

With New Eyes
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So, a few weeks ago, I was sitting in my car, parked, down in Castle Rock.

I was on the phone with a close friend of mine

who I knew I needed to catch up with, so I just sat in my car and talked to her for a while.

This was on my parents' driveway.

I'd gone down there to take care of some stuff for my dad,

while he and my mom were out of town.

And I noticed a van pull up, behind.

While I was chit chatting, I kept my eyes on the people getting out---

and as I watched, I saw it was two elderly ladies.

From the rear view mirror, I saw them standing and talking with each other for a while,

Staring at my car.

And after a few more minutes, one of the ladies breaks away from the other,

And starts walking up to my window.

Had no idea what was going on, but rolled the glass down

to this older woman smiling wide.

She starts asking me all of the questions, about what I was doing there.

If I lived in the house... If I knew the people living in the house,

and if they were home.

All of this stuff.

And her being an older lady, I answered some of her questions. Let her know it was just me, there.

“Ok...” she says to me. “I’ll give this to *you*, then.”

She slips a colorful pamphlet through the window.

I look at the paper, and see a depiction of this guy,

who looks kind of like George Michael, with short, hairdryer blown- hair,

Wearing a white robe, staring out kindly, and summoning you closer with his hand.

It was a Jehovah’s Witness evangelical flyer.

“Do you know Jesus?” The woman asked.

“Sadly never had the chance to meet him in the day,” I said.

“But I think I know him, yeah.” I smiled back.

“Jesus SAVES!” She yells.

I nodded.

“You go ahead and keep that for yourself.” She said to me, and walks off, still grinning.

Has this ever happened to you?

I’m sure it has, at one time or another.

... and it’s pretty much always the same, isn’t it?

Always these words... “JESUS SAVES!”

In my younger, less reverent, more self-centered, and adventurous days,

While I was in college,

If I had the time, I used to pretend. Play a different role.

When evangelists came to my door, I'd pretend I was an atheist.

And I'd ask *questions*, just for the sake of getting into deeper conversation,

And seeing where their mind was in all of this.

When they said to me, "Jesus SAVES!"

I'd ask them "what does *that* mean?"

Most of the time, they'd just quote different scripture. That's it.

Never giving any of their personal thoughts, or interpretations.

They'd just repeat these lines, from The Book.

And to me, this just didn't seem convincing .

There's no real thought or real belief behind it. Just recitation.

Just a repetition of someone *elses'* words.

It's like asking someone why they love their husband,

And that person pulling a binder from their side,

and quoting the words of his *mother*, scribbled in a scrap book.

It just doesn't answer the question.

See, Christians get caught up using these old phrases. Reciting scripture.

And I think people do that, because it's just easier.

It leaves our heart insulated and protected

By phrases, and thousands of pages of text---

---which are thick enough to stop *bullets*, at times.

Repeating words without the company of your own mind and heart,
protects us from being damaged,

But it also stops all of the humanity, and real passion,
and real thought, from moving out of our soul to touch another.

And so, when these phrases and verses are tossed out, they come off as empty,

And that's because they are empty of something. What they're missing is us.

What they're missing, is the witness of our own, actual experience of God.

And that's what people need, right?

If they're going to listen for even a moment to what you're saying.

As Christians... as followers and friends of God...

It's important for us to look deeper. To examine our faith. To question it.

Over and over.

As we've shared before, this isn't an act of disbelief...

...but of making your faith real.

Letting your beliefs LIVE. Vitality in your soul.

And at the end of the day, this questioning is the only way

we find our faith can deepen, or grow.

So "Jesus Saves." What does this even mean?

It's a good question to ask ourselves, when we're alone, in the quiet with God.

We each should ask ourselves, when we're in that quiet,

how was I "saved" by the life of Jesus? Why is that word even used?

We'll talk about it a little *together* here, too, today.

And what we're going to share with each other now,

by all means is not the exhaustive answer to that question.

There are many, and we each need to find our own.

But it's a good and healthy thing for us to touch into together

as a group of Christians as well.

As a group, thinking about this, and talking about it,

to open the door to the question in our own minds,

As we connect with God, and feel God in our own time.

So, like the evangelists, we'll go into some scripture, but no worries....

...We won't just stay there.

Scripture is fine to use as we pass our experience of God to another, of course,

just as long as it's accompanied by our own thoughts and heart.

Our readings for today, come from the book of Acts, and from the gospel of John.

And both of these passages shed some *light* on this *salvation* we received,

in knowing about Jesus, and learning from his life and his words.

The word "saved" doesn't pop in either of these,

but I think they both explain our situation well.

And as I read along, and describe these moments,

I'm inviting you to try to examine and see for yourself,

the ways God saves us, between the lines.

From Acts, chapter 9.

