

Say to my soul, “I am your salvation!”

Psalm 35:3, 1 Jn. 5:9-12, Acts 4:12

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Introduction: In Ps. 35 David is facing a raging enemy, so he speaks vividly of his weapons and their usefulness. But he knows that victory is not ultimately in his hands; he depends on Someone much higher. So he asks the Lord, *“Say to my soul, I am your salvation!”* Remind me again and again: that true salvation comes from beyond myself! Make me understand this: that the battle is much more than this visible struggle, that You are the only source of true salvation! Actually we’re all hungry for salvation, though most people today don’t often relate to that term. Our “hunger” is more focused on our multiple and hyper-stimulated **appetites** – we think “heaven” is whatever satisfies those! We’re especially hungry for our primal needs to be met: for recognition, acceptance, fulfillment, security and love; our **ambition** to achieve something significant, be somebody, project a positive image; or just to repeat the thrill of an adrenaline rush (from gaming, other diversions, an exciting challenge). But “salvation” seems to speak of dire situations and crises that don’t normally happen to you in everyday life: maybe when you lose your job, have an accident, fall prey to a scam, develop a serious illness, or need a residence permit or work permit; think how desperate refugees in Spain are for some “salvation” these days! Or maybe it’s your marriage that needs saving (the stories are heartbreaking!). But soul salvation – who thinks in those terms? What the church and the gospel offer in Scripture sounds largely **irrelevant** to the popular mind, not “naturally” appealing to most people or pertinent to everyday life, because our society’s worldview today assumes that **materialism**, void of any **transcendence**, is the most realistic perspective of life (these are key terms, which we’ll look at in depth).

1) Transcendence refers to something beyond this spatiotemporal world that surrounds us, meaning that this physical world is not all there is, and my being doesn’t necessarily end with my physical death (this is an essential teaching in the biblical message). Transcendence is what God was talking about in Jer. 23:23: *“Am I only a God nearby, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ... Do I not fill heaven and earth?”* Beyond the perception of our five senses, is something real if I can’t see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it? (The parameters of empirical methodology.) Ps. 19:1 affirms that God’s glory is precisely what’s being announced by creation: *“The heavens declare the glory of God [something quite beyond themselves!], and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.”* Rom. 1:19-20: *“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities –his eternal power and divine nature– have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.”* Jn. 1:9 points to *“the true light that gives light to everyone...”* – light that proceeds from beyond ourselves and provides meaning and direction for this life. Finally, Ps. 14:1 clarifies that it’s a foolish proposition to assume that there’s nothing beyond the physical universe: it’s a theory that could never satisfactorily explain all the evidence.

Materialism, on the other hand, refers to a philosophical view that says nothing exists beyond the physical world; our society is materialistic in a practical sense, because material possessions and physical comforts are treated as more important than spiritual values (but often even by Christians!); in fact, our society is also more and more committed to materialism as its operating system. So where did Western culture get this materialistic bent? It's actually as old as humankind – the attempt to live as if the transcendent didn't exist, to reduce life to the physical world. But it was Immanuel Kant (18th-century philosopher) who really made the radical **separation between faith and reason**, teaching that God-language is not possible, making God inherently unknowable, thereby opening the door for everyone to believe whatever they choose about him, her, it or them! But the popularization of this view awaited ... the Beatles! Remember John Lennon's song *Imagine*? Such a lyrical, romantic piece, totally renouncing transcendence! "*Imagine there's no heaven ... no hell, only sky, nothing to kill or die for, no religion*" = no transcendence. Some high ideals too: no boundaries or divisions, everyone living in peace, the world living as one, the brotherhood of all people. Noble ideals, but no real capacity or plan for achieving such unity and harmony – just dreaming! So this was how John Lennon imagined a better world, but his dream wasn't realistic; it didn't take into account what humanity is really like and involved no real "salvation from ourselves." He imagined only materialism and a strangely evolved humanity that could somehow share their material well-being perfectly. Is that realistic? Reality includes a lot more than what meets the eye – that's transcendence! So modern materialists are working hard to come up with alternative transcendence – "you just need to transcend yourself" (at least they've identified a small piece of the problem!): *The transcendent brain* (Alan Lightman, 2023) suggests a kind of non-religious spirituality, made possible by the evolution of consciousness (= electrical/chemical activity in the brain)! *The science of self-actualization* (S. Kaufman, 2020) reexamines A. Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, emphasizing self-actualization as the highest level (but the transcendence he speaks of is fictitious).

2) Scripture's teaching on salvation wants to fill the awful void here, but we have to be willing to face our true life situation and realize there is no real experience of transcendence apart from God's revelation in His Word. There are huge implications here regarding salvation, which even we Christians often tend to reduce to mundane matters that have little transcendence. Think of your prayer life – do I focus primarily on God's helping me manage my material world? Fix my emotions, deal with too much stress, make better decisions, improve my relationships, my mood, my career? Not that God doesn't care about these details, but am I aiming at a deeper relationship with Him, or simply trying to get Him to make me more comfortable?! Any number of other religions, philosophies, or self-help programs could be viable options in that case – without having to deal with faith issues related to Scripture! So what is it that Christian salvation offers *uniquely*? What *real* problem does it aim to solve?

