

Psalm 34

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[0 : 00] In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song.

The words of the hymn that we often sing and will indeed sing at the close of our service this evening capture the heart of the second sola of the Reformation, solus Christus, or Christ alone, or in Christ alone.

Now last week, if you were able to be here last Sunday morning, we made the point that the five solas are particularly concerned with the doctrine of salvation.

And last Sunday we focused on the fact that the way of salvation is to be found in Scripture alone. But leading on from that, the question that arises is, well, what is the way of salvation that the Bible, that Scripture points to?

And the answer that we give is Jesus Christ. The Scriptures point to Jesus, to Christ alone, as the way of salvation provided for us by the Father.

[1 : 20] I want to focus this morning on three truths concerning Jesus that together establish, beyond any reasonable doubt, the veracity, the reasonableness of affirming in Christ alone.

We're going to notice how Jesus is presented to us in the Bible as our only Savior, our only Savior. But He's also presented to us in the Bible as our only sacrifice for sin.

And He's presented to us also as our only mediator between man and God. Now, even as I mentioned these three descriptions of Jesus, these three tasks that He performs, some of you will be noting that there is, of course, significant overlap in these three descriptions of Jesus.

The second and the third describing Him as our only sacrifice, as our only mediator, are in a sense aspects of the first, that He is our only Savior.

But we still can look at each separately. Though this morning we will be spending much more time on the first of these declarations or affirmations or claims concerning Jesus, that He alone is the Savior of men and women.

[2 : 46] So let's begin there. Jesus, our only Savior. And for each of the things that we'll say, we will highlight a verse from the Bible that in a very explicit way declares this to be so.

In the case of declaring Jesus to be the only Savior, I draw your thoughts and your attention to what Peter said to the high priest Annas in Jerusalem, recorded for us in Acts chapter 4 and verse 12. Very clear, very explicit. Salvation is found in no one else.

And Peter goes on, For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. No other name. You can disagree with that statement, but nobody can question the clarity of it.

Salvation is found in no one else. This is the claim that Peter is making. This is the claim that the Bible makes concerning Jesus. He is our only Savior.

[3 : 57] Now this claim of Peter is astonishing. It's certainly an exclusive claim. And if we were to give it careful thought, we would need to begin by exploring the whole matter of salvation.

What does it even mean to be saved? Do we need to be saved? You know, some people might respond, Well, Jesus is the only Savior. Well, I don't need a Savior. So, even if He is, it really is of no consequence to me.

And we do need to give thought to that. But we're not going to do that right at this moment. We'll touch on it a little later on in the sermon. At the moment, my concern is simply to highlight the uniqueness of Christ as the only Savior, as claimed by the Scriptures.

You can be saved in Christ alone. Now, of course, it's not just Peter who argues that salvation is to be found in Christ alone, in Jesus alone.

Jesus makes the same claim. Listen to what Jesus said to Thomas, one of His disciples. In John's Gospel, we find these words of Jesus recorded in the 15th chapter.

[5 : 18] He says this, and they're familiar words, I'm sure, to many of you. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Now, again, you may agree with that or you may disagree with that, but you can't deny the clarity of the claim. There's no way of interpreting it in any other way than that Jesus is saying that He alone is the way by which men and women, any man or woman, can know God, can be brought close to God, can be reconciled to God.

He is the only way. Now, such an exclusive claim sits uneasily in our contemporary culture that is bought into a relativist narrative where truth, especially in the realm of faith, is never absolute. I have a school friend who I occasionally cross swords with on social media. It's all very friendly, of course. On repeated occasions, in the face of a truth claim made by myself, say, for example, Jesus rose from the dead.

So, I'll make that claim as a significant claim that as a Christian, I believe to be true. Now, the manner in which my friend often responds to that kind of claim is along these lines.

[6 : 48] He'll say to me, he'll say, well, that's true for you as a believer. Very polite and, you know, very nice. But it drives me crazy because it's just incoherent.

It's either true or it's not true. If it's true for me, it's true for him. If it's false, then it's false for me. It's either true or it's not true. It can't just be true for me.

We need to establish, is it true or is it not true? Well, you can come to one of two conclusions on that. But this idea that it's true for you as a believer, it sounds all very nice, but it's incoherent. It makes no sense. So, for us to hold as Christians, and not only to hold, but even worse, to proclaim, given the culture in which we find ourselves, that Jesus is the only Savior, is to lay oneself open to the charge of arrogance.

