**He will save His people from their sins**

Text: Matthew 1:21

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 1:18-24; Ephesians 5:25-27

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 191, 51b, 233, 458, 295, 23, 214, 239

**Series:** Advent (#4)

**Theme:** The name Jesus reveals His mission.

**Occasion:** Lord’s Supper

**Proposition:** You can be certain that Jesus will save His people from their sins.

**Introduction**

Becoming a parent is a great privilege and responsibility. One of the first entitlements for parents is naming their new-born child. Sometimes it takes time to arrive at a suitable name that both mother and father agree on. Sometimes couples even wait to see something of the character of their child before finally settling on a name. The New Zealand Government expects parents to register a child within two months of birth, when parents do so, they officially give their child a legal name.

About 2,000 years ago, in the land of Israel, Joseph and Mary did not chose the name of the first child in their own family. Instead, angels gave them each the same name at different times before his birth. Luke records that when Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive a son, she was also instructed to call his name ‘Jesus’ (Luke 1:31). In our text this morning, we read that Matthew records the words of an angel of the Lord to Joseph about his pregnant fiancé the virgin Mary:*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* (Matt 1:21).

Jesus was not a new name in the history of God’s people, the Hebrew equivalent ‘Jeshua’ or Joshua is the name of the key figure who led the conquest of the Promised Land with the strength of the Lord. He was a faithful servant of the Lord, able to be strong and courageous because the Lord was with him (Joshua 1:9). Joshua in the Old Testament pre-figured Jesus in the New Testament, but his mission was not that of Christ, whose unique task we focus on this morning under two points:

1. Jesus saves from sin
2. Jesus possesses his people
3. **Jesus saves from sin**

We are very familiar with the word ‘save’ as Christians. It is at the heart of the gospel, but what exactly does it mean? The underlying Greek word has the basic sense of ‘*rescuing someone from great peril*’. Its range of meaning also includes to protect, keep alive, preserve life, deliver, heal, be made whole.

In the New Testament the word ‘save’ is sometimes used of: physical deliverance from danger of dying ([Mt 8:25](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matt%208.25); [Mt 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matt%2014.30); [Lk 23:35](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Luke%2023.35); [Acts 27:20](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Acts%2027.20), [27:31](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Acts%2027.31)); physical healing from sickness ([Mt 9:21](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matt%209.21), [22](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Mt%209.22); [Mk 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Mark%205.23), [Acts 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Acts%204.9)), and deliverance from demonic possession ([Lk 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Luke%208.36)).

However, most often the word ‘save’ refers to salvation in a spiritual sense. That is to be rescued or preserved from the great peril of eternal death – separation from God. We know that this is the meaning of the word when used by the angel who appeared to Joseph, describing the purpose of the child conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. These words were revealed to Joseph: “*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21). We learn many significant things about what the mission of Jesus Christ was, and what it was not, from these few words. Jesus came to this earth primarily to save people like you and me from our sins. Simple as that.

First and foremost, for our lives now, He did **not** come to rescue people from physical danger. For example, in Luke 13 we read of two news items about events where people died: Pontius Pilate had killed some Galilean worshippers; A tower in Siloam had fallen down and killed 18 people. People physically died during the period in which Jesus lived on this earth and they have continued to die since. Physical death comes to everyone, whether saved in Christ or not (Heb 9:27). It is true that Jesus did save people from physical danger at times; as when His disciples were caught on the Sea of Galilee in a great storm (Matt 8:25), but this served to reveal His identity and was not his main mission.

Also Jesus did **not** come primarily to bring physical healing from sickness for our lives now, although He did so many times in his public ministry with signs and wonders that visibly testified to the truth that He is the promised Messiah (e.g. Isaiah 35:5-6). Many people in the world when Jesus was alive on this earth were not physically healed, and many people have suffered from sickness since. Afflictions, both bodily and mentally, affect all kinds of people, those saved and those not saved. In addition, Jesus did **not** come primarily to be a great teacher, although He is full of truth and wisdom and masterfully revealed the Word of God in both speech and action. He is the greatest teacher.

