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Allen Browne: Saved From

Thanks for joining us this evening. You may have wondered why we would consider something as basic as *salvation* could be a “hot topic.”

Doesn't every Christian understand salvation from the moment they're saved?

That's partly true. Salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit. You know something of that when Holy Spirit performs his regenerative work in you. But there is still so much to learn. Unfortunately, there's also a lot of fear associated with this topic.

I noticed recently that when someone tried to phone me and I didn't have their phone number saved in the contact list on my phone, Android tells me the person is “unsaved.” Does that number belong to anyone here tonight? I hope not. Ultimately it's not about who's listed in my contacts. But if God doesn't have your number, you probably are in trouble.

So what are we saved *from*? When you ask people, they tend to say they're saved from their sins or from the consequences of their sins. By “their sins” they mean “all the things I've done wrong.” By the consequences of their sins, they mean guilt, condemnation, life without God, and eternity in hell.

All of that is good and true, as far as it goes. But there's a bigger picture. In case you hadn't noticed, the rebellion against God's reign was in full swing before you were born. The world was in trouble before you came and added your bit. What God saves you *from* is much more than your own personal failures.

Salvation is much more than release from personal guilt. God is rescuing his creation from its enslavement to evil, from the corruption of our humanness, from the futility of life, and ultimately from the grip of death.

There are places in the world right now where people's lives are in the grip of evil. Earlier this year, several of us went to Israel. At one point we drove up the hills on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, a region called the Golan Heights. Our guide pointed east and said, “See that down in the distance? That's Syria.”

Syria has been torn apart by conflict. There's an oppressive government. There are terrorists fighting to get rid of the government. There are ISIS forces trying to overpower the government and the terrorists. There are foreign governments like the USA and Russia supporting opposite sides of the war. Entire cities have been destroyed. Millions have fled to neighbouring countries like Lebanon and Jordan. Their children now grow up in exile, in refugee camps because they can't return home.

All the conflict in the world stems back to the rebellion against God's authority. Instead of harmony, we live in hostility. We're in conflict with animals, conflict with each other, conflict with nature, and conflict with God. Life is a struggle to survive. Ultimately we lose that struggle, and die. It's not what God intended.

We were born in exile from God. We were born as slaves to a foreign power — the rule of evil. We grow up in futility, a futility inherited from our forebears.

What God saves us from is much more than personal culpability. It's the grip of evil, the reign of terror, the horror of growing up under the power of sin instead of in care and wise government of our true sovereign.

If you think of your sins merely as a list of the times you personally broke God's laws, you have not understood sin. Sin is much more insidious. Sin is the power of evil that enslaves the earth. Sin held the earth in its grip long before you were born. The world was already alienated from God before you arrived on the scene.

You were born into slavery. You did not come under sin because there was a moment when you chose to disobey God. The slave-master named Sin already dominated the world before your birth. It damaged you and shaped you before you could even make a decision of your own.

The language of salvation grows out of Israel's exodus story. They were the people of promise, the descendants of Jacob. But in Moses' time, they were born in slavery, under the rule of evil. This was not because individual Israelites had been bad: they were born under the power of evil.

Exodus tells the story of how God liberated them from Pharaoh, from their slavery under evil rule. He formed them into his own nation. He gave them his Law, for he was their king. They built a tent for their king. In his private chambers, they placed the Ark of the Covenant. The ark represented his throne (or at least the footstool of his throne, because he actually reigns in heaven). The tabernacle was a palace, a portable palace. At the end of Exodus, their divine sovereign moved into the tent they built for him, and led his people. They had come out from the reign of evil, into the reign of God.

Would you like to hear more of the Exodus story explained like that? You can! We'll be doing the Book of Exodus in Foundations 3 in first term next year, starting the first week of February.

All I can say tonight is this: What God did for the descendants of Jacob in Exodus is what he has done for all humanity in the person of Jesus.

