

Section 3, Week 20
Home Page Summaries, Days 2-5

Day 2

God's Identity

God of the Impossible

We can believe God wants to save us—the evidence of Scripture is overwhelming. But how is He able to remove our sin from us? From our limited perspective, this seems impossible. When you read Isaiah 1:18 (page xxx), you will discover that God is the God of the impossible—exactly who we need to save us.

Day 3

My Identity

Seeing the Consequences of Sin

Sometimes nothing helps us see our sin as well as facing up to its consequences. On one occasion, the Israelites discovered that looking at the consequences of their sin became their salvation. Numbers 21:8-9 (p. xxx) not only gives insight into what saved them, but what it takes to save us. Do you know how to look upon the consequence of your sin?

Day 4

Impact

It's a Whole New World

People in the government's witness protection program leave their old world behind and enter a totally new one. To the degree they cooperate with the transition, they survive. Paul says in Colossians 1:13-14 (p. xxx) that Christians have been taken out of one world and transferred into a new one. Our survival depends on faithfulness to our new identity.

Day 5

Implication

The Past Is Washed Away

When pigs are taken out of their natural muddy environment on the farm and cleaned up for a livestock show, the transformation is nearly miraculous! But what is truly miraculous is the transformation that happens when a person becomes a Christian. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul presents the "before" and "after" of the Christian experience.

Section 3, Week 20, Day 1
John 3:16
375 words

The Promise
Simple Yet True

John 3:16 In 1905, Albert Einstein theorized that $E = mc^2$. He was suggesting that the amount of energy (E) associated with an object is a function of the mass (m) of the object times the square of the speed of light (c)—and he was eventually proven right. Besides proving that a small amount of mass can produce large amounts of energy, Einstein’s formula proved something else: Profound truth can exist in the simplest of expressions.

As it turned out, $E = mc^2$ was the key that unlocked the modern atomic age. Today nuclear reactors hum all over the world because a solitary scientist arranged three letters and one number in the right order. To be sure, Einstein’s discovery was based on profound truth, the profundity of which most people could not begin to understand. But it is the *statement* of the truth that is so striking in its simplicity.

Even though Einstein’s discovery is a model of “complex simplicity,” it pales in comparison to the profound truth of John 3:16. When the Gideons organization began printing Bibles and placing them in hotels and hospitals across America, they chose John 3:16 as the verse to print in the world’s major languages on the inside covers of their Bibles. If a non English-reading person picks up a Gideon Bible, his or her eyes will find at least one verse in native script: John 3:16. And this verse, for all its simplicity, is profound enough to do what not even Einstein could—change the eternal destiny of a human soul.

But John 3:16 is no theory waiting to be proven. It is a promise from God himself: *Anyone who believes in the person of Jesus Christ will receive the gift of eternal life.* If we stumble long over the How? and the Why? we may miss the Who? And the who is so clear—*whoever believes in Him.* If you have already believed, then don’t miss this: Eternity is now. The eternal life God promises begins when we believe, not when we die. So for now, and for eternity, the most profound promise of salvation is found in the simplest verse. And if you have not believed in Christ, today would be a perfect day to do so.

God’s Promise to You: “My greatest gift is the simplest to receive—only believe.”

Section 3, Week 20, Day 2

Isaiah 1:18

364 words

God's Identity

God of the Impossible

Isaiah 1:18 When a toddler has a cup of grape juice in hand, Mom has the radar on. Perhaps more table cloths and t-shirts have been relegated to rags because of spilled grape juice than for any other reason. Some colors just don't wash out—not now, and not in Isaiah's day either.

A tiny insect that infested a variety of oak was used as early as 1700 B.C. to create a deep scarlet dye so powerful that . . . once scarlet, always scarlet. So when God speaks to Israel through the prophet Isaiah and says, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow," the people took notice. This was a powerful promise—a promise that made God the God of the impossible. No one could make scarlet not-scarlet. But why scarlet-red, anyway? The impossibility of removing scarlet stains was not the only reason the deep red color was a good picture of sin. Scarlet was also an indictment: It was the color of the blood on the Israelites' hands.

Yes, they were guilty of murder (Isaiah 1:15, 21)—murder and more. Isaiah compares the nation's rulers to the rulers of Sodom, its people to those of Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:10). No indictment could have been more severe or humiliating to Israel. The chosen people were compared to cities burned in judgment. And yet, when God's condemnation of them comes to a climax in verse 17, there is a compassionate pause—an invitation to reason together. If they will become willing and obedient (verse 19), He promises to do the impossible: Change the permanent scarlet of their blood-stained hands to the shimmering, sinless purity of the driven snow. "Imagine a sheep which has fallen into a vat of scarlet dye," God says, "whose wool I alone can restore to pure white. That is what I promise to do with you."

Our scarlet stains may not be the size of Sodom's or as great as Gomorrah's, but without God's help they will be as permanent. Thankfully, whatever their size or source, the God of the impossible has promised to change them—to make the fabric of our heart "as white as snow."

God's Promise to You: "No scarlet stain of sin can resist the whitening of my love."

Section 3, Week 20, Day 3

Numbers 21:8-9

363 words

My Identity

Seeing the Consequences of Sin

Numbers 21:8-9 For many people, the truth of salvation comes closer as the consequences of sin become clearer. Just as poisonous chlorine clears up cloudy water, so God introduced a little poison into Israel's environment to clear up their confusion about him.

