a relationship with Him. What do I mean? Well, if things were so seriously wrong, so dangerous and threatening, that God thought it important enough to come here *Himself* to save us, then **what are you doing that is different?** If you are *not* doing anything different, then are you *really* experiencing what “salvation” is all about? Again, what are you being saved *from*? What are you being saved *for*? What are you doing that is *different*, ...I mean *really* different, than the way you lived life before? ...or **what is so radically different about your life from that of the average non-Christian that would indicate you truly are being saved (or, have been saved), and he or she is not?**

Let's explore this a bit. **What did Jesus come to save us from?** The verse says He came to save sinners. **The word for “sinners” means “target-missers”, “mistake-makers”, “deviators” from what is good, healthy and right.** They are people who live life amiss from the standard. The word also communicates that **when they miss the target by their erroneous choices, they also miss out on the benefits that would follow from right choices.** Interestingly enough, the angel told Mary and Joseph to call the child Jesus (meaning “Yahweh-saves”), “for He will save His people from their sins” (Lk. 1:31; Matt. 1:21). We like to focus on the fact that Jesus paid the *penalty* for our sins before God. That is wonderful, and certainly necessary, but **do we take too lightly the seriousness of the problem, and treat the work of Jesus as insignificant, by continuing to live in habitual sin? Have we grasped that Jesus came to save us sinners from our sins?**

In what way have we been saved from our sin, if we continue to walk in it? Jesus said, “...everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (Jn. 8:34). By continuing and abiding in Him, we can experience freedom from sin's dominance in our lives (Jn. 8:31-36; I Jn. 2:1; 3:4-6). Put another way, **Jesus came to redeem us from the futile ways of living which we learned from our families** (I Pet. 1:18), ways that were unhealthy, ineffective and wrong. Jesus

came to save sinners *from their sins*. **Are you continuing to follow those old, futile patterns of living, ...or are you embracing the salvation of Jesus, by taking initiative to *no longer live in those old ways*, and choosing to *learn to live life in a new, fresh way*, i.e., by the power, health, and honesty of walking in the Holy Spirit?**

The apostle Paul certainly thought that this was a significant part of what salvation is all about, “What shall we say then? *Shall we continue in sin...? May it never be!* How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ...Even so, consider yourselves as *dead to sin*, but *alive to God* in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not *let sin reign* in your mortal body that you should obey its desires...” (Rom. 6:12). Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Are you *being saved*? **He came to deliver you not only from the *penalty of sin*, but also its *power* and the *practice* of it.** This is a serious business. Are you *taking it seriously*? Are you *actively pursuing* the freedom Christ purchased for you?

It is said that if a barn is on fire, and if the farmer attempts to rescue the horses, he cannot just lead them out of the barn and let them go, because they have a tendency to run back into the burning barn! In some ways, we are just like those horses. **We tend to go back to old, familiar ways of living, even though their destructiveness may be quite evident. Christ has come to save us from that destruction, ...now, in this present life..., if we will follow Him.** If we insist on going back to the familiar, we will get burned and we will miss out on what the Lord has for us. The problem with that illustration is that it is too black and white, too life or death. We have trouble relating to it, when the sins we are dealing with seem so insignificant or subtle in comparison. Jesus was absolutely right when He said of Satan, “the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy” (Jn. 10:10). **The enemy is a master at convincing us that there is no danger, when all the while he is *stripping away our time, energy, health and money on his little con games*, until there is nothing left.** Once we have *pidddled away our lives*, they *cannot be regained!* Not only have we been directed *into* things that leave us *empty*, ...and often *further hurt and crippled...*, we have also been directed *away from* building and investing into the plans that God has had for us. We then *miss out on the intended blessing* that would have come from radically following Him. The sad thing is that **we don’t even know what we’ve been missing!** In the target contest of life, we missed the target, lost the prize, and we don’t even know the *significance* of what was lost. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his or her own flesh shall from the flesh reap rottenness, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap Kingdom-life. And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal. 6:7-9).

What did Jesus come to save us for? II Timothy 1:9 declares that He “saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works (as though we could *earn* a calling), but according to His own purpose and grace (which means He had chosen something specifically for us that is part of His significant plan, and is of the same character as His grace, i.e., wonderful, outstanding, and incomprehensibly good). **God has created us for some significant purpose. Our life matters, and we can make a difference that is real and vital for the Kingdom of God**, while we are here in this world. It is not always evident to us how that could happen, but God says that He is the Artisan, and we are the raw material which He is forming. He is fashioning us into a vessel, or tool, for His purposes (II Tim. 2:20,21; cf. Jer. 18:1ff.; 51:20; Isa. 29:16; 45:9). We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which He has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10). **We can either cooperate in and embrace the shaping, maturing and equipping process, or we can stubbornly resist it.** All resistance will produce difficulty and pain for us (see Gal. 6:7-9), but in some cases God will still work His will out in us. In other cases, our unresponsiveness may lead to our being useless and unready for what God intended for our life. **In such cases, not only do we bear the loss, but the ruin of the potential impact of our lives is very real, and others are affected by our inability or unwillingness to serve.** God will accomplish His larger plan through some other means, but the loss to us, and those around us, can sometimes be unrecoverable (Est. 4:14). Think of it. If you fail to fulfill your calling, hundreds of people, even thousands can be affected. **This is serious stuff, and the enemy knows it very well.** Do you think it is at all a coincidence that the richest nation in the world has only a semblance of religion, but very little spiritual power? (II Tim. 3:1-5) With all the resources at our disposal, doesn’t it seem odd that we aren’t more effective at making disciples and reaching others for Christ? For the past fifteen to twenty years the church in the U.S. has been at a zero growth rate, percentage-wise. Churches grow due to transfer growth, not primarily through new converts. **The enemy is using every trick he has to keep us talking to ourselves, singing to ourselves, building more and better worship centers, spending more on conferences, concerts and impressive special events, all to distract us from the main mission, i.e., making, equipping and deploying effective disciples of Christ.**

What are you doing to be different? What are you doing to mature and fulfill your calling? The enemy’s chief tactic is *distraction*. *What are you doing to set the proper course and stay with it?* Remember, **the big picture is not about here.** It is about the coming Kingdom. If we live only for the here and now, we will ruin our potential for the Kingdom. If we do not *purpose* to do life differently, we will end up with the same results everyone else has. **If we live for Jesus as our King, and closely follow Him, we will find freedom from the power of sin.**