
Is This the Only Day of Salvation?

by: Ronald L. Dart

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37–38).

What in the world is God doing? I suspect there are those who would say, "Not very much." The world looks like God wound it up, started it spinning, and then walked away from it. That is, more or less, the deist view.

And if you should ask, "How is the Gospel doing in the world?" Someone might reply, "Not very well. After all, most of the world is not Christian, and never has been. All those dead people who never heard of Jesus in their lifetime, where are they?"

Now I realize I am making some people uncomfortable with these questions, but they are honest questions that deserve an honest answer. Paul told Timothy that "It was God's will that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). So we know it is God's will that all men be saved. Yes, there may be some who reject this in the end, but surely not half the world.

A Paradox

Most people who have ever lived on this planet never had a chance to reject salvation. Let me show you a paradox. One day, after Jesus had unloaded a rather elaborate parable on the crowd, the disciples came to Jesus and wanted to know what he was doing. "Why," they asked, "do You speak to them in parables?" (Matthew 13:10).

Conventional wisdom is that Jesus' parables are illustrations, literary devices He used to make His meaning clear. If that is so, then why did the disciples ask this question? The answer is that a parable is more like an allegory than an illustration. An allegory is the representation of spiritual, moral, or other abstract meanings through the actions of fictional characters that serve as symbols. And it is in the nature of an allegory that the reader or listener has to find the meanings by himself. What that means is that different people are apt to find different meanings in an allegory. Hence the disciples' question, "Why do you speak to them in allegories?"

Jesus' answer is nothing short of astonishing. He said: "Because it has been given to you, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (v.11).

So here is our paradox. On the one hand, it is God's will that all men should be saved. On the other hand, Jesus spoke in allegories so that some would understand the Gospel and others would not. In fact, to this day, people understand Jesus differently and by anyone's definition of salvation, many people who claim to be Christian, aren't.

How Hard Is God Trying to Save The World?

You might think that God isn't really trying very hard to save the world, and you would be right. For if God is God, if He is all powerful, all knowing, and nothing can be withheld from Him (and He is all these things), then if He were trying hard to save the world right now, He would do it. So maybe our answer is that God is not trying to save the whole world right now. Maybe that is just a little bit further on in God's plan.

God's Holy Days

Years ago, I learned that the holy days in the Bible actually picture God's plan of salvation. Virtually the entire Christian world dismisses these holy days as merely Jewish. They think these days picture things out of Jewish history and have no relevance to the Christian faith. They see it much as Americans see the 4th of July. It is a celebration of American independence, and nothing else.

But anyone who looks at the holy days of the Bible that way, is mistaken. Every single one of the biblical holy days also picture part of the plan of God and are entirely relevant to the Christian faith. In my book, "The Thread: God's Appointments with History," we have walked through each of these seven holy days in the year and have found Christ and His work in every one of them.

The questions I am asking you right now arise from the last of these holy days, and from the great question of the Christian faith – what happens to all the rest of the millions of people who never heard of Jesus? What of the Gentiles, the nations, who were to all intents and purposes down through history, cut off from God and shut out from the promises?

Well, something new is about to come on the scene, and if we keep following the thread, we are bound to run into it. Jesus had begun to stay in Galilee because it was becoming too dangerous for Him to travel in Judea. The Jews around Jerusalem had already begun looking for ways to do away with Him. But, the Feast of Tabernacles was a hitch in His plans, because the law called upon Him to go.

Feast of Tabernacles

Jesus had brothers (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3). I know that will give some people the vapors, but never mind. They were His real brothers, because they gave him a hard time about His ministry. They said, "You need to go to Judea so your disciples there can see the work you are doing"

(John 7:3). There was probably some irony in their remarks, because John notes that at that time, even his brothers did not believe in Him. But Jesus didn't respond in kind.

Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret (John 7:6–10).

Jesus wanted to avoid going into Jerusalem with His brothers. He would have been spotted immediately. It was better and safer to go alone. The truth is, there was nothing remarkable about Jesus' appearance, and He could easily enter Jerusalem as a solitary pilgrim and be lost in the crowds.

The Jews knew Jesus had to be there and they had men out looking for Him. "There were arguments among the people about Him, some thinking He was a good man, others arguing the contrary. "No," they said, "He deceives the people." But no one spoke openly of him for fear of the Jewish leadership."

