

“The Scandal of Salvation”

Dearly beloved – whoever believes in Jesus, the Son of God, shall not perish, but have eternal life. That’s the Gospel! That’s the good news of your salvation. That’s the Jesus that Peter preaches in Acts – and that’s the Lord Isaiah saw in the temple.

That’s great news indeed. As a matter of fact – it sounds too good to be true. How can one be sure? After all, my conscience daily nags me with guilt over the sins I’ve committed – the wicked things I’ve done – and the loving things I’ve failed to do.

My conscience will not let me rest. It keeps driving me to do better – to work harder – to overcome my shortcomings. But the work is never done. I can’t even the score. I’m always behind. I’m always guilty. I’m with Isaiah – “woe is me.”

Sometimes the world “comes to my rescue” – trying to sooth my fear (that I’ll get what I truly deserve). It tells me that “no one is perfect” – points out that I’m not really a bad person. As a matter of fact, it’s those Christians who are at fault for heaping all this guilt on people! If they’d quit pointing out sin and calling sinners to repentance – then there would be no basis for one’s guilt and shame.

But at the end of the day – no matter what the world has to say – deep down, I know my sin – I know that I am responsible for my guilt.

Then Holy Trinity Sunday comes along and we confess the Athanasian Creed – and I hear those words!

“Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally. And the catholic faith is this (skipping to the end) those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire. This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.” Woe is me! I’m full of evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds.

Am I doomed? Am I damned? Or, will I “not perish, but have eternal life”? Who do I listen to – the world, my conscience, the Bible, Jesus?

Well, the Apostle Peter says – “Men of Israel, hear these words ...” If you want to know what is true – if you want certainty (even in the face of your sin and death) – then listen to the Word of the Lord.

This Peter, sent by God, doesn’t pull any punches. Jesus was attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and sign – and YOU crucified and killed Him by the hands of lawless men. How would you like to have THAT on your conscience – that YOU crucified and killed God’s own Son?

Well, in truth, you have. It was for your sins that Jesus was handed over to be crucified. It was for the sin of the whole world – including yours – that He was lifted up on the cross of Calvary. We killed Him – but God raised Him up from the dead.

Long before Christ’s death and resurrection – even before Jesus was born in the flesh – King David spoke of His resurrection. David says that the Holy One of God will not be abandoned to the grave, or see corruption. “Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope.”

David would die and be buried – but his flesh dwelt secure. Because the Lord promised to raise Jesus from the dead – David was certain that he also would not be abandoned to the grave – that the Lord would raise him from the dead as well!

Remember, this is the David who committed adultery with Bathsheba – who had her husband Uriah killed – who lies, deceived, and tried to cover up his sin. This wicked man – this sinner deserving of eternal death (being abandoned to the grave) – is full of confidence, absolutely certain of his own resurrection – that he will not die, but live, eternally!

Dearly beloved, like Peter, the Lord has sent me to preach to you! Hear the Word of the Lord! Like David of old, your flesh can also dwell secure – for it was God’s plan of salvation that His Son Jesus should take all your sin and atone for it with His blood – taking your place in death, so that you may not die, but live – eternally!

This Jesus whom YOU killed – who was crucified and raised to life for you – who is exalted to the right hand of God the Father Almighty – who has poured out the Holy Spirit upon you --- this Jesus promises you, in no uncertain terms – that, “whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

“ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” – but – “WHOEVER” believes in Jesus, and His blood shed for the forgiveness of sins – has eternal life!

The Athanasian Creed only speaks of those who have “done good” and those who have “done evil” after confessing Christ and what He has done for all sinners!

To reject what Christ has done is to remain in sin – and the evil that has been done will be judged on the Last Day – and that one will enter into eternal fire.

Those sinners who believe what Christ has promised – who are washed in His blood, who are born of water and the Spirit – their wicked deeds are blotted out from God’s sight, and their good deeds remain. Because they trust in what Christ, the Son of God, has done FOR THEM – they shall enter into eternal life.

Your conscience will continue to attack you. The world will try to deceive you, confuse you, cover up the truth. Dearly beloved, hear the Word of the Lord. As surely as Jesus Christ died and was raised to life – so the resurrected Christ declares to you this day – “I forgive you all your sins.”

In Him your heart rejoices and your flesh dwells secure – for He will not abandon you to the grave, but will resurrect you – to live eternally, with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.