

Salvation¹



SABBATH—JULY 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 18:9–14; John 6:44; Luke 15:3–10; Matthew 20:28; John 8:34–36; John 6:35, 47–51.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life’ ” (John 3:16, NIV).

WE OFTEN SAY, “DEATH IS JUST PART OF LIFE.” No, death is not a part of life but the end of it. We are so used to death that we misunderstand it. We even call death the opposite of what it really is. But one point is certain: without God's help, eternal death would be the future end for us all.

We are not without hope. Help has come. God, in His unlimited love, offers us salvation through Christ. When the angel announced the birth of the Messiah, he named Him “Jesus.” (*Jesus* is from a Hebrew word that means salvation.) “ ‘For He will save His people from their sins’ ” (Matthew 1:21, NKJV).

This week we will study Jesus' saving work. First, we will study the basis of our salvation and, later, the results of it.

The Bible is clear. We have only two choices for our sins. Either we pay for our sins in the lake of fire, or we accept Christ's payment for them on the cross. We will review the generous gift of God's grace² through Christ. Meanwhile, let us once again humbly renew our faith in Jesus as our personal Savior.

DEFINITIONS

1. salvation—the gift of being saved from eternal death.
2. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

SALVATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD (John 3:16)

Two verbs are used in John 3:16 to describe what God did for our salvation. How are these verbs connected to each other? What do they teach about how our salvation came to be?



We cannot buy salvation; we can only receive it.

The English verb *to love* is used so often that it no longer has the power to describe God's true love. His love is better described by the Greek verb *agapaō*, "to love." In the New Testament, this word and its companion word *agapē*, "love," mean God's unconditional love for His people. His people are unworthy of this love. Love is the most important part of God's character (who He is). He not only loves us, but He *is* love (1 John 4:8).

God's love is not based on His feelings. It does not depend on what we do. God loves the world, and that means all humans, including those who do not love Him.

People know true love by how it is shown. Sometimes as human beings we may say we love someone. But our actions show the opposite (1 John 3:17, 18). The same is not true with God. His love is shown in His actions. Out of love, He gave His only Son for our salvation. In so doing, God gave us all He had, which is Himself.

Read Luke 18:9–14. What does this story teach us about what our attitude (feeling) toward God and His grace should be?

We have probably read this parable³ so many times that we are not surprised by Jesus' saying: " 'I tell you, the tax collector went home accepted by God. But not the Pharisee' " (Luke 18:14, NIV). But those who heard Jesus when He said this must have been surprised. Was this not an unfair result?

Yes, it seemed unfair. That is the way salvation is. It is a gift from God. Gifts are not earned. They are just accepted. We cannot buy salvation. We can only receive it. Jesus never used the word *grace*. But He clearly taught that salvation is by grace. And grace is being given that you do not deserve.

If God gave you what you deserved, what would it be, and why?

DEFINITIONS

3. parable—a very brief (short) story that teaches a lesson or a truth.

SALVATION: GOD TAKES THE FIRST STEP (John 6:44)

A simple reading of the Gospels shows that we owe our salvation entirely to God. Jesus did not come to this world because we invited Him. He came because the Father, out of love for us, sent Him. Proof that the Father makes the first move is shown by Christ’s use of the wording “ ‘He who sent Me’ ” and “ ‘the Father who sent Me’ ” (John 6:44, NKJV). (Read John 7:28; John 8:29; John 12:49.)

What else does the Father do for our salvation, according to John 6:44?

We were sinners and did not love God. But He loved us and opened the way for our sins to be forgiven through His Son (1 John 4:10). This wonderful love is what pulls us toward Him.

The Father does not work for our salvation by Himself. The Son also has a very active part in it. He came with a special mission. “ ‘The Son of Man came to look for the lost and save them’ ” (Luke 19:10, NIV). Whenever we think about Jesus dying on the cross for us, He pulls us to Himself (John 12:32).

How far is the Lord willing to go in His efforts to save us? Read Luke 15:3–10.

These twin parables show that God is not just waiting for us to come to Him. Instead, He actively looks for us.

“As soon as one sheep goes astray, the shepherd is filled with sadness and worry. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that one sheep is lost, he does not go to sleep at all. He leaves the ninety and nine within the pen, and goes looking for the straying sheep. Suppose the night is darker and the way more dangerous. Then the shepherd becomes more worried and his search more serious. He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep.

