

A Change of Heart

#534, Week of 12-2-2018

by Dennis Prutow

Zaccheus was rich. He took a cut of the taxes he collected on behalf of Rome. As a chief tax collector, he was atop the pyramid. Local Jericho residents despised this little fellow.

When Jesus passed through town, Zaccheus scrambled up a sycamore tree to see Him. Jesus invited Himself to dinner. Many grumbled. No self-respecting religious leader would associate with a tax collector. Zaccheus was a sinner. He was full of fraud and deceit. Religiously and spiritually he was a lost man. Heaven was not his destination.

At this point Jesus uttered astounding words. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus Christ is the divine and heavenly Son of Man (Daniel 7:13). He entered the world via virgin birth. His life had a goal. It was the cross. As the divine Son of Man, Jesus Christ died on that cross on behalf of sinners. "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:3).

Zaccheus had a change of heart. He confessed Jesus as Lord. "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much" (Luke 19:8). Jesus had one response. "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

WHY?

#535, Week of 12-9-2018

by Dr. Dennis Prutow

As we near the annual celebration remembering the birth of Jesus Christ, we may ask why He came. The Bible is clear. Christ came into the world to save sinners.

Hmm. What is a sinner? A sinner is a person who violates God's standards for living. For example, the Sixth of God's Ten Commandments says, "You shall not commit murder" (Exodus 20:13). Positively, we must do all we can to preserve life.

We must also not destroy others with angry words. Christ interprets the Commandment like this. "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court" (Matthew 5:22).

Violation of this standard is sin. Those who violate the standard in heart or deed are sinners. Sinners deserve punishment. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Enter Jesus Christ. He is God. He is man. He is the God-man. As a man, He dies in the place of men and women to pay for their sins. As God, He perfectly satisfies the demands of God's justice.

Is this believable? Should we accept this idea and embrace it as our own? The Biblical answer is once again clear. "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (1 Timothy 1:15).

He Came to Serve

#536, Week of 12-16-2018

Dr. Dennis Prutow

Why was Jesus born? Did He desire to push His way to the head of the table of this universe? Was His mission to garner adoration and praise? Was this uppermost in His mind? This was not the case. He came to serve.

"Although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

The Second Person of the Trinity entered creation as the babe in Bethlehem to be a ransom payment. In the ancient economy, a benevolent master might buy a slave for a stated price. He then might grant the slave freedom. The purchase price ransoms this burdened soul from a life of servitude.

Christ's perfect life and subsequent death is a ransom payment loosing sinners from their slavery to evil conduct. With this ransom payment, God "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The Season and the Reason

#537, Week of 12-23-2018

by Dr. Dennis Prutow

Mary was pregnant. A distressed Joseph thought about severing the relationship. "But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit'" (Matthew 1:20).

The angel gave further information and direction. “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The name Jesus is a New Testament form of Joshua meaning, “Jehovah saves.”

Jesus saves. Salvation has to do with sins. Sins are violations of God’s standard for our lives. God gives us His standard in the Ten Commandments. One of them requires truth and being true (Exodus 20:16). Lying and deceit are violations of God’s standard. Lies undercut life.

Jesus saves from sins. Jesus separates people from evil conduct, such a lying, in two ways. He bears the penalty for their conduct. He died as a sacrifice for their sins. He provides new life through the Holy Spirit. He arose from the grave to do so.

Jesus saves His people. He has a focused mission. His people are those who believe in Him and trust in Him. This is the reason for the season.

A Goal for the Year Ahead

#538, Week of 12-30-2018

by Dr. Dennis Prutow

Saul set his heart to demonize and persecute Christians. Christ took hold of Him on a lonely desert road outside Damascus, Syria. Without sight for three days, he contemplated this Jesus he so vehemently opposed.

A man named Ananias went to Saul and spoke to him about Jesus. “Why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). Saul became the well-known apostle Paul.

Paul was now a committed follower of Christ. There were new goals and priorities. He was willing to go to jail and even to die for the cause of the Savior. After decades of service to Christ, Paul had the same great goal.

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

We can embrace the words and the goal of the apostle Paul. They can set the tone in our lives in the year ahead.