Jesus did **not** come primarily to live an exemplary life so that we could become good moral people acceptable to God by imitating Him. However, His life on this earth was faultless – providing us with a pattern to follow (1 Cor 11:1). His perfect righteousness is part of His work of salvation, not so much **from** sin, but **to** positive righteousness for all to whom His perfect obedience is credited through the instrument of their faith. Jesus did **not** come to be a military conqueror securing an earthly kingdom through force, violence and oppression, although He is the ultimate Champion who has won the lasting victory over sin and death. Jesus did **not** come as a politician or worldly monarch, to govern an earthly country, although He is the eternal Davidic King who perfectly rules His people.

Jesus did **not** come as a divine ‘banker’ to ensure that people like you and me have material abundance in this life and never experience any discomfort. In fact Jesus promises suffering for those who He saves saying: “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Matt 16:24).

The name “Jesus” points to the mission that the Son of God was sent by His Heavenly Father to complete. **Jesus came to save His people from their sins.** The name “Jesus” therefore reveals the reality of sin. Without sin there is no need for a Saviour; no reason for Jesus to have come. The Greek word translated ‘sins’ in our text literally conveyed the idea of missing the mark in the ancient world, as when hunting with a bow and arrow. It later came to mean missing, or falling short, of any goal, standard, or purpose. The word ‘sin’ in Scripture signifies a departure from God's holy, perfect standard of what is right in word or deed. Sin is therefore unrighteousness. So the word here pictures the idea of missing God’s appointed goal (His will) which results in a deviation, a straying away, from what is pleasing to Him. Sin misses the true purpose and goal of our lives which ultimately is found in God Himself. That is why the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther wrote “*sin is essentially a departure from God*.”

Be sure also to notice the future tense embodied in the name “Jesus” – He **will** save His people from their sins. Not, ‘He might save’, nor ‘we hope that he will save’, or ‘depending on how different people respond, he may save them’. The name “Jesus” embodies an absolute certainty about His future work. He **will** save. No doubt about it. Only God can speak of the future with such complete certainty.

When you and I say ‘this or that will happen’ we express our plans, our hopes and/or our expectations, but truth is, we don’t really know what will take place. That is why James wisely warns all who will listen: “*Come now, you who say,* *Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that”* (James 4:13-15).

So if and when you are troubled because your life has not turned out as you expected, or you are in physical danger, or you are sick and unwell physically and/or mentally or you are in financial distress, or you are living under an oppressive worldly government, remember that the name Jesus tells us what He primarily came to this earth to do. To save His people from their sins. Do **not** expect things from Him in this life that He has not promised. If you do you are likely to be disappointed and discouraged. However, **do** expect Him to save you from your sins as you turn to Him in your need, trusting in Him fully, because to do so means that you are one of His people, which brings us to our second point.

1. **Jesus possesses his people**

We’ve been reminded of the gospel truth that Jesus came to save. He took on human flesh in order to rescue, deliver, heal and make whole. His mission is connected the complete restoration of this whole planet so that people will have an earth as their home in which all the effects of sin will be removed from the environment: No more chaotic weather patterns, no more natural disasters, no more pollution of the water, ground and air, no more pain, suffering and grief. However, the primary goal of Christ’s work, first and foremost is to save **His people** from their sins.

So, who are ‘His people’? Firstly, it is clear from elsewhere in Scripture that ‘His people’ are not all the people who have ever and will ever live on this earth. They are a particular, special group of chosen people; limited in number. They are not just from one or a few different ethnic groups, but ‘*from every tribe and language and people and nation*’ (Rev 5:9). The wonderful, and well-known, verse in John 3:16 “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” reflects this truth but does **not** mean that every single person will believe in Christ and be saved.

This is a troublesome revelation for many people. If God is all-powerful, merciful, loving and good, then why doesn’t He save everyone? If I was writing a book containing my thoughts about who God should be and what He should do I would want to make sure that in my book He saved everyone. That seems fair to me. The problem with this humanly attractive idea is that it is not what God has done through Christ. God is all-powerful, perfectly merciful, loving and good. He is also perfectly just, righteous, wise and has absolute authority over everything and everybody He has made.

