

SUCH A GREAT SALVATION

PART 2



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Such a Great Salvation: Part 2
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Such a Great Salvation: Part 2*

The writer of Hebrews says we have “such a great salvation.” But what makes it so great? Why do so few Christians experience their salvation as “great”? What can we do about this situation?

First, we need to make sure just what our salvation *is* and what we have *gained* as a result of being saved. Ours is a great salvation worth fighting for, and when we see Jesus clearly, and understand the greatness of God and His Kingdom-and-glory purposes for the world, then we begin to see just how truly great it is to belong to Him and to be sent to the world as His witnesses.

So great is our salvation that it’s worth striving to gain and making bold to share. In this, Part 2 of our series *Such a Great Salvation*, we’ll look at the “edges” of our great salvation, and hopefully, gain a clearer picture of all that God has in store for us.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Salvation From and Unto

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1.13, 14

Such a great salvation!

The apostle Paul explained that the power of God at work within us, the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit, is exceedingly abundantly greater than all we could ever ask or think (Eph. 3.20).

Greater for what?

For a clearer vision of Christ and more intimate communion with Him (Col. 3.1-3; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). More continuous and abundant yield of spiritual fruit (Gal. 5.22, 23). Greater consistency and effectiveness in the exercise of spiritual gifts for ministry (1 Cor. 12.7-11). More power to bear witness for Christ, to love God and our neighbors, and to advance His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy on earth as it is in heaven (Acts 1.8; Rom. 14.17, 18).

Our salvation is greater than we can ever know. We can never plumb the depths nor soar to the heights of what God has prepared for us in Jesus Christ. The more we *think* about and *meditate on* our great salvation, and the more we *ask* for a greater measure of it, the more that great and inexhaustible gift will be ours.

We must not neglect this great salvation (Heb. 2.3), which we do when we settle into spiritual complacency, insisting that the current state of our salvation is good enough.

It's never good enough. It can always be better. Blessings and benefits and manifestations of grace and truth, beauty and goodness, lovingkindness and righteous judgment await us day by day in our walk with the Lord – bounties of God's Kingdom and Spirit that fill us with grace and peace, and can turn our world rightside-up for Jesus Christ.

So, as the writer of Hebrews exhorts us, "let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6.1), and strive to lay firmer hold on the great salvation Jesus has won for us, and which He so earnestly desires us to know.

But to do this, we must have a clear understanding of how great our salvation is. And this begins with understanding what we have been saved *from* and what we have been saved *unto*.

Salvation from

The problem with *not* being saved is that we have nothing with which to compare our condition. We think we're doing OK, sort of, and that everything's going to work out soon enough. We're happy enough, some of the time, and we are managing to get along in life without making too much of a mess of things. Life for people who do not know the salvation of the Lord is good enough, although they're always open to finding ways of making things a little better.

What lost people don't realize – and what believers in Jesus must never forget – is that Jesus saves us *from* a life that is, as Ignatius of Antioch put it, merely a *semblance* of what God really intends for us (*Epistle to the Smyrnaens* 4.2). This is because, as the apostle John noted, "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 Jn. 5.19), and all the lies and selfishness and guilt and fear and uncertainty and grasping and covering-your-bases that go with life in the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus has delivered us *from* this dark domain. He has overthrown the power of the devil to deceive, mislead,

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and corrupt us. He has cancelled the guilt and shame of our sin, banished the fear of death, transported us into the Kingdom of light, and rescued us from the inevitable narcissism of a merely self-referential life. He has exposed and demolished the idols of self and the world that commanded our devotion. He has ripped us free of the clutches of the lie and rested us firmly in the hand of our loving heavenly Father.

We are saved from sin, saved from the devil, saved from fear of death, saved from death itself, and saved from judgment and hell. Hallelujah! What a great salvation!

Salvation unto

But that's not even half the story. God has "conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love." We are citizens and ambassadors of a realm of righteousness, peace, and joy that is not of this world, but that comes to us in the Person of the Holy Spirit, Who reconciles us to God through Jesus Christ, and begins the lifelong project of making all things new in our lives.

We have new *power* to live selflessly, confident that our God will supply all our needs through His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. We are free of the fear of condemnation and death, and are liberated into the joy of knowing God in Jesus Christ and dwelling in His house forever. We have a standard of unchanging truth to guide our paths and a company of faithful fellow sojourners to encourage and assist us on our way. We are embarked on an adventure of being conformed to the very image of Jesus Christ, of creating communities that refract His resurrection and glory into every area of life, and of caring for the creation and renewing culture so that beauty, goodness, and truth shine indelibly into every nook and cranny of the world.