And that's what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. We were born into a world that was already enslaved to evil and death. God rescued us, redeemed us, forgave the rebellion, and formed us into his people:

Colossians 1:13–14 (NIV)

¹³ He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We're saved *from* slavery to the powers of sin and death, from domination by evil. We're rescued *from* the futile way of life inherited from our forebears.

We're saved *into* the reign of Jesus, God's appointed ruler.

In Christ, we received amnesty for the rebellion, the forgiveness of sins.

Anyone familiar with John 3:16? In light of this staggering story of God rescuing his rebellious earthly realm back under his sovereignty, perhaps we could paraphrase verses 16 and 17 like this:

John 3:16-17 paraphrased

¹⁶ Our sovereign reached out with astounding love to his rebellious realm. The gift he gave us was his unique Son! Anyone who trusted this prince would not be wiped out, but would have life in his eternal reign.

¹⁷ You see, the sovereign did not send his son on a war mission (to crush his rebellious realm into submission) but on a peace mission (to rescue the rebellious realm back into his care).

Graham Irvine: Saved How?

Allen's point is that salvation is about being saved from the domination of evil which creation sits under because of rebellion towards God.

So the question I am considering is how does the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus accomplish this rescue?

One of the most succinct passages regarding the gospel is 1 Cor. 15. In verse 3 Paul makes this statement:

1 Corinthians 15:3

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. (NLT)

Jesus death was for our 'sins'.

Most often when we read this we read ‘sins’ as those actions that we do that are contrary to the will of God. We do wrong things. We act sinfully. However there is a far wider and greater meaning to sin than just this. Yes sin includes the actions that we do that are contrary to the will of God, actions that are immoral. But Jesus died to save us from the power of sin which is outworked in death.

Romans 1:18 looks at the problem of sin this way:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all **ungodliness** and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The word Ungodliness carries with it the sense of living without regard to a religious belief or practice, that is, refusing to acknowledge God as the one worthy of worship, refusing to give God allegiance as rightful king. This is exactly what Adam and Eve did.

Tom Wright notes this:

Paul’s concern is that the Creator’s whole plan is put in jeopardy by the failure of humans to worship him alone. Only through that worship will they be sustained and fruitful in their vocation to look after his world.¹

So the sin problem is a problem of worship or allegiance to the rightful King. Notice the language that Paul uses later in Romans 5.

Romans 5:17, 21

¹⁷ For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here Paul compares two different situations, both of which have the idea of reigning; because of humanity’s trespass, that is idolatry or worshipping something other than God, death now rules over us, however, because of the actions of Jesus, humanity is able to once again reign in life, that is take life under control. Tom Wright makes this observation:

When humans sinned, they abdicated their vocation to “rule” in the way that they, as image-bearers, were supposed to. They gave away their authority to the powers of the world, which meant ultimately to death itself. Thus, in the climactic conclusion in v. 21, Paul declares that “sin reigned in death.” Sin is the human failure of vocation, with all that this entails.

When we sin, we abuse our calling, our privileges, and our possibilities. Our thoughts, words, and actions have consequences. They were meant to. ... Both

¹ Wright, N. T. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (Kindle Locations 1467-1469).

these elements, sin and death, need to be dealt with on the cross. The whole New Testament and Paul in particular declare that this is what was achieved.²

So death and sin go together. The story of Cain and Able is an example of this. Death becomes the weapon of the powers to whom humanity gave their worship.

Who was Jesus that his actions could bring about eternal life as Paul says in Romans 5?

We often think about Jesus as the second member of the divine Trinity, which is true. But he is also full human. Not only is he fully human he was also as an Israelite, a Jew. Look at these 2 verses:

Genesis 1:26

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign....

Exodus 19:5-6

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;
⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Humanity was meant to rule. Israel was meant to rule. This is part of the idea of the image of God in humanity and the vocation of humanity. By the way in which we conduct ourselves the rest of the world will see how God acts.

The problem is that both humanity as a whole and Israel as a nation failed miserably to carry out their vocation.

