

Settling Your Priorities

How Do You Know What Is Important To You?

The other day I was working as a substitute teacher in a special ed class for four and five year olds. The children were all autistic and lacked the ability to connect socially with any other children and nearly all adults. There were four staff working in the classroom, whose responsibility was to help manage the behaviors of the children, keep them safe and provide for their physical and emotional needs. The children would generally cry or become angry if they wanted something or if they were frustrated and it was up to me and the other staff to figure out, much like you would with a three month old baby what was wrong. Because the children are all nearly completely living within themselves, it is rare that they show any signs of connection or affection. One boy in the class, who was very large and strong, was like the rest, mostly just wandering about, fiddling with different items in the classroom or lying on the floor, in his own world. The staff found it very difficult to manage him as he was so big and stubborn. Early on, he seemed to connect with me and periodically he would want to hold my hand and walk with me. As the day went along, when the staff members needed to get this boy to do something and he refused, they would look to me get him to comply. When I am working with little children, I often try to stay down at their level physically, so I do not seem to be a threat and also to connect with them. In this class, I often sat in a small chair to reduce the height differences. A couple of times, he wanted to come sit on my lap, this child who did not connect with anyone else in the classroom. The staff watched to see how I would respond to this. I had to make a decision. Would I let this autistic child climb into my lap, this boy who socially did not connect with anyone else or did I maintain a professional boundary and not let him? What in that instance was my priority, how was I, as a substitute teacher to respond? Our big idea today is this: let salvation determine the course your life takes.

Today we will take a close look at the fifth piece of armor the Bible says we need to protect ourselves from the spiritual forces of evil that are constantly looking for ways to wreck our lives. Here it is. **And receive the helmet of salvation...** (Ephesians 6: 17a) What is notable is that the command is to receive the helmet of salvation, not go get it or pick it up. Salvation is not something you can gain for yourself or earn. It can only come from Jesus as the Bible makes clear. **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4: 12 NIV) You have a choice to receive the helmet of salvation or not, and the consequences of your choice are on you. Now the Greek grammar of this verse is critical to understand the intention. First, the verb translated receive is written in the form of a command. You are told by God to do it. You can obey or not, it is up to you. Jesus Christ offers you salvation, but it is up to you to receive it or not, obey Him or refuse His orders. Second, it is in the aorist tense which means you are to receive the helmet of salvation each time you put on the armor of God. This is a bit confusing for the serious follower of the Bible because it could sound like eternal life is something you receive over and over again. The perplexity comes from mixing up eternal life and salvation. Eternal life is your ongoing, never ending, perfected life with God. Jesus said this of it. **I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.** (John 10: 28 NIV) Once you have eternal life from Christ, it can't be stopped or taken from you, nor can you do something to risk losing it. Eternal life is the gift of God and He protects it forever for you.

Salvation is often misidentified as identical to eternal life, that they are the same thing, but they are not. Eternal life is one aspect of salvation, it is to use a math term, a subset of it but not the totality of salvation. Salvation is the transformative work of Christ to make you fit for eternal life, to bring eternal life to you. Salvation removes sin from your personality, works the life of Christ into you and establishes your loyalty to Christ as your Lord. Christ becomes first, second and last as the priority and director of your life. To put it another way Christ becomes your head through salvation. Maturity is in fact defined as the work establishing Christ as your head. Although this passage is typically seen as a statement about the Church, it is just as importantly a declaration of how things develop for you when you gain salvation. **Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.** (Ephesians 4: 14-16 NIV)

Let me use an example from Scripture of what the ramifications are for you when Christ is your head. Late in Jesus' time with the disciples, before He was crucified, He took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain. When they

reached as far as Jesus wanted to go, a sign was given the three disciples. **There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.** (Matthew 17: 2 NIV) This was the sign, Jesus transfigured before them, the showing of Jesus' place and His authority. The disciples though, as they often did, completely misinterpreted things. Right after, Moses and Elijah came and met with Jesus and this the disciples saw as the sign. It was they were sure proof to them that Jesus was on an equal footing with the two great prophets of old, Moses and Elijah. Peter, speaking for the other two wanted to mark the spot of this momentous meeting, establishing for posterity the great historic gathering of the three. **Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."** (Matthew 17: 4 NIV) This is when the Father stepped in. He could not let the three disciples or any of the rest of us misunderstand who Jesus is. He is not one of many prophets, not even one of the greatest prophets of all time. He is the Son of God, and no one rises above Him in honor or authority. **While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"** **When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.** (Matthew 17: 5-6 NIV) Indeed, they well should have been terrified. They had, like so many of us completely misappropriated the identity and standing of Christ. The Bible makes it clear who Jesus is just as the Father did on that day. **They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.**" (Revelation 17: 14 NIV) **You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.** (Acts 10: 36 NIV) Thomas when his doubts were erased by Jesus raised from the dead spoke for all of us who have the helmet of salvation when he made this everlasting declaration of who Jesus is, **"My Lord and my God!"** (John 20:28b NIV)

Those three disciples were brought to the crossroads of faith. Like you, they had to face squarely this determination. Is Christ, first, second and last in your life or is He one of many, including yourself who decide matters for you? I must ask you. Is Christ Lord over all of your life or do you come and go from Him as you navigate the day? The helmet is the protector of the head and although in the metaphor, we think of it as something separate from the head, consider it this way. Your protection against all the attacks of Satan, all the ways the demonic realm tries to tear you away from God is not some leather or metal bit of headgear. That of course is a silly way to see it. Your protection is Christ Himself and the salvation He provides you. It is Christ within you that guards your mind, that guides you and helps you see what you cannot on your own. It is His salvation that supernaturally makes you right and carries you into perfection. The end goal for you is perfection in every way and the salvation of Christ is how God makes that happen.

It can be scary when your eyes become fully open and the realization comes that Jesus is really Lord of all for you. The disciples on the mount of transfiguration were terrified when it dawned on them that God was there. Jesus does for you what He did for them though when you have weak knees and trembling hands because of the ramifications of Jesus being Lord, fully Lord of you. **But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."** (Matthew 17 :7 NIV) You may not know the name Hudson Taylor, but he was probably the most important and influential missionary to go to China. He served there fifty-one years. From his journal is this description of his departure from England and what it was like for him and his mother to part. *My beloved, now sainted mother, had come over to Liverpool to see me off. Never shall I forget that day, nor how she went with me into the cabin that was to be my home for nearly six long months. With a mother's loving hand she smoothed the little bed. She sat by my side and joined in the last hymn we should sing together before parting. We knelt down and she prayed – the last mother's prayer I was to hear before leaving for China. Then notice was given that we must separate, and we had to say goodbye, never expecting to meet on earth again. For my sake she restrained her feelings as much as possible. We parted, and she went ashore giving me her blessing. I stood alone on deck, and she followed the ship as we moved toward the dock gates. As we passed through the gates and the separation really commenced, never shall I forget the cry of anguish wrung from that mother's heart. It went through me like a knife. I never knew so fully until then what 'God so loved the world' meant. And I am quite sure my precious mother learned more of the love of God for the perishing in that one hour than in all her life before.*

At some point, and I am not saying it is easy, you must decide if Christ is truly Lord of all, really Lord of your life. Like the disciples, like Hudson Taylor, it is Lord of all if you are to live victoriously and defeat all the plots of Satan against you. Our Big Idea is simple. Let salvation determine the course your life takes. Salvation, the working of Christ in us to make us perfect is the master of our course and the protector of our heads.