

Isaiah 41:10-13; 53:1-5

Dec. 12, 2021

[Zech. 9:9; 12:10]; 1 Thess. 5:16-24

Luke 19:1-10

The Mission of the Savior

It's been 20 years since the World Trade Towers were destroyed and the Pentagon was struck by terrorists on 9-11-2001. A whole generation has been born and grown up in that time. Most people don't remember who was involved. Even at the time her story was not widely known. Genelle Guzman, age 33 (at the time), was the last person to be rescued alive from the rubble of the Towers. She lay buried under the rubble for 27 hours, only able to extend her left hand into a sliver of open space above her. "I was asking God for a miracle," she later said, as she raised her feeble hand and prayed. All she could think to do was to cry out to God. She survived the night and at midday, her hope waning, a weary rescuer clasped her hand and held tight. As she felt that hand wrap around her own she cried out, "Thank God, Thank God!"ⁱ

Our Need For A Savior

It's hard to accept that bad things can happen to good people. Even harder to bear the truth that sin has so enveloped humanity and is so deeply ingrained, that bad things can happen to any of us: because of the malice of others or because our own foibles. When safety nets are torn, when tragedy and misfortune strike, that's when some people cry out to God. **From of old we have had Someone to turn to. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe, Proverbs 18:10.*** The world still needs Him.

The Promise of a Savior

God's desire to redeem people from the mess of sin has been the theme of history. He knew before we did that we needed help. Despite prophets, kings, and teachers sent by God, people turned their backs on God. Humans always try to go it alone. But, left to themselves, they just can't seem to shake the ill-effects of sin ... because of that human desire "do it my way" without regard to God ... and because each person is so loaded with selfish sin that it always leads to more mess. **God knew we needed help, but has always wanted us to know our need for help.** So the promise of a Savior was always there. ***The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, Isaiah 11:2-3.*** It is the arrival of *this* Savior that we celebrate at Christmas.

The Purpose of The Savior

Just **what did this Savior come to do?** For the most part the world knows what Christians believe about Jesus: that he was the Son of God, and that he died on a cross for us. But many outside the Christian faith (and some inside) want to know why He came and what difference He makes?

Some say that Jesus came to give us an example of God's love. Others say that He came to be the Perfect Man, the one shining example that inspires the rest of us. Many people consider Him a great teacher, maybe even the greatest of all time. Still others believe He came to establish a new religion. Some scholars say that He was a reformist rabbi who wanted to start a movement to purify Israel. All kinds of expectations surrounded the promise of a Savior.

Expectations of A Savior

A. Expectations of Israel: Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem **the people of God, the Jews, expected a savior like one of their great kings** - David or Solomon, who once led Israel. The prophet Isaiah predicted: *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit,* Isaiah 11:1. Jesse was the father of David, and so the savior was expected to follow in that great king's footsteps. ***He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever,* Isaiah 9:7.** Many expected a savior who would restore the fortunes of the nation.ⁱⁱ

B. Expectations of the Nations: Though perhaps not calling him a savior in the religious sense that Israel used, other peoples had similar expectations of kings and leaders. **Those who were revered as "saviors" were the ones who restored the fortunes of their country** through military victories, building projects, economic and cultural revival. People pictured a conquering hero astride a powerful steed, like Roman generals, returned from their military victories parading their conquests through Rome.

C. Expectations Today: I suppose if we were to weigh up all the prayers offered up to heaven, we would find the scales heavily tilted toward personal needs: healing and health, safety, food and shelter, good fortune, a solution to pressing social, national, international problems, help for those hit by natural disasters or war, world peace, moral leaders etc. (Do people look for a savior to defeat enemies, destroy prejudice and injustice, to fix things, make everything better, and make us feel good, and also have the glitter of a celebrity?) Do people today want a savior who is more accountable to them than they are to him? **A savior who relieves them of responsibility for life's outcome?**

So, the promise of a Savior was held out long ago – but in the minds and expectations of many it was a savior in purely human terms.

D. Expectations of Jesus: Here are his words: ***For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost,* Luke 19:10.** His mission was and is to save **those who are lost from God** – they are orphans on this planet, not even knowing

or caring to know their true Father in heaven, and so they don't know their real mission in life.

Yet even today people balk at the notion of being lost in this world: "I'm doing fine, thank you" or, "just give me what I need (want) and I'll be fine" or, "I don't need your help, leave me alone." Those very words betray how lost people really are.

The lost are those who have succumbed to the fatal lie that we can be as God, and we don't need Him. Some do not want to accept the possibility that our human nature is flawed, and so continue to hope in themselves or human nature to make the whole world better. Is it that bad? Here is the bottom line: If sin were blue, we'd be blue all over. Part would be dark blue, part would be sky blue, part would be light blue, but every part would be blue in one shade or another. Author Flannery O'Connor: "The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it."

