

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

I Accepted Jesus as My Personal Lord and Savior

Gospel Lesson

Luke 15:1-10 (NRSV)

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³So he told them this parable: ⁴"Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Bible/Sermon Focus

It is ok to have different interpretations of scripture. Even the people of the early church had different ideas about what scriptures meant, and they lived much closer to the time of authorship than we do. In the Jewish tradition the rabbis would often lift up different interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. It is one of the most beautiful parts of Jewish tradition, and arguably, Christian tradition as well.

So, it is fascinating when a particular idea or interpretation is lifted as the "only" correct interpretation. And what is more fascinating is when this is done with ideas that are relatively new.

The idea that to be a real Christian is to profess that "Jesus is my personal Lord and savior" is one of these ideas. It comes from the modern era and is deeply rooted here in the United States.

This idea is one of several found in a set of pamphlets known as, "The Fundamentals." "The Fundamentals: A Testimony to The Truth" (generally referred to simply as The Fundamentals) is a set of ninety essays published between 1910 and 1915 by the Testimony Publishing Company of Chicago. It was initially published quarterly in twelve volumes, then republished in 1917 by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles as a four-volume set."

In one of the many essays, this one written by Charles T. Studd, we read "There was not a moment in my life when I ever doubted that there was a God, or that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of the world; but I did not know Him as my personal Saviour."

The Fundamentals supported and pushed the concept of Jesus as "personal Lord and savior" as a fundamental aspect of being a "real Christian." This same set of pamphlets pushed the idea of the Biblical inerrancy (the idea that the Bible is without fault, never wrong, doesn't contradict itself, and is completely factual).

This set of pamphlets is considered to be the foundation for Christian fundamentalism. And the contents of these pamphlets were (and still are) often taught as if these ideas have been around since the time of Jesus. But in reality, they are relatively new.

It's not just that the phrase "personal Lord and savior" isn't in the Bible, or that Paul never writes in any of his letters that the people have to allow Jesus into hearts, or that none of Jesus's disciples, in any of the 4 gospels, ever says it. It's not just that the phrase isn't in there, or that it doesn't hold interpretative value (because it does). The problem arises when we incorrectly assume that the particular interpretation is more authoritative or older than it actually is. Most of our interpretation of scripture these days comes from modern or postmodern thought, this one included.

The activity of the Holy Spirit to keep the Biblical witness alive for each generation is something to celebrate.

Methodists (again, mostly based in modern era thought) understand the moment you know your need for Jesus and God is a moment of "justifying grace." But we also believe in prevenient grace, that God's grace has always been active in our lives even before the moment when we realized we needed it or were receiving it.

And when we experience that moment of justifying grace, we find that we are restored, not just to God (because God never left), but to community.

Whether it has been best understood by you as "justification," whether you had a personal experience or a communal one, whether it happened in one huge moment or slowly over time, being "saved" matters and it changes us. It changes us so that we are better able to turn to God and better able to love our neighbor.

What matters is that the coin is found, the sheep is saved and brought back, and that the prodigal son comes home. What matters is restoration.

Discussion Questions

1. Do we decide of Jesus comes into our hearts, or does Jesus decide? Does it require mutual consent?
2. When was the first time you heard the term "personal Lord and savior."
3. Reflect on the following quote from Dr. Stephen Ray, "The difference a single word can make. People who found Jesus are often intolerable because they believe him to be a

personal possession only provisionally available to others. People who are found BY Jesus are so grateful that God has not forgotten them that policing the lives of others is far from their minds. One word."

4. Do you consider Jesus your personal Lord and savior? What does that mean to you?

Prayer

Holy God, we thank you for your restoration. We witness to your grace in our lives and in the world. Thank you for the Bible, for a community to study scriptures with and a heart to be warmed by your presence and your word. Amen.

The difference a single word can make. People who found Jesus are often intolerable because they believe him to be a personal possession only provisionally available to others. People who are found BY Jesus are so grateful that God has not forgotten them that policing the lives of others is far from their minds. One word."

- Dr. Stephen Ray