That's a very arrogant claim. The charge of bigotry, even. You know, you're denying the convictions, the sincerely held convictions of so many people all over the world who follow other religions and who imagine there are other ways to God.

[8 : 02] That's just bigotry. And then, of course, it also lays us open to the charge of the mother of all sins, intolerance. That's intolerant to claim that to be so.

But if we're persuaded by the Reformation principle of sola scriptura, then we can do no other than affirm what the Scriptures affirm, however unpopular or however unpalatable.

But perhaps you're not a Christian and understandably you're reluctant to unthinkingly accept what the Bible says. And I would commend you for not accepting anything unthinkingly.

Can I prove to you the uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Can I persuade you by force of argument that Jesus is the only Savior? Whatever that means.

We haven't really established what that means yet. Well, probably not. Probably I'm not capable of persuading you by force of argument. But what I can do and what the Bible does more importantly is invite you to discover for yourself.

[9 : 10] The Bible invites you to taste and see that God is good. We sung those words or rather we read those words in Psalm 34. Taste and see that God is good.

That's not so much an intellectual argument that you're being asked to consider though that has a place. It's rather inviting you to discover for yourself, to experience for yourself if indeed the claims concerning Jesus stand up, if they deliver, if He delivers.

And so I would encourage you to investigate and discover if you find in Jesus the one who alone addresses the human condition, the meaning of life, your deepest longings and aspirations for love and purpose and direction and hope and who does so in a way that is both compelling and irresistible.

In that investigation, you might want to explore a couple of aspects of the person of Jesus. You might want to investigate His claims but also consider His life.

Now we've already highlighted one of His claims. I am the way and the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me. Let me give you another of His claims for you to think about this morning.

[10 : 26] There are many more but we'll limit ourselves to this second claim that Jesus makes. It's recorded for us in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 11 and verse 28.

And Jesus extends to all who would listen this invitation and implicit in the invitation that is a claim. The invitation is this. Come to Me, all you who are weedy and burdened, and I will give you rest.

As I say, it's an invitation but it contains a claim and the claim at heart is I can satisfy you. I alone can satisfy you.

There is a deep longing in our soul for rest and satisfaction and happiness. And Jesus, astonishingly, claims to be able to satisfy these longings.

This man who lived 2,000 years ago in Palestine, he claims to be able to satisfy to the very depths of your being. Now, we often imagine, especially when we're young, though even those who are less young can be afflicted with this.

[11 : 40] We imagine that we know how we can satisfy those deep longings in our life. Maybe a girlfriend or a boyfriend, our own happy family, a career, success in one field or another.

And all of these possibilities are legitimate and perhaps even achievable human aspirations. But none can or are intended to provide ultimate and lasting satisfaction.

Marie Antoinette, the last queen of France, who you'll remember met an untimely end at the guillotine. Well, Marie Antoinette is most famous for her retort to a courier or a courtier, rather, who drew to her attention that the masses were revolting or rebelling for lack of bread.

And you know how she responded to the one who shared this concern, let them eat cake. That was her infamous reply. But there's another quote of Marie Antoinette that is less well known, but I think proves more sobering and worth considering.

Now remember, this was a woman who certainly at the time that she said what she said, was a woman who had everything, beauty, wealth, power, influence. And yet, she is repeated to have come to a disturbing conclusion that she voiced with these words, nothing tastes, nothing tastes.

[13 : 15] She had everything, but nothing tastes. Nothing satisfies, nothing responds to the emptiness in your soul.

And Jesus invites us to taste of Himself. He doesn't offer us a theory of life. He doesn't offer us five steps to a purposeful life.

He doesn't offer us some theory that will somehow respond to these needs that we have. He offers us Himself. On another occasion, He made this astonishing claim, and within it, an implicit statement concerning Himself.

I am the bread of life. I can satisfy you. Now, perhaps you imagine that it will be different for you. Once you make your dreams come true, you will be satisfied and happy.

I was reading just yesterday an interview in the Guardian, not a recent Guardian. It was online. It was a Guardian of several years ago. But the interview was with the author, Henry Patterson.

[14 : 22] His pseudonym is Jack Higgins, by which he's more commonly known. And he's most famous for his novel written, oh, 30, 40 years ago, The Eagle Has Landed. And in the interview, he tells of how, as a young, aspiring author, he combined his writing with a job in teaching.

He didn't make enough money from his novels to make ends meet, so he had to teach as well. But a few days after the release of The Eagle Has Landed, his accountant called him and asked him what he hoped to get out of his writing.

