

## **Pako Evening Service: 17/04/2016**

Scripture Reading: John 15:1-17; Rom 11:11-24; Sermon: "Jesus saves true believers."

Congregation, when I first went to NZ I had to under-go a Colloquium Doctum. It's the Latin for a 'learned' discussion. Since I was an import from the CRCA, my fellow colleagues in the ministry had opportunity to question me on my orthodoxy. Now one particular guy asked me what I consider a most painful question. Did Jesus die only for the elect? Or we could ask it in this fashion, "Since all people die because of the sin of the one man Adam, are all men saved because of the one perfect sacrifice given by Jesus Christ?"

Now there is a long answer and there is a short answer, and this evening I am going to give you the long answer. Throughout Scripture we have a continual refrain of God's love for fallen humanity and his call for people to repent and believe. Immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, God in his love makes known that He will send a Saviour for mankind Gen 3:15. And then throughout Scripture we have this constant plea that people should be reconciled to him! For instance, in Deut 30:19-20; "This day I call heaven and earth as my witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ..."

A similar plea in Joshua 24:15, "Choose this day who you will serve...As for me and my household we will serve the Lord."

Eze 33:11; "Say to them, as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"

The same plea can be seen in the Father's words in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

The words of Jesus in several places highlights the love of God for fallen humanity. Mat 11:28ff... "Come to me all who are weary and burdened."

Mat 23:37; "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

John's gospel, 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

2 Cor 5:20, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

So that was the long answer!

Now you might say to me, "But you haven't answered the question!" Ha, so you want me to give you the short answer, and simply say "No!" to the question whether everyone will be saved. But I don't want to do that for the emphasis in Scripture is that people should believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Paul had unceasing sorrow and anguish because his fellow Jews rejected Jesus. Surely we cannot be so calloused and so cold and just have a short answer and say, "No, not everyone will be saved."

It is a sure fact, that the Scriptures do not teach universal salvation! Unlike Rob Bell, a recent pastor of Mars Hill, we do not believe the Scriptures to teach that Jesus died for people who have ended up in hell. That is not possible! In the end, love does not win! Similarly, we don't believe the Scripture's to teach that the church or even a 'good' person or even a departed loved one can pay penance for another departed loved one and hence attain eternal life.

Make no mistake. We disagree with those who teach universal salvation. Rather, we firmly believe that it is only Jesus' blood that is effective to save all those who believe in his saving work on the cross! It is only those that do come to believe by the power of the Holy Spirit who will be saved!

Now, I say again, this teaching of only one Saviour Jesus Christ causes us pain. After all we have this common bond with humanity. We love humanity and we do not wish any to be lost! I wish that all people would be saved, and if you don't have that desire then I guess you are a poor Christian, for the Triune God had that desire.

God the Father sent His Son. Jesus said, **“Go and make disciples of all nations.”** The Holy Spirit changes people. Paul was called to be a missionary. He had that desire. Hudson Taylor had that desire. William Carey had that desire. All missionaries have that desire. And we share that desire. We wish people to believe. That’s why I gave a long answer. In fact, one of the reasons why the Lord has not yet returned is because of His desire that, **“No one should perish, but that all should repent”** (2 Pet 3:9).

Now, please, don’t jump to the conclusion that because some reject Jesus’ saving work that somehow His broken body and shed blood cannot save sinners. Let us understand that even if the whole world would turn in repentance to the Lord, all would be saved. That’s why I emphasized the long answer. Of course the opposite is also true. If only one person from the whole human race were to be saved, Jesus would still have to suffer and die for that single person to be saved.

So how do we deal with this rather painful question and answer? We implore people to repent and believe in Jesus Christ! And we must try to do that in a winsome way. So we don’t badger people! We bring the gospel with love and gentleness and respect. We don’t bible bash them. We sow the seed and be gracious enough to allow room for the Holy Spirit to do His work. Because for people to be saved, the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of God’s word, creates faith in sinner’s hearts in Jesus Christ. For only those who have true faith in Jesus Christ are saved and become part of Christ.

Now notice, I am not saying that only those who are elect since the foundation of the world are saved, or only those who have been written in the Book of the Lamb are saved. Of course if I said that, it would not be wrong. But the message of the Bible is not that you will be lost if you are not elect, but that you cannot be saved unless you believe. Yes, we are dealing here with the mystery of God’s sovereignty in election, however, that is not the last word. Jesus doesn’t say, “Sit down and try and work out whether you are elect or not! No! He invites people to come! “Believe in me and you will be saved!”

Whether or not people believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour is where we come to the great divide. Here is the crack that divides humanity, the chasm that no one will cross [Lk 16:26]. Scripture teaches that it will be a person’s relationship to Christ as Saviour that will be the determining factor on Judgment Day! This is the only division in humanity that is worthwhile pointing out. Do you have faith in Jesus Christ or do you not? Do you trust in his completed work or do you wish to add a few of your own?

