

The Power Points of Life:
“The Power to Be Saved”
Acts 4:5-12

May 14, 2006
Dr. J. Howard Olds

In the church of my childhood, the opportunity to get saved came once a year at the annual Revival Meeting. Skilled evangelists came to the protracted meetings loaded with all kinds of bait to reel in the least and the lost. Being a sensitive teenager, I was always fair game, so I usually got saved about once a year. Over the years I've expressed my share of cynicism about such manipulative evangelism. But I have not come to criticize but to connect. It would be easy to strike up a strong debate right here concerning the statement of Peter that I choose as a text, but I have come to make an announcement, not entertain an argument. In the midst of a heated interrogation by the religious authorities of the day, Peter makes this affirmation: *“It is by the name of Jesus Christ that this cripple was healed. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mortals by which we must be saved.”* I've not come to enter an argument today, I've come to make an announcement and it is this, JESUS SAVES!

SALVATION IS THE BONE MARROW OF THE BIBLE.

It is the life force of our faith; it is central to Christianity. The experience of Jesus as Savior is the basis from which the Christian movement sprang. Wesley talked about it all the time. Everybody knows its meaning until asked to explain it, and then all of us stutter and stumble and wonder. What does it mean to be saved?

SALVATION IS PERSONAL SURVIVAL.

If you are drowning in a swimming pool and a lifeguard pulls you out; you have been saved. When Paul and Silas were spending the night in a Philippian jail, an earthquake shook the doors open and the chains off their feet. The jailer, realizing escaped prisoners meant certain death drew his sword to commit suicide. When Paul and Silas stopped him, the jailer exclaimed, “What must I do to be saved?” He was not interested in a theological discussion, he was interested in survival. How can I get out of here alive?—by salvation.

It's Mother's Day so let me make a true confession. There is a question in the ritual of Baptism that I never ask parents. I never ask parents if “they will resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever form they present themselves.” I figure they have already done that by wrestling their kids and getting them to church on time. They have already experienced the forces of evil. Parents understand the need for salvation; survival is a daily challenge.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “There never was a child so lovely, but his mother was glad to get him asleep.” So with kids to raise, bills to pay, jobs to keep, we

sometimes need to pray, “Lord, help me make it through the night. Lord, would you give me a little assistance through the day.” Salvation is a matter of survival.

SALVATION IS NEW LIFE.

John Wesley in his sermon on New Birth described it this way: “Before a child is born into the world, he has eyes but sees not. He has ears, but does not hear. He has a voice, but cannot speak. He has lungs, but does not breathe. Then a child is born. He sees the light, hears the sound, takes a breath, and begins to experience love in a whole new dimension. He is alive!”

Wesley, in his wisdom, says, “When we are born in the Spirit, we see with new eyes, hear with new ears, believe with new minds, love with new hearts. We begin to live and move and experience our being from a whole different perspective. We are alive in Christ. Salvation is not pie in the sky; it’s life down here.”

I’ve been reading Tracey Stewart’s biography of her late husband—pro golfer Payne Stewart. I no longer play golf. I just fantasize about it. As Tracey describes the up-and-down life of a pro golfer, she says, “We began to sense a need for a stronger religious foundation in our home. We were raised in the faith, but being in a different city every week, it was difficult and we wanted our children to be grounded in the faith, as well, so we started attending church regularly. As a family, we began learning the scriptures our children brought home from Sunday school. The giant faith within began to be awakened again in our souls. With new energy Payne and I wanted to live the Christian life, not just talk about it.”

You can be born again. You can live, not merely survive. You can put God first. You and your house can serve the Lord.