What sinners need is not reformation but salvation. **They need forgiveness, not lectures on morality.** They don't need a new leaf. They need a new life. (*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* Romans 3:23.) What sinners most need, Jesus came to provide. When God gave his only Son to hang on a tree like a common criminal, he gave the very best he had, in order that He might put to death the very worst in us.

What the Savior Did

Many heard Jesus' words of hope and comfort, witnessed his deeds of healing, feeding hungry people, and so believed he would be their liberating king or at least satisfy their earthly desires. But he had greater plans. He stated: ***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,*** Mark 10:45.

It came as a surprise for many then and for many even today, that **the Savior's mission is not to take away our pain, our troubles, or our enemies, but to take away our sins.** ***He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities ... and by his wounds we are healed,*** Isaiah 53:5. He was not a warrior king sent to smite the enemies of God – although He confronted and defeated the great enemy of God and people: Satan. On a cross He paid the price for our failings and our disdain for God, so that we would not have to carry the burden of our sins. There he defeated Satan and his weapon of death!

Jesus was a king who sacrificed for all, including God's enemies that we, and they might know God and be reconciled to Him. ***...it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer ... For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors,*** Isaiah 53:10, 12. Theodore Roosevelt once said: "People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader leads, and the boss drives." **Jesus came to lead us away from our sins and walk with us through this imperfect world.** It was a dangerous mission, assailed at every turn

by His greatest adversary, because Satan thrives on our alienation from God. He came as the prophet predicted: *See, your king comes to you righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey, Zechariah 9:9.* He was quite unlike the conquering heroes of nations.

A No Limits Savior

Here's the plain truth: God looks upon each and every person as worthy of redemption; even God's enemies or the worst sinners we know. Who among us would be the first to say, "Play back the unedited transcript of my life?" There are things better left unsaid and thoughts better left unspoken. We are all adrift in the same boat, and apart from the grace of God, that boat is going down.

But here's the good news of Christmas: Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost! He said so Himself. If that is true, then the worst among us can be saved. We carry some bad stuff, from this very week, or going way back. You can probably think of much. But the good news is that **God has more grace in his heart than you have sin in your life.** Jesus was God's forgiveness in the flesh: **God ...does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities, Psalm 103:10.** Jesus is a better Savior than you are a sinner. You don't have to be a prisoner of your past. Christ can raise you above your past, to live a life that brings great glory to God.

Your Savior Today

Maybe he doesn't display the image of what we expect or want in a savior. ***He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering, Isaiah 53:2-3.*** Yet our greatest need today is to accept the mission of our Savior. **Our greatest danger is resisting the work of God in our lives.** Without Him we are lost, and until we accept His help we won't be able to fulfill our part in His mission to seek and save the lost – because that takes supernatural courage and strength. Reach out to God and cry, "Lord, have mercy!" That may be the most sincere prayer anyone can pray.

It can be a good thing to hit rock bottom if it causes you to look up and see the Lord. Some must come face to face with death. Others don't need such drastic experiences. But all must realize their need for God's salvation. Whatever it takes...

At the outset of this message I told you about Genelle Guzman, the last person to be rescued alive from the rubble of the World Trade Towers after they were struck on 9-11-2001. Trapped under concrete and steel she extended her left hand into the open space above her and found the strength to pray. Unsure of her eternal fate, Guzman pleaded with God to forgive her of her sins and to give her another chance. She asked God to send her a sign that He had heard her plea. "Someone grabbed me by my hand and called me by my name, saying,

'Genelle, I've got you. My name is Paul," she recounted for CBN. Paul held her hand tight until rescue workers were able to dig her out.ⁱⁱⁱ

Genelle Guzman's life was saved because someone had put aside his own comfort and safety in order to look for her, lost in the rubble of a man-made hell. Someone took her hand as she reached out for help. Jesus sought out those looking for divine help. Have you let Him take your hand? We think we are looking for Him when all along He is looking for us. For that was and is His mission. That's why we celebrate our Savior's arrival at Christmas.

***For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you,'* Isaiah 41:13.**

ⁱRavi Zacharias, *Light in the Shadow of Jihad*, (Multnomah: Sisters, OR, 2002), 16.

ⁱⁱThey had in mind the faded glory of former days when Israel was a regional power, and kings and nations brought tribute to Jerusalem. Surely the savior would drive out the foreign occupiers. *In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious*, Isaiah 11:1-10. Herod – who was king of the Jews at the time of Jesus' birth - was appointed "king of the Jews" by the Roman Senate, though he was not a Jew. He tried to pass himself off as a great leader in the manner of David and Solomon – the revered kings of Israel. He built a temple in Jerusalem bigger and better than Solomon's. He built magnificent palaces and fortifications around the country. The one thing he couldn't do was drive out the foreign occupiers because he was dependent on the Romans for his own position.

ⁱⁱⁱNicola Menzie, www.christianpost.com/news/last-world-trade-center-survivor-tells-of-meeting-god-in-the-rubble-55373/