Ours is a great salvation. So great that words cannot begin to describe it. So rich that we can always delight in it more and more. So vast that we can never outgrow it. And so near, so very, very near to us, because it is in us – in Jesus and His Spirit, in His Word, hidden with Him in the presence of the eternal God. Hallelujah! What a great salvation, indeed!

Let us, therefore, go on to perfection!

For reflection

1. How do you experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, living in you? Do you think there's yet more for you to experience of Him? Explain.
2. Why is it important for us to know that we have been conveyed *from* one kingdom *unto* the Kingdom of Jesus Christ?
3. In what areas of our great salvation would you most like to see progress?

Next steps – Preparation: Reflect on your answers to the questions above. Use your answers to lead you into a time of silent meditation and prayer, waiting on the Lord to convict, affirm, and direct you as He will. Share with a Christian friend your answer to the last question.

2 Great Salvation for Your Soul

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13.17

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1.6-9

The end of faith

The word *salvation* (Greek: σωτηρία) conveys the idea of restoring something or someone to a previous condition, a condition of wholeness, divine purpose, and glorious potential.

That being the case, the salvation Jesus has achieved for us looks back to God's original purpose for creating people in the first place, that they might know, love, delight in, obey, honor, and glorify Him in all aspects of their lives – all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

God made Adam and Eve good, and the environment in which He placed them, together with them, He declared to be *very* good. In that environment, Adam and Eve were assigned two works: to fill the earth with other humans like themselves, and to develop and guard the garden so that the very-goodness of God would continue, expand, and increase, thus refracting His glory into ever greater sectors of His creation.

To be saved in Jesus Christ is to be restored to that original wholeness with God, with our fellow human beings, and with the creation and everything in it. Salvation is a *world-focused* condition, and not merely a *soul-focused* or *eternity-focused* condition. The salvation of God, which is unto *good works* (Eph. 2.8-10), intends to restore wholeness *to* the world through restored and whole people *in* the world who are increasing in knowledge, wisdom, love, and obedience in Jesus Christ.

Salvation is thus not *limited* to the soul; the great salvation which is ours in Jesus Christ *begins* there, in the mind, heart, and conscience of every human being who surrenders to Jesus and is born again into the Kingdom of God. And it is not limited to *eternity*; instead, it issues in a life of restored wholeness here and now, for all aspects of life in the world.

We have been saved from a condition of *separation from* God and His good purposes and plan, so that now our souls are *being renewed in Christ Jesus* unto full and whole restoration, precisely as God originally intended. The end of faith in Jesus Christ is that the great salvation He has achieved should flourish throughout the world, beginning in the souls of those who believe.

Thus, understanding and possessing our great salvation begins by understanding the effects of Christ's salvation on our souls.

Salvation and the soul

I suspect that for many, if not most Christians, the salvation of their souls reduces to being forgiven of their sins, relieved of their guilt and shame, and assured of an eternal home in heaven with the Lord. That is all very true, and where such a condition is realized, believers may say, "It is well with my soul."

However, this is merely the foyer of the house of our great salvation. No one should be content to live in the foyer of a great house. What Christ has accomplished for our souls goes far beyond this beginning of faith,

bringing wholeness and restoration and transforming power to bear in all aspects of our minds, hearts, and consciences, and for all of life in the world.

Mind, heart, and conscience are the three components of that spiritual entity, the soul, which is the driving force of all human existence. *Mind* refers to that aspect of the soul which manages thinking; *heart* is that part of the soul where affections are nurtured and deployed; and *conscience* identifies those default values and priorities which blend thinking and feeling together for good works of obedient love.

This is not the place to try even to sketch out the enormous implications of salvation for all aspects of the soul. Instead, let me mention three functions – one for each of the components of the soul – which our great salvation invites us to engage far more than we are at present.

Three functions

With respect to the mind, let us consider the intellectual work of *imagination*. For the believer, imagination is that function of the mind which, informed by divine revelation, projects an image or vision or scenario into the future, describing the possibilities of what might be achieved, given the presence, promises, and power of God in our lives. Jesus and the apostles invite – rather, challenge – believers to cultivate a large imagination, an exceedingly-abundantly-God-at-work-within-us-beyond vision of what God can do in and through us as servants, witnesses, disciple-makers, and world-transformers, beginning right where we are.