And he tells the interviewer that his response was along the lines of, well, it would be nice to make a million. I think this was over his lifetime. It would be nice to make a million.

To which his accountant retorted, you've just earned that much in a week. You know, that novel was such a resounding success that he already had that in earnings from this one novel.

And his overnight and continuing success allowed him to enjoy all the trappings that accompany wealth and fame. Listen to what he went on to say in that very interview.

[15 : 34] And I quote, I've had the chance to do it all. The car, the driver, Beverly Hills, MGM, the movies, The Carson Show, Larry King, hanging out with Richard Burton, being waited on by a dwarf in a green jacket in the polo lounge.

Not one of my aspirations, but nonetheless. The Hollywood dream. All the trappings of wealth and success. Now, with that background in mind, it's sobering to hear the answer that the same man gave to a journalist who posed him the following question.

What is it you know now that you wish you'd known as a boy? And his response was that when you get to the top, there's nothing there.

When you get to the top, there's nothing there. That's a very sobering response. And to such a man, Jesus speaks, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and dissatisfied and empty and disillusioned, and I will give you rest.

And what I would encourage you to do is investigate that claim. Discover if it's true. There are many others that I've left unmentioned. But also consider his life. Not only the claims he made, but how the claims that he made were backed up, as it were, by the authority of the life that he lived.

[16:53] Because his claims were accompanied by a quite remarkable and unparalleled life. Remarkable in its character and in its influence.

Let me just share with you a couple of opinions of individuals concerning Jesus. Now, my purpose isn't to validate these claims as being altogether true.

They're not from the Bible. They're individuals who have spoken about Jesus and given their opinion. But simply to whet your appetite to consider what these folk concluded concerning Jesus. The first thing that I'm going to read to you is from an anonymous source of somebody who penned a short biography of Jesus entitled *The Incomparable Christ*. Maybe some of you have come across this little biography.

It's just a couple of paragraphs and I'll read it now. More than 2,000 years ago there was a man born contrary to the laws of nature. He laid aside his purple robe for a peasant's tunic.

[17:57] He was rich, yet for our sake he became poor. This man lived in poverty and was raised in obscurity. He received no formal education and never possessed wealth or widespread influence.

He never traveled extensively. He seldom crossed the boundary of the country in which he lived. But this man's life has changed the course of history. In infancy he startled a king.

In childhood he amazed religious scholars. In manhood he ruled the course of nature, walked on stormy waves, and hushed the raging sea to sleep. He healed a multitude without medicine and made no charge for his services.

He never practiced psychiatry, yet he has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors far and near. He never wrote a book, yet his life has inspired more books than any other man. He never wrote a song, yet he has furnished the theme for more songs than all songwriters combined.

He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. He never marshaled an army, he never drafted a soldier, fired a gun, yet no leader ever had more rebels surrender to him without a shot fired.

[19:05] Herod could not kill him, Satan could not seduce him, his enemies could not destroy him, the grave could not hold him. After three days he rose from the dead, alive forevermore.

He is the ever-perfect one. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This man stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory, proclaimed by God, acknowledged by angels, adored by his people, and feared by demons as the risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now what this man declares, or woman, we don't know, touches on both the character and enduring influence of Jesus. A second anonymous writer marvels on the influence of Jesus, and it's a much shorter quote.

Again, one some of you may have come across. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned have not affected our life on earth as much as that one solitary life.

And then the third quote that I want to share with you this morning is one that I was alluding to when I was speaking to the children. And the question that is posed is this, what kind of stone could it be that once thrown into the pool of human existence could set in motion ripples that would go on spreading until the utmost rim of the world had been reached?

[20:29] What kind of stone? And you can't deny those ripples. You may question the truth claims that are made concerning Jesus and by all means question them and investigate them.

But you can't deny the ripples because the ripples continue to spread. That we are here today is evidence of that. We are a ripple of the man Jesus and His entrance into human history.

So, I would encourage you to investigate Jesus. Perhaps you will discover Him to be in your own experience the only Savior. But then the second thing I want to say and much more briefly is that the Bible presents Jesus as the only sacrifice.

Listen to what is said about Him by the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 10 and verse 12. But when this priest speaking about Jesus had offered for all time one sacrifice for sin he sat down at the right hand of God.

For all time one sacrifice for sins. The only sacrifice necessary. But what is all this about sacrifice?

