

Weekly Encouragement

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Forgiveness of Sin

By Rev. Peter Eng



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"And you will be called the prophet of the Most High ... to give his people the knowledge of salvation / through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77) NIV

Christians everywhere seem to agree that what sets us apart from others is not whether we are morally superior or inferior to others, but that our sins are forgiven. This truth from the OT was first distilled to us through the ministry of John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus. At John's birth, Zechariah his father rightly prophesied, concerning his son, "And you will be called the prophet of the Most High ... to give his people the knowledge of salvation / through the forgiveness of their sins" ([Luke 1:76-77](#)) NIV.

"The knowledge of salvation" is not theoretical or cognitive knowledge. In the ancient world, the carpenter knows how to work with wood, the fisherman knows how to fish, and the smith knows how to work with metal. It is the

knowledge of experience or the knowledge of doing. Zechariah is talking about what we would today approximately describe as "the experience of salvation," which, by the way, is a term not found in the Bible. (We think in different categories then and now.) What sets us apart as Christians is this knowledge / experience of God's salvation. We are different because we are redeemed! Saved!

Saved from what?

There are many urgent things in life from which we desperately want to be saved. We want to be saved from joblessness, from business failure, from foreclosure, from natural disaster, from a broken heart, from depression, etc. All these needs of life are as valid as they are transient.

From time to time, God would place in our heart a desperate desire for the forgiveness of sin. This need will be more compelling than the other needs in life. We will have a moment of clarity, that God has made no mistake in holding out forgiveness of sin as the highest and most precious gift for us. We will suddenly realize that all our other needs are temporary, but the gift of forgiveness of sin leads us into eternal redemption and is of infinite worth.

Ironically, this often happens in our most desperate moments in life. King David enjoyed this clarity when he lost his throne and was running away for his life. As he fled through the dry unforgiving desert, he was overwhelmed with a desire for God:

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.” Thirst demands first satisfaction. David needs God more than any other thing. “My tears have been my food day and night.” David suffers from unrelenting turmoil. But the Holy Spirit of God works a new passion within him. What he wants more than anything is to “come and appear before God,” and “go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God.” David’s soul of spiritual reason demands an answer from his earth bound soul of cares, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” He does not allow self-pity or thoughts that bring about depression even though they seem most natural. Instead, the Holy Spirit of God touches his heart, and he says, “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him my salvation.” ([Psalm 42:1-5](#)).

Forgiveness of Sin

There comes a time in our life when things seem to fall apart. Often, this is the result of our own wrongdoing, as it happened to David. That is when we see the Holy Spirit of God moving God’s child into the experience of forgiveness of sin. It is strange how a person can go about sinning blatantly, justifying his sins, increasing his selfishness, and feeding his appetite in the midst of security and plenty. And it is only when sin has caught up with him and the devil demands his payment that he turns to God for forgiveness. And there, he experiences salvation in its fullness.

This situation that causes us to crave forgiveness more than anything seems so narrow that I am tempted to think only a few experience it. But the Holy Spirit of God works differently in different people. The early Christian leader, Augustine of Hippo, was not driven to repentance by his more significant sins as we would see them, but by his prank of stealing some worthless sour pears. What is your sin that drives you to God?

John the Baptist would grow up to be the precursor of Jesus. John would proclaim

forgiveness of sin. Jesus would accomplish forgiveness of sin.

God in Christ has given us forgiveness of sin. He redeems us from sin for all eternity and draws us to himself. He calls us, through our experience of forgiveness, to hold lightly to the things of this world and to hold tightly to our eternal future.

When we strip away everything, even life itself, we find ourselves in the presence of God, as Savior and not as judge – because of the forgiveness of sin.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.