We don't like to acknowledge our spiritual neediness; we'd rather just give the appearance of having it all together – even for our own sakes! If I can deceive myself into believing I *do* have it all together (at least as well as the next guy), then I won't have to deal with the *really hard questions* of life. Christianity deals with them! But not if you're satisfied with a superficial approach to the Word! We are complex creatures – more so since our fall into sin – because we were made to reflect the image of God! So how does Christian faith help us deal with the really hard issues so that we experience the full dose of transcendence that God intended? It's about knowing Him: in all the nooks and crannies of our brokenness! It's the *whole Bible* that gives us this view of the **full range of damage** that our fall has caused and the full range of what salvation is about! When Paul says that Christ died for our sins "**according to the Scriptures**" (1 Cor. 15:3), he's not referring to some proof text from the Old Testament – he's talking about the whole Hebrew Bible, the entire history of the Hebrew people. So **salvation** from the OT perspective takes in the whole gamut of human needs: we have a huge **sin problem** that shows us to be truly guilty, broken, lost, **incapable** of correcting our course or resolving our dilemma; we **abandoned our true home**, so we're wandering **in exile**, far from our true destiny; we've become **enslaved to powers** that we can't understand or even perceive; and humanity has a

plethora of enemies, all of which are too strong for us to ever overcome. So what do we *need* in terms of salvation, according to this biblical vision? What does God offer us in salvation? Removal of sin problem, freedom from slavery, return from exile, defeat/destruction of all our enemies, through a new covenant that would bring fulfillment of all God's promises: all accomplished in the incarnation/cross by the Son of David!

3) But in fact, biblical salvation is at risk of being eliminated as a serious option, since religious pluralism is devouring the playing field thanks to postmodern attitudes ("everything is relative, no absolutes"). In our culture we are being proselytized 24/7 – by television, movies, the internet, social media, secular friends – to believe that any religion is as good as another (and "no religion" is best of all, re: John Lennon)! An essential part of that message says that there are "no objective moral values." "Morality" exists only in our minds and social norms; i.e., it's just "what we have agreed on," or "social contract theory" (whose foundation is materialism as the only thing that really exists). So all human acts are "amoral," which means there's no such thing as "immoral"! We just get together and agree on what's good for *us*, and other societies do the same (most Western governments these days are aggressively pursuing this agenda). But do we realize that by accepting this view, they've just eliminated the category of evil?! So anything can be now justified: all the transgender theory you want, all the corrupt pleasures you might imagine, war as a viable means to an end, even murder (abortion, euthanasia, genocide).

Reminds me of an incident with my grandchildren recently as they were watching something on TV that seemed useless and pointless, so we grandparents made our usual plea for a program with some "redeeming value." And our granddaughter's comment was, "Why does everything have to have redeeming value? Can't we just relax and watch something entertaining?" Hmmm, I had to think hard, not wanting to seem a legalist or party-pooper. But it got me to thinking about our need for transcendence and redemption. Ps. 4:2: "**How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?**" **That's our default mode!** We imagine God as a celestial accountant, measuring all our actions according to His divine rules, and in order for Him to be able to forgive, somebody has to pay Him off. Is that how forgiveness works? If you have to pay for it, where's the forgiveness? (What a petty, unbiblical view of God, totally void of the vision of Jesus, who came to *represent* God in every way and show us His true glory!) It's why the Bible describes us as so utterly lost: enslaved, exiled, guilty, broken victims who tend to twist everything, surrounded by enemies too strong for us; so **everything in this world is desperate for redemption** (in English it means re-evaluation; the Hebrew [*padah, kofar, gaal*] points to rescue, ransom from slavery). We are in bondage to the elements of this world and our old nature, incapable of sowing to the Spirit until we experience God's rescue, new birth. So wherever there is no recognition of Christ's lordship, there is slavery, absence of life, vanity, wrong choices, anguish, and need for redemption. When the command of Ex. 20 says "**no other gods before Me,**" that's not legalism, but God trying to protect us! When we serve other gods, who clearly are *not* the source of life, we're serving death! That's why God doesn't want us "dominated" by anyone other than the true *Dominus* = Lord. 1 Jn. 5:9-12 tells us that when you put your trust in Jesus as the Son of God, you have God's own witness in your heart. And that witness says that God has given us eternal life [= transcendence!], and this life is in his Son. "**Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have LIFE.**"

So what transcendence do we have when Jesus comes to reign in us? **1)** Liberation from bondage to other gods (you can't break free on your own); **2)** correction of our false way of thinking, feeling, worshiping, relating and acting (you don't have auto-correct – you need Jesus!); **3)** cleansing from the guilt and corruption of our egotism, idolatry, false worship, moral failures; **4)** healing from inner damage due to false criteria and blindness, due to our relational wounds and soul infirmities (you cannot heal yourself); **5)** restoration and transformation – into the image of Christ, and the promise of life eternal with Him: all thanks to His reign in us (you have to let go of the reins – by calling on Him). ... Will you ask the Lord to say to your soul today, "***I am your salvation***"?