Two titles that Jesus used for himself and that were used of him are, *Son of Man* and *Son of God*.

Son of Man – the son of the human. That is, Jesus saw himself as a true human. Paul takes this one step further by comparing Jesus with Adam, the first human.

1 Corinthians 15:45

⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.”
The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

So Jesus was a true human whose responsibility it was to carry out the vocation given to humanity from creation, that is to rule.

Son of God – this term is not necessarily referring to Jesus as divine, though that is true, but rather it places Jesus in the position of the nation of Israel. Jesus is the embodiment of the nation of Israel. Hosea described Israel thus:

Hosea 11:1

¹ “When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and I called my son out of Egypt.

² Wright, N. T. *The Day the Revolution Began* Kindle Location 1450

Matthew makes this connection in his gospel account.

Matthew 2:14-15

¹⁴ That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵ and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."

Tom Wright speaking of this use of Hosea by Matthew:

For Matthew, part of Jesus' role and vocation is precisely to make Israel's story complete: as 'son of God' he is, as it were, Israel-in-person, succeeding at last where Israel had failed (see particularly 4:1–11).³

The writer of Psalm 2 makes the point that the king of Israel is to be considered the son of God. **Psalm 2:7-8**

⁷ The king proclaims the LORD's decree:

"The LORD said to me, 'You are my son.

Today I have become your Father.

⁸ Only ask, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the whole earth as your possession.' "

Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the first day of the Passion Week, saw him proclaimed as the King of Israel – God's son.

Jesus' action then not only represented the nation of Israel but he was the representative of all of humanity. Thus all that happened to him happened to and for both Israel and humanity.

By fulfilling the role of Israel as outlined in Exodus 19, obeying the Father's voice and keeping the covenant relationship pure, Jesus did what Israel could not do; he placed humanity back under the authority of God.

Death and the grave had no power over him because he did not give his allegiance to the power of sin. He remained under the rule of God.

Romans 6:9

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again;
death no longer has dominion over him.

In order for Jesus to defeat the power of sin and death he had to place himself within their realm and defeat them from the inside out.

So salvation is made possible for humanity because Jesus entered the realm of the power of sin and death and defeated these powers. This means that I am personally able to be saved but more importantly the whole world, the entire cosmos, is able to be saved.

There are of course other illustrations of how salvation was achieved, in theological terms *Atonement Theories*.

³ Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 15.

- Atonement as an Example of Love - The real value of Jesus' death lies in the beautiful and perfect example of the type of dedication we are to practice and of the love that God holds for humanity.
 - The challenge here is that if something real did not happen at the cross then the cross is not an example of love but rather of meaningless folly. If Bill shows his love for his friend by jumping into a fast flowing river to save his friend while his friend is standing safely on the bank, then nothing is really achieved.
 - However if Bill's friend is really in trouble in the river and he jumps in to save him then love is indeed shown.
- Atonement as a requirement to satisfy God's character – The idea here is that God, while being a God of love, is also a god of justice and that sin is an offence to his character and therefore there is a price that needs to be paid for offending the character of God and that on the cross Jesus paid that price.

My suggestion tonight is that while both of these have some validation, neither of them tell the whole story in such a way as to leave us realizing that what was accomplished by Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension, was something for the whole world, not just me as an individual.

Not only must the cross rescue me from the powers of sin and death, it must also rescue the world from these same powers. If any understanding of the life, death, resurrection and ascension, of Jesus does not include the rescue of the whole cosmos then there is not real answer to the question of theodicy – that is why do evil things happen.

Allen has so rightly pointed to John 3:16, 17 to tell us that what Jesus accomplished was for the whole world.

How is this salvation to be entered into by people?

Romans 10:9

If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The word Lord, *kyrios*, means ruler or king, the person to whom you swear allegiance.

Philippians 2:9-11

⁹Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names,

¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is **Lord**,

to the glory of God the Father.