Now please, don’t trust in your faith perse. If your faith is anything like mine, it can be so fickle on occasions. One day I am on the crest of the wave; other days I am being dumped and I have rash from head to toe. We place our faith in Christ as it is revealed in what is absolute and objective truth – God’s written word. It’s what is written in God’s word that we trust in. And God’s word says, “Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved!”

Christians get worked up about all sorts of things. What Bible versions are to be used? Can we have more instruments in worship than just the organ? Should we have a guitar or drums? What colour should the lines in the car park be? Is the minister wearing a tie?

Oh, let us get excited about whether people have faith in Jesus Christ! Whether they trust in his word! Christ is the ‘God given’ divider. There is no neutral position where the cross is placed. I am reminded of Hebrews 2:3; **“How shall we escape if we ignore (not reject, but neglect) such a great salvation.”** Brothers and sisters there are many questions that are raised in the church today, yet there is none more important than this one question, “Do you have faith, do you believe in Jesus Christ?”

The answer given to this fundamental question is what all people will be judged by. We need to think through the full ramifications of this question. For if we have never raised the question about what people think of Jesus and been given an answer, then I think our coffee talk, our lunch talks, our neighbour talk, family talks, our church talk, our work talk, our Classis talk have been unspeakably superficial. This is the statement we should encourage our loved one’s to consider. Jesus saves true believers!

Now the question may be asked, what is saving faith? Saving faith is receiving Jesus Christ by believing in his name. (Jn 1:12) **“Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God.”** Believe in his name and you will be saved! Then your sins are forgiven and eternal life in glory is yours! Now I cannot do that for you. We must personally accept Jesus as the One who saves me. One grandmother I spoke to said that she wished she could drag her children and grand children into heaven with her.

And let's not be arrogant about our salvation. Jesus' death and resurrection not only saves me, but whoever truly believes, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Uniting, and Reformed people! When we truly believe, we are grafted into Christ and we are alive and can produce fruit. It can be no other way! It is through Him that we get the nourishment, that is the Spirit, and it is by that power that we can produce fruit that pleases Him.

We read it, John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." This is a beautiful picture. Being grafted into Christ not only shows us our source of life, how we are living, but also that we are organically united with him along with all others who believe. That means we are part of a community. Together we constitute the people of God in Christ. People who accept Christ find that he has placed them in a community of those whom he has accepted. We cannot have Christ and not have community.

Now it also needs to be said that true faith is a gift – grace alone. We may not boast about it. We who were dead in our sin and trespass are now grafted into the Vine. Notice, it is done to us rather than by us. Therefore, one who has true faith finds it easier to speak of God's doing than of ours. It stops us from being "puffed up" and boasting about our faith!

So what is true faith? Faith is the instrument, and the only one, by which God's goodness comes into our lives. That is how we receive Christ's blessings. True faith is a whole person response to God. The writer to Hebrews calls faith a certainty based on the word of God.

James says that faith apart from works is dead. So our faith must be evident. Not only in our hearts, but also show in our hands, lips, feet, and pockets! Far too often people speak about their faith but their actions deny its existence! The gospel speaks about faith and obedience as being two sides of the one coin. On the one side we acknowledge the truth of the Bible, and on the other we are assured it is good news for us.

So true faith is made up of knowledge and trust. If we don't know, we cannot trust. If we don't trust, it's because we don't know how reliable Jesus is. God makes himself fully known in his Word! Our faith is rooted in the Word of God. We don't just have faith in what the minister says, but we have faith in what the Word of God teaches. We need to own it for ourselves. Often when people doubt or struggle with their assurance of being saved, it's because they don't have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures.

And when their knowledge is shallow, they're not sure whether they can trust God's truth as written in his word! True faith is knowing and trusting God's word as truth. And that true faith is created in us by the Holy Spirit - and He assures me that my sins are forgiven and I have been made forever right with God. It's the best news.

One more thing. How do we answer someone when they say, "Ha well, if it is the work of the Holy Spirit to save me, then let Him do his number on me. Until then I will just wait in the wings." Allow me to use a door illustration to explain my thinking and you can shoot me down later.

Just think of salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of sins as a door that we need to go through. On this side of the closed door we have all these texts – Choose life, not death. Go through the door please!

As for me and my household we shall worship the Lord. Go through the door please!

Come to me all who are weary and heavy burden. Go through the door please!

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life. Go through the door please!

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned;

Go through the door please!

We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. Go through the door.

And we go through the door and we look back and we see just one text:

John Zuidema, filthy sinner, chosen in Christ before the foundations of the world to be holy and blameless! All by grace!

Now are all men saved? Or, as the guy asked me on my Colloquium Doctum, "Did Jesus only die for the elect?" Let me ask you a more important question, "Do you have faith in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Don't ask whether you are elect or not, believe and you are saved and you are elect! And the amazing thing is that when believe, when we embrace it, when we accept it, we will realize that it was God working in us by his word and Spirit to bring us to that point. For our desire is that God receives the glory! Amen.