“How relieved the shepherd feels when he hears the sheep’s weak cry. Following the sound, he climbs the highest hill. He goes to the very edge of the cliff, at the risk of his own life. So continues his search. While the sheep’s cry grows fainter, it tells the shepherd that his sheep is ready to die. At last the shepherd’s effort is rewarded. The lost is found.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 188.



The Father, out of love, sent us Jesus.



**“The lost is found.”
—Christ’s Object
Lessons, page 188.**

THE REQUIRED DEATH (Matthew 20:28)



No greater love than this has ever been shown.

John the Baptist described Jesus as “ ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (John 1:29, NKJV). Each Israelite knew well the sacrifices offered in the temple and the sacred history of the Old Testament. Abraham had shown his faith that “ ‘God will provide [give] for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering’ ” (Genesis 22:8, NKJV); and the Lord provided the animal to be sacrificed (offered) in place of Isaac (verse 13). In Egypt, a lamb was killed by the Israelites as a symbol of their freedom from the slavery of sin (Exodus 12:1–13). Later, when the sanctuary service was established, two lambs were to be sacrificed on the altar each day: one in the morning and the other in the evening (Exodus 29:38, 39). All these sacrifices were symbols of the coming Messiah (Promised Savior), who “was led away like a sheep to be killed” because “the LORD has placed on his servant [Jesus] the sins of all of us” (Isaiah 53:6, 7, NIV). By introducing Jesus as “ ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (John 1:29, NKJV), John was showing Christ’s sacrifice.

What examples did Jesus use to show that He was going to die as a Substitute for us? Read Matthew 20:28; John 10:11.

“ ‘No one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends’ ” (John 15:13, NIV). This is true even if the disciples did not understand or accept that sacrifice. On the cross, Jesus shed His blood, which “ ‘is poured out to forgive the sins of many’ ” (Matthew 26:28, NIV).

It is important to notice that Jesus died freely. As the Father gave His one and only Son, so the Son gave His own life to save humans. Nobody forced Him to do so. “ ‘No one takes it [my life] from me. I give it up myself,’ ” said Jesus (John 10:18, NIV).

Caiaphas, Israel’s high priest, refused to accept Jesus and led the plan to kill Him. But Caiaphas did not realize that his plan would fulfill God’s plan for Jesus to become man’s Substitute.

Many people are not thankful for what God has given them through Christ. How can we make sure we do not fall into that trap? Why is this so easy to do, especially when we are going through bad times?

FREE FROM SIN (John 8:34–36)

Without Christ, we are slaves of sin. We are slaves to our evil desires. We live in a selfish world. We try to please ourselves instead of living to the glory (praise; honor) of God. The result of this spiritual slavery is death. This is because the wages of sin is death.

But Jesus came “to announce freedom for prisoners. . . . To free those who are beaten down’ ” (Luke 4:18, NIV). These are not real prisoners but spiritual slaves of Satan (read Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:1, 2). Jesus did not release John the Baptist from Herod’s prison. But He did free those who were chained by their sinful lives and saved them from the heavy burden of guilt and eternal death.

What great promise is found in John 8:34–36?

The use of the word *indeed* (*really*, NIV) in verse 36 shows that there is also a false kind of freedom that actually enslaves humans to sin. Jesus’ hearers trusted in their family connection to Abraham as their hope for freedom. We run the same risk. Satan wants us to depend on anything except Christ for our salvation. But nothing but Christ has the power to free us from sin and its curse. Our only true Rescuer and Liberator is the Son (Jesus), who was never enslaved by sin.

Jesus delighted in forgiving sins. When four men brought a paralyzed⁴ man to Him, He knew that this man was sick because of his sins. But He also knew that the man had repented (turned from sin). In the pleading eyes of this man, the Lord saw the desire of his heart for forgiveness and his faith in Jesus as his only Helper. Tenderly, Jesus said to him, “ ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’ ” (Mark 2:5, NKJV). Those were the sweetest words this man ever heard. The load of guilt and depression disappeared from his mind. And the peace of forgiveness filled his spirit. In Christ, he found spiritual and physical healing.