SALVATION IS BLESSED ASSURANCE

A young mother enrolled in a Bible study where many of her questions about God were answered. At a worship service she responded to the invitation, made a profession of faith and accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior. She sang all the way home. She walked in the door, hugged her husband and whispered in his ear, “Honey, I’ve been saved.” She was the happiest she had ever been in her whole life. A few weeks later, she fell and broke her leg. Unable to get around the house, work piled up, the kids fought constantly, and the young mother grew more discouraged by the day. She went from the height of a new found experience to the depth of every-day problems. Before long, she doubted her religious experience was authentic at all. Has that happened to you? Do you know what that is like—to have some wonderful religious experience somewhere and then have to work it out in the nitty-gritty and routines?

John Wesley lived and preached the doctrine of Christian Assurance. He based his belief on Romans 8:16. *“The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.”* Assurance is an inward consciousness of God’s acceptance that brings peace and calm to our lives. Assurance is not a feeling; it’s a faith that produces fruit. Anyone can sing when the sun’s shining bright. But

you can have a song in your heart in the night. That is salvation; it is the bone marrow of the gospel. I didn't understand bone marrow until they started chasing stem cells out of it and suddenly I realized, that **is** life. My life at its elemental level is stem cells in the bone marrow. That is salvation.

HOW DOES JESUS SAVE?

BY HIS GRACE

It's all about grace. It's all about the unmerited, unconditional love of God extended to us. You can't buy it, but you can receive it. Sometimes that is hard for us, isn't it?

Did you hear the story about a woman who died and went to heaven? She met St. Peter at the Pearly Gates and asked, "How do I get in?" "Well," replied St. Peter, "You have to spell a word. The word is love." "L-o-v-e," said the woman. "Welcome," said St. Peter. "Come on in." She lived her heavenly reward, meeting up with old friends, catching up with the saints, and enjoying her life in heaven. After some time of enjoying her heavenly reward, St. Peter asked the woman if she would mind covering the gate for him while he ran some heavenly errands. The woman agreed. Lo, and behold, who would appear at the heavenly gate but the woman's late husband. "What are you doing here?" inquired the woman. "Well," said the late husband, "You remember that cute, young nurse that took care of you while you were terminally ill. We fell in love and married a few months after your death. Believe it or not I won the lottery, so we bought that big house you and I always dreamed about. We traveled to all the exotic places you and I could never afford. On this last trip, I was killed in a ski accident, so here I am. How do I get in?" "Well," said the wife, "You have to spell a word." "Fine," said the husband, "Give me the word." The wife thought a moment and said, "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious."

There is no password to salvation. Grace is free for all and in all. Grace is not cheap, but grace is free. In loving kindness, Christ invites whosoever will to come. Do we have sense enough to accept the invitation?

BY HIS RESURRECTION

Paul put it plainly in I Corinthians 15, *"If Christ has not been raised from the dead then our preaching is useless and your faith is futile. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Because Christ lives, death is swallowed up in victory, causing Christians to shout, 'O, death where is your sting. O grave where is your victory?'"*

How sweet to hold a new-born baby,
And feel the pride and joy he gives.
But greater still, the calm assurance,
This child can face uncertain days,
Because Christ lives.

Isn't that the hope of every parent and grandparent on earth?

BY HIS POWER

The whole question in this interrogation of Peter and John with religious officials has to do with power and authority? Brought before Annas, Caiaphas, John, Alexander and other men of the high priests family, they are asked “*By what power or what name did you do this?*” Peter’s response is clear and simple, “*In the name of Jesus Christ, Jesus saves.*”

The second step of the AA Twelve Step Program is this:

We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. That’s salvation. For Christians that higher power is Jesus Christ.

Ted Turner said in a USA Today interview, “When you look in the mirror in the morning, you’re looking at the savior. Nobody is going to save you, but yourself.” Mr. Turner, you are wrong. If salvation is dependent upon us, we are in bad shape.

Christians say we cannot save ourselves. The first step in salvation is to come to believe there is a God. The second step is to understand that I am not God. It’s the power beyond us who can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Do we have sense enough to accept it?

Give the winds a mighty voice,
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Let the nations now rejoice,
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Shout salvation full and free;
highest hills and deepest caves;
This our song of victory,
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Amen.