An imagination filled to overflowing with possibilities not presently realized but greatly and earnestly desired will affect the heart by engendering *courage* to believe and endeavor toward that compelling vision. I believe that courage is the great missing affection in the hearts of most believers today. We have become mired in the fear of men, of failure, of inexperience, or of upsetting our comfortable status quo, and that fear has discouraged a lively imagination and consigned us to a merely self-serving view of faith. We have settled for a good-enough salvation rather than our great salvation, simply because we fear things other than God.

A compelling and Biblical vision of what our lives can be, provoking us to courage in daily living, will soon become a settled conviction of *firmness* in our souls. Having once stepped out of the boat and begun to walk on water, our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus, we will not be content merely to endure the buffeting waves of this world ever again. We will set our faces like flint toward that glorious vision of what Christ can do in and through us, and, drawing on the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, we will summon the courage to press ever more deeply into our great salvation day by day.

If all you can say about your salvation is that “It is well with my soul,” well, that’s at least a start. Jesus calls you to a *large* soul: You have the mind of *Christ*! The very *Courage* of God dwells in your heart! And with your conscience *rooted in the deep soil of God’s Word*, nothing can keep you from obtaining more and more of your great salvation every day of your life.

A great salvation awaits unpacking in your soul. Will you neglect it? Or will you take hold of it with all the force and vigor you can muster?

For reflection

1. Why is it important to understand that realizing more of our great salvation begins in the soul?
2. What do you think is involved in nurturing the kind of *large* soul Jesus and the apostles call us to pursue?
3. If our imagination is not rooted in Christ and His Word and promises, where will it be rooted?

Next steps – Preparation: How can you enlarge your imagination so that it takes into its scope more of our great salvation? Talk with a Christian friend about this.

3 Salvation into Christ's Image

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus...
Hebrews 3.1

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.
Hebrews 12.3

The remedy for drift

We recall that the writer of Hebrews was trying to arrest a tendency on the part of his readers to neglect and drift from their great salvation (Heb. 2.1-3). He was attempting to encourage his readers to “give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard” so that they would confirm their faith by growing in their great salvation and, doing those good works of love and witness that are the mark of mature believers.

The writer's solution to the *neglect* of salvation is to lead his readers to *attend* more diligently to it. And the linchpin for succeeding in this effort is to focus more earnestly and consistently on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We may not be realizing the full scope and power of our salvation at present; and we may be falling short in our work of bringing the Lord's great salvation to the whole world (Heb. 2.5-8). But if we will look to Jesus, see Him in His exalted glory, higher than the angels, seated at the right hand of God, controlling and upholding the entire universe and everything in it (Heb. 2.9), then we can discover the vision, strength, courage, direction, and incentive we need to lay firm hold on our great salvation.

Looking to Jesus: contemplation

Twice in the book of Hebrews we are urged to “consider Jesus.” In Hebrews 3.1, the writer exhorts us to *consider* Jesus (κατανοήσατε) so that we will continue believing in and confessing Him throughout our lives. This word means to pay attention to something through direct observation, with the implication of also thinking about it, meditating on it, and returning to it often, just as one might carefully observe an object in creation, or a work of art.

We can especially see the beauty and majesty of Jesus by contemplating images of Him presented in the Scriptures (cf. Heb. 1.8; see also Pss. 2, 47, and 110). For example, in Psalm 45, Jesus is portrayed as exalted in glorious array, surrounded by sweet fragrances and beautiful music, and accompanied by His Bride, the Church, in expansive glory. From His throne room He goes forth daily, conquering and to conquer (Rev. 6.2), gathering and perfecting His followers in the goodness of the Lord, as He prepares them for their eternal dwelling in His holy courts.

This aesthetical and poetic consideration of Jesus engages all our senses and stirs our hearts to delight in and enjoy Him, as we become immersed in the various devices and images the psalmists use to reveal His great goodness and glory. Considering Jesus in this contemplative way fills our minds with new aspects of vision, our hearts with greater excitement and love, and our consciences with firmer resolve to know, love, obey, and glorify this majestic and powerful King of glory.

Looking to Jesus: analysis

In Hebrews 12.3, the writer calls us again to *consider* Jesus, but this time as a work of rational analysis (ἀναλογίσασθε), a theological analysis, as opposed to an aesthetical contemplation. This suggests the need to study, read, think deeply, meditate, talk with others, and know Jesus in terms appropriate to His uniqueness and mission.