At a Pharisee’s (Simon’s) house, a sinful woman (Mary) washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and anointed (covered) them with perfume (Luke 7:37, 38). Seeing that Simon was not pleased, Jesus explained to him that “ ‘her sins, which are many, are forgiven’ ” (verse 47, NKJV). Then He said to Mary: “ ‘Your sins are forgiven’ ” (verse 48, NKJV).

“ ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ ” Why are these the best words that ever can be said to each one of us?

DEFINITIONS

4. paralyzed—unable to walk or move one’s arms or legs.

**CHRIST GIVES US ETERNAL (NEVER-ENDING) LIFE
(John 6:35, 47–51)**

Because of our sins, we deserve to die. But Christ took our place on the cross and paid the death penalty that we should receive. Jesus was innocent. But He took on our guilt and received our punishment so that we sinners could be innocent. Through Him, instead of dying, we receive eternal life. John 3:15 makes this wonderful promise to us. It says, “ ‘Everyone who believes in him can live with God forever’ ” (NirV). This is a promise repeated at the end of John 3:16.

Some think that the promise of everlasting life will be real only *after* Jesus’ second coming. But the promise of salvation is shown in the *present* tense: “ ‘He who believes in the Son has everlasting life’ ” (verse 36, NKJV). Whoever believes in Christ “ ‘has everlasting life’ ” now, “ ‘and shall not come into judgment’ ” in the final day, “ ‘but has passed from death into life’ ” (John 5:24, NKJV). So, even if we die and sleep in the grave, this short-time rest does not take away the promise of eternal life to come.

When Jesus becomes our Savior, our lives receive a whole new meaning. And we can enjoy richer and fuller lives. “ ‘I have come,’ ” said Jesus, “ ‘that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly [plentifully]’ ” (John 10:10, NKJV). Instead of short-time worldly pleasures, which do not really satisfy us, Jesus offers us a life lived in a completely different way. These are fulfilling lives, very satisfactory and plentiful, which include our whole persons. Jesus healed the bodies of many people. But above all, Jesus wanted to give them renewed spiritual lives, clean from sin and filled with faith in Him. And the promise of salvation was certain.

What symbol did Jesus use to illustrate the results of accepting Him? What does that mean in our daily living? Read John 6:35, 47–51.

Think deeply about eternal life. It is not just living forever. But it is also a blessed, satisfying, and happy life in close relationship with God in the new earth. We are still living in this world, but how can we start to enjoy even a part of eternal life on earth?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “The Sinner’s Need of Christ,” pages 17–22, in *Steps to Christ*; “The Subject Presented in 1883,” pages 350–354, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“Looking upon the Savior crucified [put to death] on the cross helps us come to a fuller understanding of the meaning of the sacrifice made by the King of heaven. The plan of salvation is made glorious [beautiful] to us. And the thought of the cross awakens living and holy emotions [strong feelings] in our hearts. Praise to God and the Lamb will be in our hearts and on our lips. This is because pride and self-worship cannot grow in the soul that keeps fresh in memory the scenes of the cross.

“He who sees the Savior’s matchless love will become more pure in thought, heart, and character.⁵ He will go forth to be a light to the world, to show part of this mysterious love. The more we think about the cross of Christ, the more fully we echo [use] the language of Paul when he said, ‘I never want to brag about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through that cross the ways of the world have been crucified as far as I am concerned. And I have been crucified as far as the ways of the world are concerned.’ Galatians 6:14, NIRV.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 661.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Salvation is a gift. This means that it is free. At the same time, does it not cost something? What does it cost to accept this gift? The cost may be high, but why is it more than worth it?
- 2 On Monday we read verses showing that salvation is the result of God’s first move. He makes every effort to save us. But Jesus also said that we need to look for the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). His words “ ‘Strive [work hard] to enter through the narrow gate’ ” (Luke 13:24, NKJV) suggest that we need to look for our salvation. How do we explain this?
- 3 How does Christ’s death on the cross show God’s justice? How does it also show God’s mercy?
- 4 If we could work our way to eternal life through our own efforts and good deeds, and even our own law-keeping, what would that say about how serious sin must be? But think about just how bad sin must be that only the death of Jesus could cleanse it from us.

DEFINITIONS

5. character—the thoughts, feelings, and actions that make up a person.