He is under no obligation to save anyone, for all have sinned and fallen short of His glory (Rom 3:23). He is our Creator, and we are His creatures. His ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). The Bible is not mankind’s thoughts about who God should be but God’s revelation to mankind of who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will yet do. In His Word, God addresses the question of whether He has acted unfairly in saving some, but by no means all, of humanity. Through the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit has inspired these words: “*What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.*’” (Rom 9:14-15).

God decided to send His Son Jesus on a mission to this earth to save His people, not all people, from their sins. Jesus came to save God’s chosen people from their sins, that is the people upon whom God has chosen to have saving mercy. Should we then, brothers and sisters, be proud that we are somehow better than those who are not His people and are therefore not to be saved? Absolutely not! “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*” (Eph 2:8-9).

There are two groups of people, those who are ‘His people’ and those who are not ‘His people’. It is not true that one group is better than the other. Naturally, no one is righteous, no, not one! (Rom 3:10). Everyone has ‘missed the mark’ of God’s good and perfect standard of righteousness: His perfect law. All have sinned.

Yet those in the first group “His people” are saved, those in the second “not His people” are not. The 20th century British author C. S. Lewis wrote in his work ‘The Great Divorce”: “*There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done*.’ *All that are in Hell (that is eternal separation from God), choose it…. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek, find. Those who knock, it is opened*”

So when you hear why the child of the virgin Mary was called Jesus – that He came to save His people from their sins, do not stumble over the question ‘Why only **some** people?’ but instead ask ‘Do I want to be one of His people?’ Do I see that I have ‘missed the mark’ and gone astray from God’s good will for my life? Do I trust in Jesus as my Saviour?

It is clear from the angel’s words that the mission of Jesus on this earth was to save **His people** from their sins. The Greek language underlying this translation (a genitive) indicates possession; that is the say that the people Jesus will save from their sins **belong to Him**. They are His. The language of total possession is used to reflect the status of those who are God’s people in HCLD1Q&A1: ‘*What is your only comfort in life and in death?*’ ‘*That I am not my own but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ*’.

In the 1st century Roman Empire it has been estimated that about one third of the whole population were slaves and another third had been slaves earlier in life. Slavery was more common back then than it is now (although almost 50 million people are thought to be enslaved worldwide today through forced labour and enforced marriage). The language of slavery is used in the New Testament to describe the state of those who have been saved from their sins by Jesus. For example Paul, Timothy, James, Peter, and Jude, all describe themselves as “servants of Christ” (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1). The Greek word translated ‘servant’ means ‘slave’ or ‘bond-servant’.

The same language, that of being a slave, is used of all those who are saved in Christ (e.g. 1 Cor 7:22; Eph 6:6; 2 Tim 2:24). Brothers and sisters, as Christ’s possessions, His willing ‘slaves’ we renounce other masters (Matthew 6:24) and give ourselves totally to the service of our Lord (Matthew 16:24). Let’s be clear about the joy of being possessed by Christ as one of His people. Being a bondservant, a slave, of Christ is not unrelenting misery. His “burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). He is kind and compassionate, not asking anything of us that He has not done Himself. Also, we have this promise: “*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life*” (Rom 6:22).

Jesus will save His people **from** their sins and **to** sinless eternal life. His people, the church universal in the New Heavens and New Earth, will be ‘*presented in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*’ (Eph 5:27). Jesus ultimately saves all His people to perfection, true righteousness and complete holiness.

Congregation, brothers and sisters, friends, as those who still contend with sin in our lives, it is hard to fully imagine an existence where there will no longer be any missing the mark of God’s will, but it will be very, very good. Paradise indeed. As we come to the Lord’s Supper table we remember the Lord’s death – the cost that Jesus bore to save His people from their sins. We also proclaim His death until He comes to bring His bride, the church, in all her perfected glory into the presence of God forever.

AMEN.