

A Savior Has Been Born

Best-selling author, Michael Crichton, describes what he believes is the difference between people in our century and people in most other centuries. He writes:

Today, everybody expects to be entertained, and they expect to be entertained all the time... Everyone must be amused, or they will switch: switch channels, switch parties, switch loyalties [switch churches?]. This is the intellectual reality of Western society. In other centuries, human beings wanted to be saved, or improved, or freed, or educated. But [now] they want to be entertained. The great fear is not of disease or death, but of boredom. ⁱ

We begin today our march toward Christmas and this year we're going to study five names that Jesus either called Himself or was called by others. The first name is Savior. Jesus actually didn't call Himself by this name very much, but others certainly did! So, first, I want us to consider this question...

I. In What Way Is Jesus a Savior?

The first thing to note is that the reason He didn't call Himself "Savior" is because that's what the name Jesus means. His Hebrew name is *Yeshua* which means, "the action or result of deliverance or preservation from danger." It's actually the shortened version of the Hebrew name *Yehoshua*, or as it is often translated in English, *Joshua* which literally means "He whose salvation is Yahweh" or "Yahweh's Salvation." ⁱⁱ So, the very idea of "saving" is built right into His name. But that doesn't answer the question of how. How, in what way, is Jesus a Savior?

There are a lot of people today who give themselves to deliverance or rescuing people or things from danger. The environmentalists are all about "saving" planet earth, at least that's what they believe they are doing. There are large groups of people who give money, effort and time to saving endangered species, saving people from the danger of poverty, or disease, or sexual abuse, or political tyranny. Salvation, it seems to me, is pretty big business these days. So, in what way is Jesus living up to His name of Savior? What kind of salvation is Jesus really offering?

The business of saving is directly tied to some form of danger. If there's no danger, then there's no need for salvation, right? So, for example, some environmentalists believe we are in grave danger from global warming. They are passionate about passing laws that will force people to change certain behaviors which, they believe, are causing the grave danger of global warming. The same is true of those who are working to end abortion, or pornography, or the drug trade. The salvation business is directly tied to some form of danger or some perceived danger. So, if Jesus came to save us, what's the danger? What is Jesus trying to save us from?

The angel said it about as clearly to Joseph as it could be said. He said about his fiancée, Mary:

...what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Matt. 1:20b, 21)

Now, it wasn't just the angel who saw our sin as a danger, Jesus Himself saw it as a danger, so large a danger that He would have to die to bring about the salvation. Jesus said to His disciples:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

If someone is willing to give up his life for some cause, that's a pretty radical commitment, isn't it? We've all heard of individuals who have done this. Whatever the cause may be, whatever the danger they are trying to rescue people from, some people actually give their lives to perform the rescue. Jesus is one of those kind of elite saviors; a very, very committed and radical one. He died in an attempt to save us from the consequences of our own behavior. I think most rational people respect Jesus for His level of commitment.

But I think we all also know of people who gave up their lives for something that didn't pose a real danger. Because of false dangers, they say...

II. Why Would I Need a Savior?

They don't believe that the danger is really that severe. It's like the guy in Maine who was putting pie tins on sticks around the entire circumference of his yard. His next door neighbor asked him what the pie tins were for. The man said, "To keep the elephants away."

His neighbor said, "But there aren't any elephants within a thousand miles of here."

The first man said, "See how well it works?"

The angel said that Jesus would save us from the danger of sin, but many people today think sin is like elephants in Maine. They don't think it poses any significant danger to anyone they know. So, if sin poses no danger, then Jesus is offering a protection that is no different from the pie tins in Maine. There's greater danger in boredom they would say, along with Michael Crichton, than in sinning. So, how can we know if the danger of sin is real or simply a mirage?

Some people think that Jesus' message was that sin is in some ways dangerous here in this life, but its primary danger is in the next life, a life that we cannot see or experience until after we die. So, since we can't go past the grave and see if there really is a hell or see if there really is judgment, we just have to trust Him that it's true. It's the ultimate gamble – will I risk being wrong and pay a horrible price for all eternity or will I call Jesus' bluff and live free of the fear of judgment? So, they conclude, ignoring Jesus is living free and believing Jesus is living in slavery. Do you know anyone who thinks this way?

But Jesus never taught that. He never said, "You're just going to have to trust that what I'm saying is true because no one can go beyond the grave to get the evidence for themselves." No, Jesus' line of reasoning was actually quite different. John the Baptist, of all people, had a day where he was questioning who Jesus really was. So, he sent some of his disciples to Jesus and outright asked Him: (Lk. 7:20)

...Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?

Jesus could have said, "Hey come on, John! You've just gotta believe! Don't ask for proof!" But He didn't. He did just the opposite. Jesus said, "Check out the proof I'm offering you, John." (Luke 7:22-23)

...Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.