Silent, belly-borne terror slithered into Israel's desert camp. "*Snakes!*" someone screamed. And deadly poisonous ones at that. A terrible scene—but the scene fit the crime. The Israelites had just spewed their own venom directly at Moses (and indirectly at God). Fresh off a victory over the Canaanites (Numbers 21:1-3), they were tired of the Sinai scene—"Enough manna already! We want to go home to Egypt." They sunk their fangs deep into Moses' heart.

God released serpents in the camp initially to punish them, ultimately to save them. The people started dying—and crying: "We sinned against you and the Lord," they wailed. "Please ask God to take away the snakes!" They were dying because of snakes in the camp, and the snakes were because of sin in their hearts. As soon as they saw the snakes, they saw their sin. No mirror reveals sin as clearly as sin's consequences.

A prayer from Moses brought a promise from God: ". . . anyone who is bitten can look at [the bronze snake Moses has made] and live." God didn't remove the snakes from the camp. He didn't even keep them from biting people. He just promised those who knew they had been bitten that they could be saved. How? *By coming face to face with an image of the consequences of their sin.* Looking at the bronze serpent meant agreeing with God that they had sinned.

Almost 1,500 years after this incident Jesus promised that just as Moses lifted up a serpent for salvation in the wilderness, so He would be lifted up for salvation as well (John 3:14-15). Next time you come face to face with who you are, remember that God has lifted up Someone to save you. Not a serpent, but a Savior. God is concerned about our sin, so concerned that He lets us see the consequences of it--His Son lifted up on a cross. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, turning our eyes upon the consequences of our sin becomes our salvation.

God's Promise to You: "You will be saved from sin by looking unto Jesus."

Section 3, Week 20, Day 4
Colossians 1:13-14
384 words

Impact
It's a Whole New World

Colossians 1:13-14 In March, 1992, Salvatore (Sammy the Bull) Gravano, the highest-ranking member of the American Mafia ever to defect, broke his blood oath of silence and testified against his boss, John Gotti. As a result, Gotti went to prison, the Cosa Nostra crime family was decimated, and Gravano moved “from one social planet to another,” in the words of the presiding judge. In order to protect himself from retaliation, Gravano entered the federal government’s witness protection program.

Actually, Gravano underwent two huge social transformations—first, by switching allegiance from the highly-structured social and economic world of organized crime, and second, by entering the witness protection program. As big a shift as the former move was, it was not as life-changing as the latter. In effect, entering the witness protection program is like dying and being born again. Its purpose is to erase all vestiges of a person’s past and create a new identity so as to protect that person and his or her family from retaliation by the convicted. New names, new birth records, new social security records, new tax records, new family histories and genealogies, new home, new vocation—the old world is gone and a whole new world is created in which the witness lives.

The impact of salvation on the believer is no less radical than moving “from one social planet to another.” Paul says that believers are rescued from one world and transferred into another when they are saved. The old world—“the dominion of darkness”—is not unlike the dark underworld of the Mafia, where sin and wrongdoing are the way of life. It is a world ruled and energized by Satan (1 John 5:19), where bad is good, dark is light, and lies are the truth. The new world—“the kingdom of the Son”—is a world in which our past has been erased. It is a world where we learn a whole new way of living. In God’s kingdom, good is good, light is light, and truth is truth.

The biggest challenge for people in the witness protection program is to remember that their lives depend on their faithfulness to their new identity. The same is true for Christians. In a new world, reverting to an old identity makes us easy targets for the enemy of our souls.

God’s Promise to You: “As my faithful witness, you will always have my protection.”

Section 3, Week 20, Day 5
1 Corinthians 6:9-11
378 words

Implication The Past Is Washed Away

1 Corinthians 6:11 City-dwellers who attend county fair livestock exhibitions are always most surprised at seeing the pigs. People think pigs belong in a wallow covered with mud—an action reflective of their intelligence, actually. Mud cools them on hot days and protects them from stinging insect bites.

When a pig is identified as having prize-winning potential, it is redeemed from the mud-pit, washed, and ushered into a life of luxury. It is kept in a pristine stall where it is fed, washed, fed, manicured, fed, coddled, and fed. The before-and-after transformation in a set-apart swine is something to behold. Once washed, these hams-on-the-hoof are never allowed back in the mud. A wallow is no place for a clean pig.

Without calling human beings pigs, we can observe several parallels between the life of a prize-winning pig and the redeemed Christian. The apostle Paul uses a variety of terms to describe the wallows that people come out of when finding their way to Christ: Sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, thievery, greed, drunkenness, slander, and cheating. The way pigs use mud, it's the nature of the human species to cover itself with all sorts of defensive lifestyles as protection against the heat and bug bites of life. But because God sees His image in us, He redeems us from the wallows in which we live. He washes us (Heb. 10:22) and declares us holy (Col. 3:22), making us righteous in His sight (Rom. 5:1).

Paul's language is like a farmer explaining to his prized pig why it can't be allowed back in the mud: ". . . that is what some of you *were*." The verb "to be" has no action—it simply describes our former condition. The Greek tense Paul uses means we *continually* were those things as a way of life. But then he switches to a different verb tense when he says "you were washed . . . sanctified . . . justified"—meaning that they were, at a point in time, taken out of those lifestyles, not to return.

Salvation for the believer means being taken out of one environment—where sin and uncleanness is a natural way of life—and transferred into another. What we "were" is no longer to be what we "are," for we are now God's own possession.

God's Promise to You: "As the object of my love, I will keep you from returning to your past."