Jesus was a rabbi, though, and about mid feast, He was up in the Temple teaching. The most common question about Jesus the teacher was, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" (verse 15).

"Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" (John 7:16–19).

"You're crazy," the people said. "Who wants to kill you?" They knew, but they didn't know that Jesus knew.

"I have done one work," Jesus replied, "and you all marvel." He had read their minds, but it didn't require that much discernment to see the murderous intent on some of their faces.

Jesus' Sabbath Day Healings

So, Jesus went straight to the issue that had triggered all this in the first place, His Sabbath day healings: "Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:22–24).

The logic was irrefutable. They would allow circumcision on the Sabbath, because it had to be done on the eighth day, regardless. But they were angry with Jesus because He healed on the Sabbath. Of course, that wasn't the real reason they wanted Him dead.

Jesus was a threat to the existing power structure. And the events of that festival did nothing to allay their concerns.

"Now some of them from Jerusalem said, "Is this not He whom they seek to kill? But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from"" (John 7:25–27).

Jesus didn't let that stand. "You both know Me", He said, "and you know where I come from. You know I come not of myself, but that He that sent Me is true. The problem is, you don't know Him."

That was too much for the leadership, and they tried to have him arrested. But no one would lay hands on Him because His time had not come.

"And many of the people believed in Him, and said, "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?" The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. Then Jesus said to them, "I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come"" (John 7:31–34).

This was a moment of great danger for the Pharisees. Jesus was gaining ground with the people and He was, to them, openly defiant. "They wondered among themselves, "Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?""

What was behind that response? It is generally not realized that the truth of God, the promises, the covenants, all the great gifts of God, were given to the Jews who were in turn supposed to share them with the world. They had done precious little of that.

There are many references to Gentiles in both Testaments, along with instructions to take the truth to the Gentiles. Those listening to Jesus on this occasion knew all this, and they wondered when and how Jesus might do that. All this went on through the last half of the feast, and finally Jesus made a proclamation.

The Last Day, That Great Day of The Feast

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37–39).

We have once again found the thread we have been following. This is one of the great days in the Hebrew calendar, the Last Great Day of the Feast. It does not seem to be distinct from the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jews are well enough aware of it, but most Christians will not have heard of it beyond this passage. Nor will they realize that on this occasion, Jesus is engaging in some very important symbolism. It is on this particular day that Jesus issues a call, not just to some, but to all men to come to Him.

The first mention of this day in the Bible lies far back along our thread, and we have been there before. It is that 23th. Chapter of Leviticus where all the festivals, the holy days, are laid out in order. In that part of the chapter dealing with the Feast of Tabernacles, there are instructions for this day as well.

"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it" (Leviticus 23:34–36).

The first day and the eighth day are annual Sabbaths where a holy convocation, an assembly, was required. You take off work, and you go to church.

Now there is some question about whether this eighth day is a separate festival or the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles? (i) We will leave that aside for the time being and consider the special significance of the day for Christian people.

The last day of the feast was characterized by the pouring of water. It was a great water festival. One source says that the Temple Mount was awash in water on this day. Hence Jesus' statement: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38).

And the greatest meaning of the day is found in the words, 'any man.' Not just some, not just the Jews, not just those in the western world. For to this day, the Gospel has not been extended to every man. And so Jesus, somehow, on this Last Great Day of the Feast, stands and cries in the Temple that, "The time has come for the Gospel to go to every man."

6,000 Years of Human Rule

There is a parallel between the Feast of Tabernacles and human history. The pattern in the Bible appears to be that man has six thousand years of human rule to do his best. And oddly, even though archaeologists and other scientists have found evidence of civilization existing some ten thousand years ago, the Bible appears to lay out the ideal six thousand years. This doesn't mean the Bible is wrong, only that we don't have all the data.

The seventh thousand years period, the Millennium, is the time of the Kingdom of God. But if you have been following this carefully, you may wonder, "Hey, then, what about that eighth day that's outside the seven-thousand-year plan?"

Yes, it is, isn't it? What comes at the end of the plan? You don't have to be a scholar to know where to look in the Bible for the end of the plan. You just go to the back of the Book. And here it is in the Book of Revelation:

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and He cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while" (Revelation 20:1–3).