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Our calling in life is to learn Jesus (Eph. 4.17-24). All Scripture is about Jesus (Jn. 5.39), so we need to apply ourselves diligently, daily, and dutifully to reading and studying all of God's Word, looking for the revelation of Jesus in every section. This is what the writer of Hebrews does in his epistle, as he draws from a wide swath of Old Testament revelation to show how it all leads to Jesus.

Others can help us by their writings and insights. Church history offers many excellent writings about Jesus and how to know Him. Jesus is one of the most popular subjects of contemporary Christian writers, and we can greatly enhance our theological understanding of our Lord by taking recourse to these excellent resources.

Looking to Jesus is the starting-place and substance for attending to, rather than neglecting, our great salvation. But we'll have to work at it, taking full advantage of all available resources, and making good use of both contemplation and analysis.

Into His image

Each of these exhortations to consider Jesus involves the soul and its various components. The first (Heb. 3.1) will engage what Paul calls the eye of the heart (Eph. 1.18, following the Greek), and the second (Heb. 12.3) involves us with the mind of Christ and the protocols of reasoning. By the first we see Jesus as He is depicted in His glory, garbed in splendor and majesty, bearing the emblems of office, wearing the crown of righteousness, and attended by worshipful saints and angels. We see Him in His majestic loveliness, which is impressed on us by images, sounds, smells, and sweeping vistas of conquest.

By the second we trace out all Biblical arguments, explanations, reasons, hopes, and joys – all teachings, causes, and events – as they lead us to Jesus, Who is the focus of all Scripture, the consummation of all things, and the end of all meaning and purpose and life. By considering Jesus in this way, logically and theologically, we become persuaded that He alone can fulfill God's purpose in restoring all things to Himself, and that He is indeed Lord and Christ.

The end of all our work of considering Jesus is that we should be transformed increasingly into His image (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Our great salvation is not limited by our present circumstances, state of spiritual life and growth, or perceived sense of our abilities. Our salvation is as great as Jesus in all His greatness and glory, and by considering Him we may be daily renewed and transformed in our souls, so that outwardly, in all our words and deeds, Jesus will make Himself more consistently and compellingly real. We may not at present be enjoying as much of our great salvation as the Lord intends, but if we will look to Jesus, He will set us on the course to increasing in His image and growing in our great salvation.

For reflection

1. What is your practice of *considering* Jesus at present? Can you see ways to improve this?
2. How can we know when we're being transformed more into the image of Jesus Christ?
3. How do you expect to see Jesus making Himself known through you in your Personal Mission Field today?

Next steps – Preparation: Lay out a plan for considering Jesus more consistently, then share that plan with a Christian friend and ask your friend to pray for you.

4 Salvation and the World

For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. Hebrews 2.5

*The parched ground shall become a pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water;
In the habitation of jackals, where each lay,
There shall be grass with reeds and rushes.* Isaiah 35.7

The world to come

The writer of Hebrews reminds his readers that a new world is coming, a world in which people who know the Lord, their eyes firmly fixed on Jesus and their lives increasingly conformed to His image, will take up the ancient mandate of God to bring an order of beauty, truth, and goodness to light in the land of the living (Heb. 2.5-9; cf. Ps. 27.13, 14).

The coming of this new world features in various places in the book of Isaiah. Once “the King in His beauty” (Is. 33.17) has begun to advance His rule on earth, change will occur everywhere – in creation, culture, societies, and nations. Isaiah envisioned waste places, impoverished and stricken nations, enfeebled and impeded individuals, and all manner of flora and fauna being quickened, renewed, healed, and restored as the reign of the King spreads according to the promises of God’s Word (Is. 34.16, 17). When God reveals His glory to His people, and brings His salvation to them (v. 4), even the land they inhabit will be transformed.

God’s salvation is for the *world*, that it might not be barren, wasted, and unfruitful, though populated with people who are sick with sin in various ways; but that His goodness and fruitfulness might abound everywhere. God’s chosen and redeemed people are the instruments for this transformation, as they work to bring the full scope, power, and promise of God’s great salvation and Kingdom into those sectors of the world they occupy.

As the writer of Hebrews observed in those early days of our great salvation, we don’t yet see this new world fully in place. But it is coming. Jesus embodies it, and we who believe are being transformed in our souls and lives to refract His image in the world. And as we do, the great salvation of God, promised by Isaiah and others, begins the amazing work of making all things new.

