

JESUS, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter Day Saints
Independence, Missouri

SCRIPTURE: John 3:14-17.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; That whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

We have seen and do testify that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

In last week's sermon we talked of Jesus, the Lamb of God, by whose sacrifice of himself the sin of the world was taken away. Today we wish to speak of Jesus as the Savior of the world -- a subject which grows naturally out of the preceding one if we raise the question as to the extent of Jesus' saving mission. Whose sins are taken away by the Lamb of God? Whose Savior is he?

The answer to those questions might be suggested at least in part by asking another question -- "Who needs to be saved?" The answer is obvious -- the whole human race. Every one of us who ever lived has been subject to sin and to the penalty for sin, which is death. If the whole human race needs saving, a true and complete Savior must have come to save the whole human race. This is indicated by many Bible verses, and particularly by the very familiar one from John 3:16,17: "For God so loved the world (i.e., all men) that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world (all men) through him might be saved."

Jesus then is the Savior of the world -- of all men. But this does not necessarily mean that all men are to be saved if they are unwilling to accept Salvation on God's terms. Believers in universal salvation often point to I Timothy 2:4, which says that God "will have all men to be saved," but not a single modern translation which I have examined keeps that construction. God desires, or want or wishes all men to be saved; he has provided the means of their salvation; but there must be an obedient response to God's offer and an acceptance of his Savior Son if the individual man is to be saved. No man is forced; no man is coerced. The Savior is his if he will claim him, but his saving power cannot be used by those who reject him. As one of the Book of Mormon writers puts it: "He cometh into the world that he may save all men, if they will hearken unto his voice." (II Nephi 6:45)

The fall of man brought about two kinds of death; first, a spiritual death, or separation from God who is a spiritual being. Second, a physical death, or separation of spirit from body. The work or the mission of the Savior of the world was to overcome these two kinds of death; to make it possible for man's spirit and body to be re-united in the resurrection, and for this immortal being then to come again into the presence of God, his Father and Creator. If Jesus was to be the Savior of the world, his salvation must lift these two penalties from the shoulders of all men.

We believe that by the power of Christ's resurrection all men will be raised in either the first or the second resurrection. Spirit will be restored to body, and body to spirit, and all men will become immortal. In this resurrected, immortal body, all men will then be restored to God's presence.

Imagine if you can the consternation and terror and confusion of a wicked man, one who has rebelled against God all his earthly life, and who is then suddenly brought face to face with him and made to realize the depth and greatness and tenderness of the love he has spurned, the might and majesty and glory of the God he has

defied, the perfect goodness and light and righteousness which dwell in God. In the resurrected state, we are told that men shall have a perfect recollection and knowledge of their own guilt and filthiness and unrighteousness, or of the forgiveness of their sins because of repentance and acceptance of Christ and his righteousness. That will be judgment! It would be a hellish torment for a man to dwell in the presence of God through eternity, beset with a perfect knowledge of his own guilt, knowing that he was immortal and could never die. Therefore such will of their own choice seek a place far from the presence of God. Those who have accepted Christ, who to the best of their strength and ability have striven to keep his commandments and make themselves like him, whose sins have been forgiven by their acceptance of his redemption and atonement -- these will be saved with God. Those who deny Christ, reject his mercies, and continue to rebel against God will still come under Christ's salvation to the extent of being raised from the dead and restored to God's presence, but being unable to tolerate that perfect presence in their wickedness, they must depart from him, to live eternally in a separation made all the more tragic by the recriminations of their own consciences, and more horrible by the eternal memory of what might have been. That will be hell!

How many people will be saved? Many more than some people have supposed. I know of some who believe that only 144,000 out of the hundred and fifty billion people who have lived on earth will be saved -- or a score of about one in a million in the battle of God against the devil. There are roughly two and a half billion people on earth today. About one in four is a Christian. Three out of four never heard of Christ. Are three men out of every four living today lost to the Savior of the world? Paul says in Romans 2:14 that when the Gentiles, having not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they are law unto themselves which show the work of the law written in their hearts. When men with a good conscience live up to the best they know God accepts their righteousness.

But no matter how good a man is, he cannot save himself. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." No man can be saved from death and restored to God save through the power of Christ's resurrection. No man can have his sins forgiven and be worthy to dwell with God save as he accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior, and gladly receives his pardoning grace. It is reasonable then to believe what is taught in nearly all of the old creeds -- that at his death, Christ descended into hell. There he not only overcame death, and broke the bars of death's prison asunder, but according to I Peter 3:19,20, and I Peter 4:6, he there preached the gospel to the spirits of men who had not had opportunity to learn of him in the flesh, and gave them a chance to accept him as Savior.

Let us make sure, however, that there is no misunderstanding at this point. Every man is to have opportunity, either in this life or in the next, to accept Jesus Christ as Savior. But God gives no promise of another chance to those who have had abundant opportunity to know Christ in this life, but who have spurned and rejected him, and given body and soul to the service of the devil. The atonement of Christ is an infinite atonement -- efficacious for all men. It will restore the spirits of all men to immortal, resurrected bodies. It will bring all men back into the presence of God for judgment. Then those who have accepted Christ will be saved from the second death, which is eternal separation from God. Those who continue to reject Christ must depart into outer darkness.

All men who are saved, however are not saved to the same degree of glory or reward. Christ's atonement cannot make a good man out of a bad one, or reclaim the wasted hours of this life. Reward will be given strictly on merit -- according to the works done in the flesh. Nothing which you can do after death can change the record of your works. This life is your period of probation -- now is the day of salvation. Your complete salvation depends on what you do today -- your choices, your obedience, your works, as well as upon the redemption offered by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, whose infinite atonement is efficacious for all men who will gladly receive it.