Jesus didn't say, "Go back and report what you HAVEN'T seen and HAVEN'T heard." No, He said, "I'm providing tangible evidence. Check it out. Who else can do what I am doing? Examine the "real world" evidence and then decide."

Jesus dealt with sin in the same real-world way. He didn't tell people to put their minds on the shelf and just blindly trust in Him. No, like the Great Physician that He was, He put His finger on the sin in their lives and said, "Now, how does that feel?" This is exactly what He did with the woman at the well. He offers her water for her soul. Listen to their conversation from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase *The Message*: (John 4:15-26, 39)

**Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty...
He said, "Go call your husband and then come back."**

What is He doing here? Being a chauvinist? No, He's putting His finger on her sin.

"I have no husband," she said.

"That's nicely put: 'I have no husband.' You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough."

"Oh, so you're a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?"

What's she doing? She's trying to change the subject, a classic diversionary tactic! But Jesus is not so easily diverted. He talks briefly about worship and then He says:

It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly *themselves* before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself - Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.

The woman said, "I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story."

"I am he," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."

Jesus isn't talking "pie-in-the-sky, in the sweet by and by." He's talking real life, practical living. He's saying, "So, you're living your own way, disregarding God's way. You know it's against God's law to roll in and out of marriage like you roll in and out of the meat market, but you don't care what God says. So, how's your way working for you? Is your sinful life fulfilling your needs? Is your soul satisfied?"

That's essentially what Jesus is asking this woman. He doesn't ask her to believe in Him because, if she doesn't, she might go to hell. No, He confronts her with the horrible dysfunction of sin in her life now! He puts His finger on the sin in her

life and she has to admit that it hurts, that it's that sin that is making her life miserable. So, she goes back to her own village and says of Jesus: (Jn. 4:39)

He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out.

The village people ask Jesus to stay and He uses the exact same line of reasoning with them as He did with her. And what's the result? (Jn. 4:39-42)

Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman's witness... A lot more people entrusted their lives to him when they heard what he had to say. They said to the woman, "We're no longer taking this on your say-so. We've heard it for ourselves and know it for sure. He's the Savior of the world!"

Do you know that? You're here today because you greatly respect Jesus Christ. You wouldn't be here if you didn't. You're awed, you're amazed at His passion for His cause and that He was willing to die for that belief. But do you really understand what He came here to do? He didn't come here to set a good example of how to live or to make up a bunch of witty sayings that would inspire people to live a better life. He came here to warn you about the mortal danger of sin. He didn't come here to heal the hangnail on your big toe or help find you a better job. I'm not saying He isn't concerned about your minor hurts, I'm just saying that's not the danger He's most passionate about. He's passionate, deeply, deeply passionate about saving you from the fires of hell, eternal punishment, which He knows for a fact is real. He came here to save you from the consequences of continuing to choose to live a sinful lifestyle. He's not going to force you to live in obedience to God's law, but He also knows that God's law is the way of real blessing.

It reminds me of the true story I read this week about a guy in upstate New York, 55-years-old, who was participating in a protest motorcycle ride. They were protesting the New York state helmet law that requires motorcycle riders to wear helmets. During the ride, he lost control of his Harley, flew headfirst over the handlebars, fractured his skull and died. He died protesting a law that the doctors in the emergency room said would have saved his life. ⁱⁱⁱ

Is that what you're doing? Are you living your life in protest, rebelling against God's law that is designed to save your soul? Jesus isn't going to force you to obey His law, but He is going to do what He did with that woman at the well. He knows you "inside and out," and right now He's going to put His finger on that area of your life where you are rebelling against His way. You're not loving your wife as Christ loves the church, you're not being patient with your children as God is patient with you. If you're a child or a student, you're not obeying your parents, you're looking for every way you can to get around their commands. Jesus has His finger on that area of your life right now. How does it feel? It hurts doesn't it? The right response isn't to say, "Jesus, stop touching me there!"

The right response is to say, "Yes, I see now why it hurts. It hurts because sin hurts. I did this to myself. Oh Jesus, heal this sin in my life! Remove the poison before it infects even more of me. Oh Jesus, save me! Save me! I need saving. Do what you came here to do! Be my Savior! I need saving! Save me now!"

This is how to prepare for this table. Ask Yeshua, the One Who Saves, to cleanse you, to purify you; to save you now. Let's pray...

ⁱ Michael Crichton, *Timeline* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), p. 443

ⁱⁱ John A. Witmer, *Immanuel: Experiencing Jesus as Man and God* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 46

ⁱⁱⁱ Alyssa Newcomb, "New York Rider Dies Protesting Motorcycle Helmet Law," ABCnews.com (7-4-11)