Seeing the World as God’s

We need to make sure the vision of salvation which we cherish is as large as the world God intends to save, beginning with our *own* world. The world in our day already reflects in many ways the remarkable progress of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, realized through the words and deeds of centuries of faithful believers in Jesus Christ.

The day of salvation has dawned, and the darkness of unbelief cannot prevent its continuing to advance (1 Jn. 2.8). As believers *seek* the rule of King Jesus and His beauty, goodness, and truth, the reality of the Kingdom comes to expression in all their words and deeds, and affects the people and conditions around them for the glory of God.

Everything in the world – everything in *your* world – is groaning and travailing under the burden of sin and unbelief. Everything can be improved. Everything needs more of the King’s beauty, goodness, and truth so that it can realize the “very good” possibilities God has invested in it. Your world already shows much evidence of Christ’s rule, but still it groans. It groans in neglected spaces of creation’s natural environment. It groans to refract God’s goodness in everyday conversations, ways of working, neighborly relations, local

culture and institutions, and creative acts of beauty and goodness of all kinds. Creation will continue to groan until those who know and follow Jesus bring to it the liberating and restoring power of the great salvation of our Lord (Rom. 8.18-22).

In His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus reconciled *the world* to God (2 Cor. 5.18-22). And He has brought us, by grace through faith, into His great salvation so that the world to come might come sooner rather than later.

Reconciling the world to God

What does this involve?

Realizing the world to come is just another way of saying, “work out your own salvation in fear and trembling” (Phil. 2.12). The Greek word *κατεργάζομαι* involves the idea of “working along” at something continuously, doing something successfully and thoroughly, accomplishing assigned work, performing a task, getting things done. It includes the word *work* and, in this context, aims that energy at “your own salvation,” that great salvation we have been considering in this series.

We have to *work* at realizing our *great salvation*, with a view to succeeding in every area over which the King in His beauty has rule and interest. All our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. In every area of your world, Jesus has newness, goodness, and beauty to bring, and He intends to bring it through you. But your progress in this great salvation will be impeded to the extent that you, like those first readers of the book of Hebrews, *neglect* and *drift* from your great salvation into the kind of “good-enough-for-me” complacency that Jesus condemns.

Here is a call to learning: How does the work of the King of beauty, goodness, and truth translate into every aspect of my life?

Here is a call to action: What can I do today to bring more of Jesus’ life and truth to my world?

Here is a call to worship: Keep Jesus always before your eyes. Give thanks for everyone and everything in your life, at all times, and call upon Him to make His glory known through you. Praise Him, at the end of the day and in everyday conversations, for all the ways He is reconciling and restoring the world, and bringing into being the world to come, through the work you do in living His great salvation into all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

Jesus has reconciled the world and everything in it to God. He is bringing a new world into being, and He has called us to take our places, eyes fixed squarely and constantly on Him, in working out our great salvation in every area of our lives.

For reflection

1. Have you mapped out your world, your Personal Mission Field? Watch [this brief video](#), download the worksheet, and get started right away.
2. In what ways can you see that your world contains a good bit of groaning and travailing? What can relieve this?
3. Where do you think you need to learn more about working out your great salvation in fear and trembling?

Next steps – Preparation: Map out your Personal Mission Field. Make some notes about ways you would like to see more of the beauty, goodness, and truth of Christ in each of the places to which God sends you each day.

5 A Salvation to Fight For

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6.9-12

Salvation's accompaniment

There are things that “accompany salvation,” as the writer of Hebrews put it. He offers a short list: work, labors of love, ministering to other believers, bringing hope to full assurance, actively seeking to imitate that great cloud of witnesses among whom we run our race, and laying hold on more of Jesus and our great salvation (Heb. 12.1, 2).

Let's not miss the things the writer did *not* mention, but which we may consider to be really important: feeling like I'm saved, having said the sinner's prayer, belonging to a church, enjoying the service of worship, having lots of Christian friends. These, of course, may well be part of the experience of those who are saved. But they also may *not* be. Some of these were probably the experience of those first readers of the book of Hebrews who were in danger of neglecting their great salvation and drifting from the Lord.

What accompanies salvation has to be *worked for*. It requires effort on our part: we must learn, grow, sacrifice some of our own interests, invest our time in others, give of ourselves selflessly, be always ready to bear witness, and daily press on to increase in Christlikeness in every area of our lives. Faith that does not have such accompaniments is dead faith (Jms. 2.14-26). Conversely, the more and harder we *work out and work for* our great salvation, the more of it we may expect to realize, and the more our great salvation will affect our world for the goodness of God and His glory.

