

ADVENTURES IN MISSING THE POINT  
It's All About Being Saved  
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<< SLIDE>> In 1979, I came home from college with a startling revelation. I told my parents that I felt I was being called into the ministry.

For me, that statement, that revelation was totally unexpected. I wanted to become a movie director, or at worst a TV director. Never, had it crossed my mind that I might follow in the footsteps of my father and become a part of the ordained clergy.

In retrospect, it seems like it was a pretty logical decision. I was either to be a pastor, or a mental health professional.

I was the one who everyone came to with their problems — people learned that they could tell me almost anything and I would do three things with it.

- 1) Keep my mouth shut
- 2) Listen to them and not judge them
- 3) Help them see some possibilities in the midst of their crisis

<< SLIDE>> I also had a concept of God that was pretty comforting to most people.

They found me representing a God that was loving and welcoming, despite ourselves.

But to be honest with you — I am not sure that I really understood.

By that I mean, I am not sure that I really had a theology that was consistent.

And for the last 30 years, I have struggled trying to articulate what it was that I believed and how I understood God.

And, let me be clear, I still have not figured it out.

But at the same time I am pretty comfortable with my struggles.

But that hasn't always been the case.

In 1988, Nancy and I were asked by Bishop Hodapp to be the founding pastor of a church in Warsaw, Indiana.

It was an exciting time — but it was also a difficult time because I found that I was very different from every other pastor that had been asked to start churches.

All the other pastors, were what you might call very conservative, and tended to view God and Jesus very differently than I did.

Every training session that I attended attacked my understanding of God and suggested that I was, at best a heretic.

And so, I did my best to try to adopt their point of view. I began to “believe” in a God that was very foreign to me. << SLIDE>> A God that was kind of angry, and seemed always wanting to make me feel bad for my sins.

No longer was Christianity about a loving God who wanted to be in a relationship with me — it was about getting “saved” being “right” with God.

And as I look back over that time in my life I kinda shake my head.

I got so busy trying to believe the right things that I was missing the entire point of what it means to be a Christian.

BUT, like I said earlier, I am still trying to figure it all out.

I offer the Wrestling with God classes so that you can witness me as I struggle with who God is, and hopefully engage God in your own struggles.

Because what I do know is that God loves me — unconditionally!<< SLIDE>>

And what God wants if for me to be in a relationship with God, and the only way I can be in that relationship with God is by being in relationship with other children of God’s.

That is a huge statement — and I would love to unpack it sometime for you, but today is not that day.

<< SLIDE>> Today, and for the next several weeks we are going to being a journey facing some of the issues that may have created in us blindness. Things that we may have missed the point on. We are going to look at our cloudy judgements and foggy thinking and see if we can’t begin to see a little more clearly.

Reminds me of a story in the Bible.

<< SLIDE>> They spent some time in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town, trailed by his disciples and a parade of people, a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road. When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, he began to cry out, "Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!" Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder, "Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped in his tracks. "Call him over."

<< SLIDE>> They called him. "It's your lucky day! Get up! He's calling you to come!" Throwing off his coat, he was on his feet at once and came to Jesus.

Jesus said, "What can I do for you?"

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

"On your way," said Jesus. "Your faith has saved and healed you."

In that very instant he recovered his sight and followed Jesus down the road. (Mark 10:46-52 The Message)

I hope over these next several weeks that you will join me in rubbing some of the dirt out of our own eyes as we attempt to see.

As Brian McClaren and Tony Campolo put it in their book:

<< SLIDE>> "The adventure is for those who simply and passionately want to see. It's for those who have a passionate thirst for insight that won't be silenced by the polite crowds along the road. It's for those who, as they begin to see, want to follow Jesus along the road."

<< SLIDE>> For many people who call themselves Christian, life is all about being or getting saved — and most importantly — knowing it!

Christians are often taught that they should know the exact moment when they experienced salvation.

Are you saved? Is a question that everyone understood meant one of four things.

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1) You have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

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- 2) You believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and you believe that his death, and not your good deeds, make it possible for your sins to be forgiven.

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- 3) That you have said the sinner's prayer — quite possible during an altar call or invitation.

You all know the sinners prayer don't you?

<< SLIDE>>

Heavenly Father:

I come to you in prayer asking for the forgiveness of my Sins. I confess with my mouth and believe with my heart that Jesus is your Son, And that he died on the Cross at Calvary that I might be forgiven and have Eternal Life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Father, I believe that Jesus rose from the dead and I ask you right now to come in to my life and be my personal Lord and Savior. I repent of my Sins and will Worship you all the day's of my Life!. Because your word is truth, I confess with my mouth that I am Born Again and Cleansed by the Blood of Jesus! In Jesus Name, Amen.

<< SLIDE>>

- 4) You gained the assurance that when you die, that you are going to heaven.

For many Christians, successfully answering the question: Are You Saved is an obsession, but << SLIDE>> the Bible has a lot less to say about these four things than we might believe.

While we often talk about our personal salvation — the phrase: accept Jesus as your personal savior is not in the Bible. Actually the phrase “personal savior” is nowhere to be found in the Bible. The Bible always focuses on the ideal of communal salvation and not personal salvation.

Being forgiven is definitely a great thing — but in the Bible salvation means so much more than simply having our sins forgiven. If anything, being forgiven is the starting line, and not the finish line when it comes to salvation.

Just like “personal savior” is not found in the Bible neither is the “sinner's prayer”. Nobody in the Bible prays that prayer. It is only in the last 150 years or so that “altar calls” or “invitations” began to be offered in the church to

save people. NO ONE has ever or will ever walk down the aisle of a church or raise their hand to “get saved.” They may be wonderful experiences for people — but you don’t get “saved” by doing them.

<< SLIDE>> My favorite phrase that conservative/fundamental Christians often use the question “If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would go?” For me the answer is easy — Kish Funeral Home, but that is not what the question really is asking. The question they really are asking is: Do you know if you are going to heaven or not?”

That question misses the whole point of being a Christian. The purpose of becoming a Christian is to become a fully formed mature person living with the values and attitudes of Jesus. Getting to heaven, as I always say, is the icing — we need to be sure not to forget the cake!

So what is the point about salvation?  
What does it really mean?

<< SLIDE>> In the Hebrew Bible the word that is usually translated as salvation <<yasha’>> means rescue. And by rescue it means rescue from sickness, trouble, distress, fear and especially enemies.

It is not a rescue from hell, but rather a rescue from those who are oppressing the people. Liberation from violence, oppression and the terrible fear that it can create.

<< SLIDE>> Ultimately, as Jesus comes to show us — salvation means being rescued from fruitless ways of life here and now, to share in God’s saving love for all creation, in an adventure called the kingdom of God.

And that is why you hear me constantly talking about Christianity being a journey.

We miss the point when we make it a destination like heaven.

<< SLIDE>> The point of the journey — is the journey. And God wants us to find great joy and hope along the way!