These are actions of allegiance swearing, to bow before the king and declare that he is your Lord. When we swear allegiance to the king we come under his authority and are considered to be in his kingdom or as Paul puts it, *in Christ Jesus*.

But Paul also declares that for a person to be saved they must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. This is because you cannot have a dead king. Once a monarch has died his or her rule is ended and the new monarch's rule begins.

Believing that Jesus is still alive means that he remains the king.

With this idea of swearing allegiance to the king in mind let's look at Romans 1:16-17.

Romans 1:16-17

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. ¹⁷ This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” (NLT)

Matthew Bates in his book *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* makes the argument, and I believe credibly so, for translating the word *pistis*, not as “faith” by rather as “allegiance,” in places where it relates to salvation.

So in closing I would have you consider the following translation of Romans 1:16-17.

Romans 1: 16–17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, (*the announcement that Jesus is the fulfilment of the story of God's reconciliation of humanity*) for it (*the gospel*) is the power of God for salvation for everyone who gives allegiance to Jesus as the Christ, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in the gospel the righteousness (*the covenant faithfulness*) of God is revealed by means of Jesus' allegiance to God; this righteousness becomes ours through our allegiance to Jesus the king. For both Jesus and us, all of this accords with the prophetic word, “But the righteous one shall live by allegiance.” (Rom. 1: 16 – 17)⁴

Salvation is a reality because Jesus defeated the powers of sin and death. Being fully human and fully divine Jesus IS the reconciliation of the world to God. Humanity joins in this reconciliation by being *in Christ*. We join Jesus by offering him our allegiance.

⁴ Bates, Matthew W. *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (p. 44).

Jon Bergmann: Saved for

Introduction - Problemata

I think that one of the biggest challenges when it comes to understanding something like *salvation* – particularly the “to” or “for” of salvation – is that we think we are going to heaven.

You see, this ethereal idea of heaven often seems to either get in the way, or completely obscure our vision of the purpose of salvation. Eastern Orthodox Theologian David Bentley Hart bemoans the way that so many Christians have approached the idea of salvation as if it was “some sort of forensic exoneration accompanied by a ticket of entry into an Elysian aftermath of sun soaked meadows and old friends.”⁵

We have already heard about the “from” of salvation, and even dived into the “how” of it (cruciform) however many people assume that the “to” or the *trajectory* of salvation is set. The major presupposition behind this is a narrative that goes a little like this:

I am a Christian because I have professed Christ as my Lord and Saviour and because of that he empowers me to live a good moral life. Because of my association with Christ and my good moral life and have been granted entry into the eternal paradise known as heaven.

The problem with this, of course, is that it is almost all completely false. There are two major problems with this:

1. We often assume that *heaven* in scripture is talking about some utopian post-life experience whereas the language of heaven⁶ is simply idiomatic of a place where God’s justice and righteousness reign.
2. We also assume that the **movement** of *heaven* is from here (earth) upwards – whereas the scriptural witness appears to show us that salvation is not about us escaping, but rather him restoring. It’s a movement from there (heaven) *downwards*.

The key challenge for us is to formulate a picture of salvation that rests not on our longing to escape, but on God’s ultimate mission of uniting heaven and earth together. This makes more sense of both the beginning of the story, and the end.

The world is going to hell, so let’s get the hell *out* of here

So, let’s have a look at a phrase I like to use (above).

When we take even a brief look around at the world in which we live it’s not hard to conclude that it’s a far cry from containing the kind of truth, goodness and beauty for which it

⁵ David Bentley Hart, ‘The Lively God of Robert Jensen’ found at:

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2005/10/the-lively-god-of-robert-jenson>

⁶ The Gospel of Matthew continually invokes the phrase *kingdom of heaven* whereas Mark and Luke are far more comfortable with *kingdom of God*. John appears to use phrases interchangeably but leans on *eternal life* as his preferred descriptor. What we know about all of these phrases is that they carry the same overtones. They all speak to the concept of *heaven* not as a destination as such, but as an established kingdom where God’s justice and righteousness were complete.

was inevitably intended. I don't need to be so crass as to list the long line of historical and present human atrocities that contribute to a world that is in disarray.