But there are obstacles. The enemy of our souls does not want us to know more salvation than we are presently enjoying. The times in which we live are not exactly hospitable to those who are seeking a great salvation. And to gain more of this great salvation, we need power from beyond ourselves, a power we must consciously seek and yield to, and which we need every moment of every day.

So if the accompaniments of our great salvation are to be increasingly realized, we need to make sure we are thinking about our salvation and pursuing it according to what Scripture prescribes.

Salvation as helmet and shield

For example, the Scriptures teach us to think of our salvation as *armaments with which to engage our enemies in a struggle for our souls*. We are in a fight for life – for eternal life, more and more of it, day by day. How badly we want it will determine how hard we are willing to fight for it.

When our great salvation fills our mind, so that we think about it with increasing clarity and fullness, desire it more earnestly, and value it above everything else, then that great salvation that fills our mind will guard us from enticements, distractions, and dumb ideas of various kinds. In that respect, our salvation is like a *helmet*, guarding our brain, surrounding our head, and serving to ward off the temptation blows of the enemy and our unbelieving age (Eph. 6.17).

No football player would go into a game without a helmet, or with a defective helmet, or one intended only for kids playing touch rather than tackle football. You need a strong helmet to protect your head, and you need a great salvation to protect your mind from being enticed away from the Lord Who saved you. The

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greater your salvation, and the more you think about it, meditate on it, pray and plan for increase in it, and talk about it with others, the more it will protect your thinking so that you will not drift from salvation; and the accompaniments of our great salvation will be increasingly in evidence.

Salvation as shield

The Scriptures also regard our salvation as a *shield* (Ps. 18.35).

In a pitched battle, a warrior holds his shield in front of him, moving it here and there to deflect blows, protect his bodily core, and push his way in advancing across the field. Our great salvation is like a shield when it goes before us, leading through attacks and obstacles, and presenting a strong front to the devil and the world.

Salvation must lead the way for us, since only it is sure and firm and unchanging. The more we put forth our great salvation in all aspects of our lives, planning for and wielding it into each day's battles, the more progress we will make in our struggle, and the more we will realize the accompaniments of our great salvation in every area of life.

The cup of salvation

Our salvation is so great that Scripture counsels us to be utterly controlled by it, exuberant and joyous in celebrating it, and heartily inviting others to join with us in it.

Put another way, Scripture encourages us to be drunk with salvation and with the Spirit Who brings our great salvation to us in ever-increasing measure (Ps. 116.12-14; Eph. 5.18-21). Our great salvation is like a cup of fine wine, to be drunk in celebration with those who are saved, until we have become full of our salvation and are entirely shaped and guided and transformed by it.

We are not to be drunk with the world; we are to be filled with the Spirit, drunk with our great salvation, so that we go into each day's struggle, filled with a power beyond our own strength, armed and confident that we can achieve more of salvation's accompaniments in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

The things that accompany our great salvation can be increasingly ours, but we will have to fight for them every day of our lives.

For reflection

1. How is being filled with the Spirit and salvation like being drunk with wine?
2. How should we prepare each day for going out into a hostile world to gain more of our great salvation?
3. We are in a fight. We didn't start this fight, and we're not looking for trouble. But we are in a struggle for our soul. Either we fight to gain more of our salvation, or, neglecting our great salvation, we will drift from it. How would you advise a new Christian to prepare for a life of fighting for this great salvation?

Next steps – Transformation: Can you think of one change you could make in your daily life that would allow you to fight more effectively for your great salvation?

6 God Our Salvation

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11.6

And it will be said in that day:

“Behold, this is our God;

We have waited for Him, and He will save us.

This is the LORD;

We have waited for Him;

We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” Isaiah 25.9

He is

For all who believe in Jesus, the apostle Paul reports that their lives have been hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3.3). It is easy to miss the incomparable and incomprehensible scope, majesty, and prospect of Paul’s words.

Our lives have been hidden *with Christ in God*. We have considered the greatness of Jesus, His sovereign splendor and glory, His exalted majesty and strength, His infinite and absolute beauty, goodness, and righteousness. The more we consider Jesus, the more immense and wonderful and mysterious He becomes, and the more our minds and hearts long to grow into His image.