This certainly has not yet happened. The Devil is still on the loose in our world. But this thousand-year period when Satan is bound and out of the picture, is what people are talking about when they speak of the Millennium. It is the ideal seventh period of Biblical history. It is symbolic, and it connects to the Feast of Tabernacles. It lies right along our thread.

First and Second Resurrections

"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4).

You won't find the word, 'Millennium' in the Bible, but this is where the idea of the Millennium arises. It is odd in some Christian circles that it is commonly called the Millennium rather than 'The Kingdom of God,' because that is what it really is. But there is something else here that we don't want to overlook:

"But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:5–6).

When John said, the first resurrection, he implies at least one more. In fact, what we have is a first and second resurrection, a thousand years apart. I realize that there are many ways to interpret a vision like this, but one way is to take the most obvious intent, which is what I have done here.

Satan Released

"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of

the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were cast. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:7–10).

Mind you, this comes at the end of a thousand years of peace, of God's reign. Now the Devil is loose again, and this is what happens. But finally, he has a very unpleasant future thrust upon him. One might suppose that this terrible sequence is to cut off all the loose ends of those people who, no matter what, will not accept God's way. And there are a lot of them.

White Throne Judgment

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life" (Revelation 20:11–12).

Consider where we are in time. This is a vision, of course, but we have been following a sequence in time. We are at the end of the Millennium. And earlier we read that there was a first resurrection and then that 'the rest of the dead' did not live again until the thousand years were finished. The first resurrection is all those in Christ. So here we are, with the rest of the dead standing before God in judgment. What is it when the dead stand up? A resurrection? Yes, and this one is the second general resurrection.

Book of Life

But there is an anomaly here. One of the books that was opened was the Book of Life. If we think this through, there are some questions we need to answer. The Book of Life is the book in which all the names of the saints, of all those in Christ, are written. Your name should already be there.

Here is the problem. Since everyone whose name was in the Book of Life was raised in the first resurrection, why are we opening the Book of Life again in this second resurrection? It can't be to see who is written in it, because they had already been resurrected and given eternal life, so why is the Book of Life opened at this late date? It is so that new entries can be made in it!

"And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:12–15).

I don't know all the details of God's plan or how He will work out every aspect of it. But it is fairly clear when you follow this thread all the way through the plan, that when all is said and done, God is going to revisit a lot of those who have lived and died in this world, because He is a merciful God and He isn't finished with them yet.

All those who never knew God will come up out of their graves, and they will be judged. We might assume that they are standing before the bar being judged only on the basis of what they have done in the past. But take the judging of a prizefight as an illustration. A fight is being judged while it is being waged. These people may well be right back in the land, being judged by the way they live their lives, the second time around.

So, it may be that your old Uncle Bob, who never found time for religion in this life, will in the second resurrection, find time for God.

Still have questions? So, do I. But what we have seen is that God does indeed intend to make a way to solve our problem.

In the festivals of the Bible, we find a promise of a future beyond our imagination. In that future, we will meet those lost loved ones one more time. And this time, it will be different.

Having followed the thread this far, I find new meaning in an old Gospel song: "I Will Meet You in the Morning," by Albert Brumley:

"I will meet you in the morning on the bright riverside,

When all sorrows have drifted away.

I'll be standing at the portal with the gates open wide,

At the close of life's long, dreary day.

Chorus: I'll meet you in the morning with a "How do you do?"

And we'll sit down by the river, and with rapture, old acquaintance renews.

You'll know me in the morning by the smile that I wear.

When I meet you in the morning in that city that is built foursquare."

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you explain to a mainstream Christian that this is not the only time for salvation?
2. How would you patiently and lovingly explain God's Holy Days?
3. If those who do not believe in Jesus in this life are destined to go to hell, then how does one explain that God closed the minds of many to the truth for the fulfillment of His plans?
4. Could we possibly call God loving if someone who never heard the name Jesus, lived as best as they could, to only be resurrected to torment?
5. Have you ever met someone who does not believe in the second resurrection?
6. If you have, how did they explain Revelation 20?
7. Isn't it wonderful to know that there is hope for those who do not believe in this life?
8. Who do you hope to meet again?
9. Are we sharing the truth that God doesn't wish any to perish?
10. Are we refuting the heaven and hell claim in a loving manner but also boldly, so that all you encounter can learn that God is a loving and merciful God?