This considered, I think this is one of the primary theological drivers for so many people's conception of heaven. It's not that their understanding is drawn from any kind of concrete reality but it is constructed *in contrast* to an exceptionally violent and spiteful world. Our utopian vision of heaven is an apologetic against the dystopian reality we experience. This is not a new thought (it is just more pronounced these days).

People will often invoke scriptures such as 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17⁷ to describe the *movement* of salvation as one of humanity being extricated from earth:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

They will use this to develop theories such as the "rapture" theory which proposes that in some way those that have been saved now bear no responsibility in God's restoration project – the problem of course is that scriptures like this are usually taken so wildly out of context. The reality of this particular passage is that it is describing the common image of a returning king coming back to a city they have been away from, and the people coming out to meet them and bring them back in a flurry of praise.

If we compare this passage with one in Luke we will learn that, once again, God's movement is not one of "evacuation" but of "incarnation."

Luke 19:37-38, 41-44

When he had come near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God... "Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord!", "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest... As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you."

God is not concerned with removing us from earth, he is concerned with creating both in us and through us a *new world in his image*.

⁷ This verse, among others (e.g. Mt.24:30-31; Jn. 14:3, Phil.3:20-21) helps to capitulate a strange theological idea commonly referred to as the 'rapture.' The basis of this idea is that the 'faithful elect' will be removed from earth, usually prior to a time of great tribulation, before ultimately spending eternity with God in the ethereal realm known as heaven.

When Tom Wright recounts this story in beautiful narrative form:

All the old songs came flooding back, and they were singing, chanting, cheering, and laughing. At last their dreams were going to come true. But in the middle of it their leader wasn't singing. 'When he came near and saw the city, he wept over it' (Luke 19:41). Yes, their dreams were indeed coming true. But not in the way they had imagined.

He was not the king they expected. He wasn't like the monarchs of old who sat on their jewelled and ivory thrones, dispensing their justice and wisdom. Nor was he the great warrior-king some had wanted. He didn't raise an army to ride into battle at its head. He was riding on a donkey. And he was weeping. Weeping for a dream that had to die, weeping for the sword that would pierce his supporters to the soul. Weeping for the kingdom that wasn't coming as well as for the kingdom that was.⁸

What we are often dealing with, both in this scriptural story, but also when it comes to the idea of salvation, is *expectation*. In this story the people expected a saviour who was going to liberate them with strength and power, freeing them once and for all, and removing them from the subverting hand of their oppressors. Because of their expectations they missed the form that the saviour took: a nonviolent Nazarene, approaching them on a donkey, with the goal of overcoming evil through the power of suffering love. My question is, if we are constantly looking at salvation as a means to escape this dark and often chaotic earthly reality – will we miss the Christ that **has come down to us? And will we therefore misunderstand our role in the story that salvation invites us to participate in?**

The world is going to hell, so let's get the *hell* out of here

If we decide to approach the above phrase in a slightly different way however, putting the emphasis rather on the *hell*, then it takes on an entirely new meaning. Suddenly the goal (the *telos*) is not on the escape, but rather the removal of the *hell* (insert whatever language you might like to use: sin, darkness, evil etc.) from within our reality. This is a significant shift of perception, and one that I think is matched within the story of Scripture itself.