We have been seated with Jesus in the heavenly places in God (Eph. 2.6). God the Father and God the Spirit and God the Son, the eternal triune God of heaven and earth, Maker and Sustainer of all things, infinitely powerful and wise and good, thrice-holy, in Whom the vast, immeasurable cosmos and everything in it are contained: Our lives have been hidden in Him.

Do you think there’s room to grow here?

A spiritual corollary to Parkinson’s law – which states that work expands to fill the amount of time available for it – might be, “Salvation expands, according to faith, to fill the vessel within which it resides.” The vessel within which your salvation resides is God. Jesus has hidden your life in God, in the safety, strength, and spiritual soil of His eternal being and glory.

So grow where you’re planted.

God is our salvation, and as we wait on Him, rejoicing and believing and working out our salvation in fear and trembling, we will grow *in* God and *into* God increasingly. The Orthodox branch of Christianity uses the term *deification* to describe this process – not that we *become* God, but that, as we increase in the salvation which God *is*, we become more like Him in every way. We see the world as He does. We engage with Him in bringing His Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. We attend to all the details of our lives as surely and faithfully as He attends to all the details of the cosmos, that He might be glorified in them all. We draw on His power to live exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we have previously known in the life of faith. And we realize the joy and hope and exuberant boldness that come from being continuously in the presence of God, ever-growing into Him and His great salvation.

He rewards

It pleases God to reward those who thus devote themselves to diligently seeking Him and His great salvation. And what is His reward to those who delight above all else in knowing Him and growing into Him and being

conformed to the image of His Son?

It is to give them more of Himself, more of what they most fervently desire, more of that great salvation and the joy and rejoicing that go with it, every day, for every situation, increasingly, without end (Ps. 37.4). God declares to us, as He did to Abram of old, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

In the light of who God is and who we are, “exceedingly great reward” seems like an understatement. To know God, to stretch out into Him, to be clothed with the exorbitant garments of His righteousness and salvation, and to be empowered with His presence and understanding, is the greatest reward any human could ever know. It is the reward that awaited Jesus when He finished His work on earth and returned to His Father’s presence and glory. And it is the reward held out to all who take seriously the news that their lives have been hidden with Christ in God, that, believing in God, He will reward them with Himself, and thus cause them to increase, with unspeakable joy, in that great salvation which He is. Thus, increasing in their great salvation, they fill *their* world with the knowledge of God and His glory.

Come to Him

What then shall we do?

We must come to Him. We must diligently seek Him, and not neglect this great privilege, this unfathomable condition of newness which has been granted to us in Jesus Christ and in His Father and ours.

We must come to Him day by day, waiting on Him in prayer and meditation, listening to His words and hiding them in our hearts. We must set our souls to obey the Lord and go into the world as salt, light, and leaven to refract the reality of Jesus, risen from the dead, by all our words and deeds.

Jesus stood on the top of a stormy sea and called to Peter, “Come” (Mk. 14.22-29). God the Creator and Lord, our loving heavenly Father, stands beyond and over and throughout the vast cosmos and its billions of galaxies, its burning suns, its dark depths of unknown substance and power – God stands and says to us, “Come. Believe. Receive Me. Grow in My great salvation.”

We must not fail to obey Him Who calls. Let us give ourselves with all diligence to seeking Him and His great salvation.

For reflection

1. How do you experience your life having been hidden with Christ in God? Do you think there is room to grow in this experience?
2. What does it mean to say that God is our reward? A reward is something good, something to be really enjoyed. Is this your experience of God? Explain.
3. Would you say that you are *diligently seeking* the God Who is your salvation? Can you see any ways you might improve in this?

Next steps – Transformation: How can you improve in diligently seeking the Lord? Share your thoughts about this with a Christian friend.

7 Great to Proclaim

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12.28, 29

*My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know their limits.* Psalms 71.15

*Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;
And let those who love Your salvation say continually,
“Let God be magnified!”* Psalms 70.4

Merely the edges

We have been attempting, with only the meagerest of satisfaction, to paint a picture of our great salvation that will stretch our minds and inflame our hearts to seek the Lord and His presence and power, to the fullest extent of all that He has accomplished for and promised to us.

I confess to feelings of inadequacy in trying to explain what we’re missing when we neglect this great salvation. I feel like Job, rebuking his friends by reminding them of the greatness of God, Who sees every soul at a glance, upholds the earth and all things, maintains the vast cosmos, brings the rains, rules the light and the darkness, “stirs up the seas with His power,” and “by His understanding He breaks up the storm.” He adorns the heavens with majesty and might, and He controls even the wicked and fallen angels. And yet, after such a breath-taking litany of mysteries, Job can say, “Indeed, these are the mere edges of His ways” (Job 26.1-14). Truly, “how small a whisper we hear of Him!” (v. 14), and how inadequate have been my efforts to rouse us from our neglect, and call us to greater diligence in working out our salvation in fear and trembling before the Lord.

