

## **LIFE MATTERS – What Matters Most – “Salvation”**

**1 Timothy 1:15, “Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” 1 Timothy 2:3–4, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.”**

Salvation matters and it matters most to sinners. Mankind’s universal need for salvation is one of the clearest teachings in the Bible. The need for salvation goes back to the removal of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. After this, the lives of people were marked by strife and difficulty, and corruption and violence dominated the earth. God performed the first act of salvation by saving Noah and his family from the Flood. However, the central Old Testament experience of salvation was when God brought the Israelites out from tyranny in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.

Later, a new Exodus emerged with the expectation that one day the *rule of God* would overpower all His enemies and perfect the life of His people. This hope is expressed through the concept of the “day of the Lord,” but such an expectation also focused the people on the role of the coming of the Messiah.

However, even Israel’s return from captivity failed to fulfil all their hopes. So a new belief arose; that the full realisation of God’s purpose of salvation would involve the coming of a completely *new age*. And this doctrine of salvation reached its fulfilment in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus’ mission was to save the world from sin and the wrath of God. During His earthly ministry, salvation was brought to us by His presence and the power of faith. But now, our salvation is based on His death and resurrection.

The salvation that comes through Christ may be described in three tenses; *past, present* and *future*. When you believe in Christ you are saved. But you are also in the process of being saved from the power of sin. Finally, you shall be saved from the very presence of sin. God has released into your life today the power of Christ’s resurrection and this gives you a foretaste of your *future life* as a child of God. Your experience of salvation will only be complete when Christ returns and the kingdom of God is fully revealed. But, until then – you can experience heaven here on earth!

Someone once said, “*Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.*” Through salvation, Jesus has done more than this. He considers Himself your closest friend, and in turn, promises never to leave you or forsake you. His presence leaves divine footprints on every aspect of your life. And He also gives you a brand new heart. Jesus places in you the very same heart that He has, a heart that’s overflowing with unconditional love and a heart yearning to extend the kingdom of God through salvation.

This *change of heart* was evident in the disciple Peter when he preached the most important sermon of his life on the Day of Pentecost. From denying Jesus three times, and never quite getting his life together, Peter is dramatically transformed by the presence of God’s Spirit. Peter had a Pentecost experience and His salvation had finally become real to him. But what was Pentecost – what is a Pentecost experience?

**Pentecost** (*‘the fiftieth day’*, from the Greek word meaning *‘fiftieth’*) was a religious feast or festival which lasted just one day and usually occurred around the end of May. It was also known as the *‘Feast of Weeks’*, the *‘Day of First-fruits’* or the *‘Harvest Feast’*, and may be regarded as a supplement to the Passover.

Jewish men were encouraged to go to Jerusalem three times each year to celebrate the major feasts, however, during Pentecost they were especially exhorted to rejoice before Jehovah with all their families [including their servants].

The great feature of this annual celebration was the presentation of the *'two loaves'*, made from the first-fruits of the wheat harvest. Until the Pentecost loaves were offered, the produce of the harvest could not be eaten, nor could any other first-fruits be offered. Therefore, the typical significance of Pentecost must be the fact that all those who became Christians on this day were the *'first-fruits'* of the vast harvest of millions of souls which were to follow; the salvation of both the gentiles and the Jews.

It is popular to refer to Pentecost as the birthday of the church, and there is much truth in that. However, we must try not to totally separate Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost, because in doing so, we miss the astounding truth that both the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost are further explanations of the wonder of Easter. At Pentecost, the power of God (which was made manifest at the *resurrection* and *ascension* of Christ) was bestowed upon the people of God. It was the *coming* of the Holy Spirit!

In listening to Luke's graphic account of the formation of the church (in the Book of Acts), we are pursuing the truth about this peculiar new community which God had birthed. However, we are also exploring the primary reason why the Holy Spirit had come. Remember, the Holy Spirit is the main focus at Pentecost. So first, let's try to imagine what transpired way back then [in the upper room], and afterwards, let's examine what happened to Peter...

It is dawn on the day of Pentecost and the faithful followers of Jesus are passionately gathered together *'with one accord'* (having one mind and purpose). They have waited expectantly and have prayed fervently. Suddenly, the new day begins with an eruption of sounds from heaven *as of a rushing mighty wind* (suggesting the arrival of the mighty but unseen power of the Holy Spirit). Things appear to be coming loose, breaking open all around them! Can it be the same wind, which on the very first morning of all mornings, had swept across the dark waters of the earth – the wind of creation? And so it is, for the Wind of God is once again bringing something to life. It was the Spirit of Life descending upon God's people! And the world would never be the same again! God's people would never be the same again!

Peter was definitely never the same again, and He is a perfect example of what happens to a human vessel when it is filled with the Spirit of God. Let's now take a closer look at these unique circumstances... (Read **Acts 2:5–13**)

International Jews had gathered in Jerusalem from all over the known world to observe the Feast of Pentecost. When they had heard the rumour of what had just happened, they quickly assembled at the house occupied by the disciples. Then, as now, people were attracted whenever the Spirit of God was at work. By the time the multitude had reached the house, the apostles were already speaking in other languages. Much to their amazement, the visitors heard these Galilean disciples speaking in a great variety of foreign tongues. Notice, the miracle was with those who spoke and not with those who heard. Everyone present was able to hear in their own language or dialect. But it was those who had been filled with the Holy Spirit that had been changed so dramatically.

It is widely believed that the primary purpose of the *gift of tongues* at Pentecost was to proclaim the gospel of salvation to people of different languages simultaneously. The message of salvation is so important to God that He chose to speak it in all languages to all nations.

Peter is obviously the spokesperson of the disciples and takes the lead role at this point. He is bold, and very direct, quoting a well known passage of scripture from Joel. But he then closes the quotation with the promise that *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*. This is the good news for all ages. That salvation is offered to all people on the principle of faith in the Lord.

But who is the Lord? Peter next announces the startling news that Jesus whom they had just crucified is both Lord and Christ. Can you imagine the crowd's response? And if they had any expectations that Jesus was still in a Judean tomb, Peter was soon to disillusion their minds! They were told clearly and directly that the One they had just murdered is in heaven, and one day they will still be judged by Him. Is this the same Peter that denied Jesus and hid like a little wimp when the Roman soldiers appeared?

Later, Peter repeats an announcement (a proclamation) that must have shocked and horrified his Jewish audience even further... The Messiah was in fact Jesus of Nazareth and God had raised Him from among the dead, and the apostles could testify of this because they were all eyewitnesses to His resurrection. And following His resurrection, the Lord Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God, and now the Holy Spirit has been sent. This is what's been happening! This was the explanation of what had taken place earlier in the day.

Peter doesn't stop there! He then courageously calls upon his audience to change their opinion concerning the Christ and publicly acknowledge that they had accepted Jesus as Lord. Peter makes a lionhearted appeal for the salvation of every man, woman and child present. *Then those who gladly embraced his word received the gift of the Holy Spirit and that day about three thousand souls were added to them (verse 41)*.

Pentecost meant something to these three thousand souls – it meant that they were finally “right” with God. They were truly *saved*, and then filled with the Holy Spirit as well! But Pentecost also meant a lot to Peter. It was the day that he moved from being a “big mouth” to being a “big man!” He was the first apostle to be called by Jesus, and became the first apostle to step into the fullness of what God had made him to be. He was the first apostle to recognise Jesus as the Messiah; and the first to witness the resurrection. He was the first to inspire the writing of a Gospel, but more importantly, Peter was the first apostle to proclaim salvation to the gentiles.

Salvation does matter!