

What is God Doing?

Why did God send His Son? What was His purpose? If you are a Christian, you are convinced by God that you were alienated from God, hopelessly condemned because of your sins against Him. Being convinced by God of these things, we thank Him for sending His Son to take the punishment we deserve and reconciling us to Him. If He had not done this, we would be hopelessly lost.

When we think of the gospel and salvation, our own plight tends to occupy our minds. As a result, the glorious work of Jesus to deliver us from the penalty of our sins (judgment) tends to dominate our understanding of God's purposes in saving us. Evidence of this may be observed in the lyrics of most Christian hymns and songs. We love singing about the glorious work that Jesus did to rescue us from our plight as sinners. But if we discipline ourselves to look at it from God's point of view, we will find a much greater purpose behind our salvation. He did not do all this merely to deliver us from our just condemnation. He did all this to make a holy people set apart for His purposes. He desired to make a people who live righteous lives (in these mortal bodies). Nothing less would satisfy Him.

Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah to the nation of Israel. These people believed that they were God's chosen people and as such, they considered themselves superior to all the other people of the world. They observed the laws given to them through Moses and believed that they had a right standing with God. After all, in their minds, the other people of the world served other gods. They had no knowledge of the true and living God. By comparison, the children of Israel were more righteous in their own estimation. Even though they failed to obey God's law perfectly, they had false assurance that in their end, they would be accepted by God.

When John the Baptist came, he preached a message of repentance to the nation of Israel. This message conveyed that, contrary to their own estimation, these people were not righteous in God's eyes (unacceptable). When the most religious of the people came to John, he warned them that their righteousness did not please God and as a result, they would be cast into hell in their current condition.

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, "and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:7-10).

When some Christians see words like this, they automatically assume that the reason for their (the Pharisees and Sadducees) condemnation is strictly based upon the fact that they did not believe in Jesus (yet). But I say to you that the reason given by John stands on its own. The reason why they will be cast into hell is because the level of their righteousness did not please God.¹ After saying these things to the more religious of the Jews, bystanders became concerned about their own plight and asked John what they should do. Notice that John did not say, "Ask Jesus to come into your heart and save you." Instead he said things like this:

"The people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:10-14).

Many, if not most Christians, tend to take these words lightly as if they no longer apply. They believe that because Jesus took the punishment, they are reconciled to God and have a right standing with Him. They believe they are heaven-bound. Now if they indeed believe the gospel from the heart, these things are true and they have great reason to hope. But this does not make John's message any less relevant. The only people who will be in heaven are those who truly repent and DO God's will (live righteously). The things John the Baptist

¹ In reality, their righteousness gas tank was on empty based upon Hebrews 11:6.

told the bystanders to do were God's will. They were righteous things. Unless a person's life is filled with righteous attitudes, thoughts and actions, he will perish no matter how convinced he is that he is heaven-bound.

God's ultimate purpose for sending His Son to die was not to deliver us from the penalty of sin. God's ultimate purpose for sending His Son was to make a holy people who think righteous thoughts, have righteous attitudes and DO righteous deeds. Nothing else would suffice. He is pleased with righteousness and displeased with unrighteousness.

The religious people attempted to live righteous lives in their own power. But this could not be accomplished because *"the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be"* (Romans 8:7). But God is only satisfied with truly righteous lives so He sent His Son to make that possible.

"What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3-4).

God's reason for sending His Son is spelled out clearly here. He did it so that the righteousness of the law would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. This was His ultimate purpose for sending His Son to die. Deliverance from hell is basically a necessary ingredient to make it possible!

When you hear the words *"He shall save His people from their sins,"* do you assume that He is talking about saving us from the penalty of sin (hell)? When you realize God's purpose in sending His Son, you more accurately see that He shall save His people from the sins themselves. His work made it possible for us to be delivered from slavery to sin. *"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death"* (Romans 8:2). Now having been set free from sin, and we have become slaves of God. We now have fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life (Romans 6:22). Our "appetite" for righteousness increasingly grows. Our distaste for unrighteousness also grows. As a result, we increasingly have righteous thoughts, attitudes and actions as we live by faith.² This is what fits us for heaven.³

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:7-8).

In conclusion, rather than emphasize our deliverance from the penalty of sin, let us discipline ourselves to see salvation from God's perspective. He saved us by His grace SO THAT our lives would be full of thoughts, attitudes and actions that please Him.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

² This is what Jesus meant when He said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly" (John 10:10).

³ *"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹² "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 22:11-13).*