Truly, who of us can ever know the limits of our salvation? God intends the knowledge of His glory to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2.14), to flood the world with grace, forgiveness, newness, goodness, beauty, hope, and joy. And He does this first of all in our souls, then from our souls into all our words and deeds; then by those words and deeds, God floods His saving grace and truth into every nook and cranny of our world, in particular, that part of the world He has assigned to each of us.

Salvation so great, so utterly transforming, so all-things-renewing is not a salvation merely to soak in, as you might indulge a hot bath, simply for the feel-good experience it yields. This is a salvation great to proclaim. This is Good News about the all-powerful God Who offers eternal and abundant life through our Lord Jesus Christ and according to His Word.

We must not consume this salvation merely on ourselves. Let us take up the psalmists’ resolve to proclaim the Lord’s salvation all day long, and to say continually, “Let God be magnified!”

Let us have grace

But for this, no less than for salvation itself, we will need grace. Our salvation brings us by grace through faith into a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, a Kingdom that expands and increases in light and love and truth and goodness to manifest the glory of the Lord to every human being in every place.

And it does this through the witness of those who *have* received grace and who *daily* seek grace to fulfill their

appointed callings as witnesses for Jesus Christ (Acts 1.8).

What does this mean?

Grace, recall, is both a *disposition* of God toward us and an *active power* of God in and through us. We need to be daily renewed in the grace of God, that we might always know how much He loves us, though we are but puny creatures; and what great lengths He has gone so that we might be saved. We need to bask in the grace of God, and marvel at it with tears, by reading carefully and reflectively of it in God's Word, and praying it back to God in great detail, giving thanks for every indication, be it ever so small, of the undeserved love He shows us each day.

Then we must plead with God to give us such a disposition to the people around us, that we might look upon them as we delight in Him looking upon us, to love our neighbors, to care about their eternal disposition, and to do whatever we can to demonstrate the reality of the great salvation we have come to know.

And we must ask God to give us grace as *active power* to help us get beyond our natural self-interest, to be alert to every opportunity to show grace, and to banish our fears of what others may think, and step out of the boat toward Jesus, bearing witness as we do of His power, grace, forgiveness, and soon return.

God will give us the grace to bear witness to His great salvation, just as He gives us the grace to grow more fully into it day by day. But we must ask. We must ask specifically, believing as we do that God will work in our hearts so that we might serve Him acceptably through our words and deeds to bring His great salvation to light in our world.

With fear?

And let us make one more observation about the writer's charge concerning the grace of God: We must do so "with reverence and godly fear." We do so with *reverence* when our motivation is to honor God and to represent Him rightly to the world. We want the people in our world to see God as He is, a God to be worshiped and revered and served. They will need to see that in our lives if they are to believe it can be possible in theirs.

And we serve God with *fear* when we remember that He is a consuming fire, that not only will He consume unrepentant sinners with eternal fire, and pour out His wrath on ungrateful people, but He will discipline us if we continue to neglect our great salvation and drift from His path (Heb. 12.3-11).

We will not bear witness to our great salvation unless we are, first, overwhelmed by the grace of it, and filled with the same; second, moved by grace to show our great reverence-deserving God to our world; and, third, fearful of how He may intervene – with our neighbors and with us – if we fail in our calling.

We may only know the merest edges of God and His great salvation. But we can grow in Him and in it, and as we do, let us tell the world how great He is and how great it is to be saved.

For reflection

1. How do you seek the grace of God each day? How do you know when you're basking in His grace?
2. Given the opportunity to explain our great salvation to a friend, what would you say?
3. Why must we both reverence God and fear Him if we are to serve Him acceptably?

Next steps – Transformation: For the next several days, concentrate on seeking grace from the Lord to serve Him acceptably. At the end of each day, give thanks for the ways He answered that prayer during the day.

Such a Great Salvation: Part 2

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to *neglect* our great salvation? Why is this not a good thing to do?
2. Can we know more of our great salvation if our vision of Jesus and God is too small? Explain. How can we grow our vision of the Lord?
3. What does our great salvation promise for our soul?
4. Why do we say that our great salvation is Good News worth telling?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.