[21:48] To speak of a Savior as we have been doing is to acknowledge our need to be saved. But what do we need to be saved from? Well, the Bible is clear in answering that question.

We need to be saved from sin and its consequences. In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel puts it very vividly the soul that sins it shall die. die.

In the New Testament Paul also declares that same truth. The wages of sin is death. We need to be saved from sin and its consequences.

But how can we be saved? Well, the Bible affirms that sinners are saved by sacrifice and that Jesus is our only and sufficient sacrifice.

Jesus died as a sacrifice for or to deal with our sin. Your sin. My sin. Now the Bible describes His death in a number of ways and two words capture something of the nature and purpose of His death.

[22 : 49] His sacrificial death. The words substitution and the words penalty. Listen to what Mark says in his gospel. In chapter 10 of Mark's gospel where he speaks of what the Son of Man came to do.

He says this, For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. That's the language of substitution.

That He was to die in the place of others. That He was to die in order to rescue others. That He was to die in order that they might not have to die. That's substitution. But the Bible also speaks in terms of penalty or punishment.

Jesus died to bear the penalty or the punishment due to our sin. Martin Luther, the great reformer that we were touching on and speaking about a little bit more last Sunday morning.

He spoke in terms of a wonderful exchange that takes place at Calvary on the cross. Jesus bore our sin and its punishment and in exchange we are given His righteousness.

[23 : 55] Now the very idea of punishment is also unpopular, maybe even repellent for some. But punishment is a necessary complement of justice or component rather.

God is just and as a just God sin requires punishment. The genius of the cross is that it allows God to be both just and the justifier of sinners that He loves deeply.

Which is the very point made by Paul in that same language in his letter to the Romans. In chapter 3 and in verse 25 He states as follows, God presented Him, that is Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood.

He did this to demonstrate His justice because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

See, the cross satisfies God's justice, the demand, the just demand that sin be punished. But it also provides Him the opportunity to be the justifier of sinners and to bring us back to Himself.

[25 : 18] Jesus then offered Himself up as a sacrifice for our sin. And this is the key point that we're stressing in everything we say that He is the only sacrifice for sin.

Again, the writer to the Hebrews who we've already quoted making that point very vividly does so on another occasion in the same letter in chapter 7 of Hebrews. Such a high priest, Jesus, meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Unlike the other high priest, He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself.

I'm very much stressing those words, once for all, the only sacrifice required, the only and sufficient sacrifice for sin, our only Savior, our only sacrifice.

but also, finally, and again, very briefly, our only mediator. Again, listen to what is said in the Bible on this matter. Paul, writing to his friend Timothy, in 1 Timothy 2, in verse 5, he declares this truth, for there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man, Christ Jesus.

[26 : 42] But what does a mediator do? Well, he or she intercedes on behalf of alienated persons. And in the matter of our alienation from God, the one presented as our only mediator is Jesus.

Jesus alone, as the God-man, can stand in the breach and bridge the chasm. Jesus has bridged the chasm, and He continues to bridge, even more wonderfully, to remove the chasm for His people.

Jesus, as our only mediator, is, if we can use the language, multitasking on our behalf. He mediates the benefits of His own death for the believer as we put our trust in Him.

Every gospel benefit we enjoy, bar none, is in Christ, mediated by Christ. He leads us into the very presence of God as we pray and praise.

Even this morning, He is acting as our mediator. He intercedes for us even when we don't ask Him to. He is our advocate, our mediator in heaven.

[27 : 54] But the crucial point is this, only Jesus can serve us in this way. There is only one mediator between God and man, the man, Christ Jesus.

Jesus. Solus Christus, in Christ alone, Christ alone, our only Savior, our only and sufficient sacrifice for sin, our only mediator.

In Christ alone, my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song. I pray that that is true for you and that these words are also your words of testimony concerning the man, Christ Jesus.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your great work of salvation on our behalf wrought in and through your Son, Jesus.

And we recognize and affirm and testify to what the Bible says concerning Jesus, that He is indeed the only name given under heaven by which men and women can be saved.

[28 : 59] We acknowledge and recognize that He is the only and sufficient sacrifice for sin, for our sin. And we gladly acknowledge and celebrate that He is the only mediator between us and you, our great and holy God.

We thank you that even as we pray now, He is performing His ministry of intercession and mediation for us as we come and as we pray in the name of Jesus.

we pray that it would be true for us that we have discovered Him to be all of these things in our own experience. And we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.