Allen has set up a picture of the cross that, if you stop and think about it, completely disrupts all that we have been taught about salvation. We often get taught that Jesus on the cross is a demonstration of love *because he takes on the punishment reserved for us*. Another way to look at it, and the one I think that has been presented here tonight, is that the violence of the cross is not God's action, but *ours*. The love demonstrated on the cross is therefore not an appeasement of God's bad temper, but a signal that **there is no amount of hatred, violence or sin that can overcome the light and life of God.**

What we are invited into therefore, is not a salvation that is granted on the presumption of God's righteous aggression, but a participation of a love that actively overcomes all violence, oppression, hatred. Our goal is not just to live good moral lives so that one day we might be one of the faithful elite who will be removed. Our goal is one of participation in God's

⁸ Tom Wright, *Simply Jesus: Why he was, what he did, why it matters* (London: SPCK, 2012): 1

restoration project – we are part of those called to bring “[his] kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven”⁹

The central idea here is that **if salvation is not about escape, then it must in some way challenge the way we experience, and *participate in*, our world now.**

In order to really understand this however it is essentially that we are able to clearly identify what **hell** really looks like. In just the same way that we often consign heaven to a kind of elysian/utopian paradise, we image hell as the fiery underbelly of the mystical world. If we look closely at the idea of hell, or evil in scripture is usually has a face, or a name. Many of the NT uses of the word actually locate it as a physical place (*Gehenna*), whilst some prefer the Greek mythological approach (*Hades*). The Hebrew Bible refers constantly to *Sheol*, the place of the dead. But one the clearest visions of evil we have I think comes in Revelation, with the curious and imaginative language that John uses.

Now, for centuries people have been terrified by the book of Revelation, not simply because some of the imagery is quite rightly quite terrifying, but because they have viewed the interpretive task as almost impossible. In reality I think, given a few key tools, Revelation is quite simple to understand, but more importantly it may well be one of the most significant books for us to grapple with in our modern, 2017 context. Revelation puts a face to evil, to sin, to *hell*, and that face is **Rome**.

For John’s audience Rome was the clearest image of everything that stood in antithesis to Christ and he uses the language of beast, prostitute and monster to convey different aspects of Rome’s perversion.

If we look to Revelation 17-18 we focus in on the image of the prostitute we find that is set up as an idiom for Rome’s crimes against the Judea Christian tradition. Adela Yarbro Collins¹⁰ depicts John’s indictment against Rome as consisting of 4 key crimes:

1. Idolatrous and blasphemous worship offered and encouraged by Rome, especially the emperor cult
2. The violence perpetrated by Rome, especially against Jews and Christians
3. Rome’s blasphemous self-glorification and
4. Roman wealth

de Silva goes on to explain that:

This serves to further dissuade the Christians addressed by John from adopting practices that lead to partnership with this ugly system of domination and economic exploitation, promoting instead a vocal, critical distance in the form of witness and nonparticipation in key activities.¹¹

⁹ From the Lord’s prayer in Mt.6:10

¹⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Westminster: John Knox, 1984): 203.

¹¹ David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Westminster: John Knox, 2009): 205.

He hits at the heart of the Roman hypocrisy, saying that John is trying to do is expose this hypocrisy so that Christians don't fall prey to believing that their faith can in any way be aligned with the brutal and dominating principles of empire:

Uniting the practice of exerting control and maintaining peace through violent suppression of dissent, the promotion of an economy arranged for the great benefit of the few, and the prominent use of religious language and ritual claim sacral legitimation for these arrangements – uniting these is both the genius of Rome and the heap of her sins for which John excoriates here¹²

So, the point? If we can understand what the **face of evil** is, we can participate in a resistance against it (or at the very least a neglect of it). For John's day the face of evil was Rome, **what is our Rome?**

You see, if salvation is not about our removal from earth, but rather it is about resurrection – God bringing about *newness* from what is dark and chaotic – then to be “saved” is to acknowledge that you are now a citizen of a kingdom which is being born among us. You are a citizen of a kingdom that is both resisting evil, and giving birth to beauty. If you acknowledge that this is true then you are part of the restoration project.

We are *saved for* this kingdom. And there is a lot of work to do.

The promise however, is that one day God will come, and his realm and ours will be united, and in that reunification there will be no more pain, injustice or heartache.

Revelation 21:1-5a:

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!

The challenging paradox of faith is that we look forward to this being fulfilled in the future, but live as if it were our reality today.

¹² deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 48