1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named [An-uh-NAI-uhs] Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

Ok. So that's the beautiful story of the change from God that comes to Saul---

---who becomes Paul---

(Of course) The writer of a lot of the letters of the New Testament,

and the most effective evangelist of the Christian faith outside of Jerusalem.

Now, both of our passages from the New Testament today, are long,

so I won't read straight from the gospel of John, again...

... but what happens in that moment written down in The Book,

Is the disciples are on their own.

This is after the crucifixion, after the resurrection...

After those moments we read last week,

when Jesus comes past the locked and shut doors,

To show his followers that his physical death didn't take him from the world.

In this moment, from Ch 21, some of the disciples are out fishing,

and see a man on the shore.

At first, the person is unrecognizable as Jesus.

...But by this point, the disciples know better, don't they?

Because this is *third* time, Jesus has come to be with them, after he was crucified.

And just like in this moment, each of those times he came to them before,

he no longer resembled what he used to look like.

...By now, they *know* it's him, after not too long a glance.

Because something has changed in them, right?

Something has changed in the way they see the world, and people.

And they go to the shore, and spend time with Jesus, not even daring to ask who he is,

Because a new knowledge has come to them of the ways and miracles of God.

And this, I think, is what happens to us, too, in knowing God.

And in knowing Christ.

Both from what happens to Paul in Acts, and what happens with the disciples in John,

This is what happens to us, too, in our own lives, *today*,
as we reach out, and hold onto God, and go with God.

And experience each new moment and person, in the world God has created.

In Acts, Paul is off doing his normal thing. An aggressive thing.

He's off spending his time hurting people.

Working against the work of God, in the world.

He thinks he sees, until he runs into Jesus on the road to Damascus,

And in that moment, he becomes truly blind, just as he was in those days before.

The light of God shines bright into his eyes,

and for three days (resurrection symbol!) he sees nothing,

Until these scales fall from his eyes, and he sees the world with new sight!

Everything is changed for him, and from that moment on, he lives for God.

He shouts out about the glory of God---and spreads the teachings of Jesus,
until the day he dies.

Paul is changed. His view, is entirely different from what it used to be,
and he lives and experiences the world around him, with new eyes.

Just like the disciples, there on the shore that day we read about in the gospel of John.

...Seeing God, and finding God, and recognizing God in unexpected places.

...And just like for each of us, here in this room.

And this is where we move out from the scriptures themselves, and
into our own hearts.

In my own understanding,

Jesus spent his life, doing his best to remove the clutter from our eyes.

Our egos, our fears, our anger, our frustrations,

our clinging to set ways that drive us further from a sense of God and each other.

He opened our eyes to all of the stuff that blinds us from each other,

and from the sight of God all around us.

And this is how I believe Jesus “saves” us.

For me, I believe we’re “saved” by the life of Christ,

Because he taught us to *see* God, everywhere we go.

He taught us to *see* *God* in every face we pass and speak to...

... to know God is here with us, present in everything

we can possibly encounter in this world.

And that new sight, pulled into us from new eyes... it changes us, doesn’t it?

It changes the way we are. Down to the core.

It changes the way we move and act each hour of each day. .

And it brings all of those repeated Christian lines into reality, doesn’t it?

That new view, from new eyes, helps keep us from “sin,” right?

Meaning, it saves us from hurting each other, so badly and so readily.

From making mistake after mistake in the ways we are with each other.

In a lot of ways, this new sight we have in knowing about the life and words of Christ, saves us from reaping and dwelling in hell with each other, each day.

Because when we know God. And when we've finally opened up our souls and eyes to see God---like the disciples on that shore---in each face we run into out there...

We find we're a lot more open to people.

We find we're a lot less willing to be hurtful, or aggressive, or self-centered with those eyes that look back at ours.

Because in those eyes, we see the light of God.

We see the heart of God, beating right there inside of the person in front of us...

... no matter what they're doing to frustrate you. No matter how stubborn or pigheaded they're being about some random thing.

Our eyes are opened to the fact that when we interact with the world around us,

We're interacting with God. With the very :Life of the universe that gives us breath,

And moves our own heart.

And that, to me, is how knowing Jesus, brings each of us salvation, each day we're alive.

So, as we move around, knowing ourselves as Christians,

Let's, each of us, ask ourselves, how has knowing God, changed me?

What has it saved me from? What new things do I see in the world, because I see God?

When we do this, we make our souls ready share what's inside. With life. With passion.

With real and very personal joy.

And maybe, in letting ourselves look deeper, and see,

the light and glory of God which has shined into us, in this reflection,

will move back out into the world,

And give new sight to others.

So that more might see the beautiful life of God all around and inside of *them*, too.

So that more might be drawn up by God, and healed by God,

and rejoice in God each day they're blessed to look out

from new eyes into soul of the One who brought them to be.

Amen.