

Urban Legends – Part 9
Salvation-Part One
Revelation and Romans

Urban Legend.

1. *Revelation 3:20*

2. *Romans 10:9-10*

A Closer Look.

- *Ephesians 3:16-17a*

Who's in my heart, then?

- *Romans 10:9-10*

A Closer Look.

Who's in my heart, then?

Am I saved, then?

- *Titus 1:16*

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West Valley Church
8/14/2022
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Urban Legends¹
Salvation Part One
Revelation 3:20
Romans 10:9-10

The year was 1979, and the place was the garage behind a weightlifting gym. I was a 17-year-old high school kid who had run flat out of excuses and straight into God. The owner of that fitness center was a Christian man, and he had encouraged me to bow and pray with him as he led me to confess and repent of my sins, to accept what Jesus Christ had done for me on the cross and his resurrection, and to pledge my life to God. I prayed and he prayed for me. On that day I knew that I had been saved, converted, and had become a Christian.

But how did I know that? How could I be sure I was saved? Was it because I said the right words? Was it because I prayed certain things in the correct order? And when I did pray that prayer, did Jesus actually come into my heart?

Today and next Sunday we are going to explore some of the urban legends around what the Bible says about salvation, or being saved.

Here is the...

Urban Legend

...we will look at today: ***Jesus is knocking at your heart's door. Invite him into your heart, just say you believe, and you are saved.***

For those of us who've grown up in the church or who have been around the church for a long time, that might sound like what we've all heard for years. But just because we've heard it for years doesn't necessarily mean it's correct. As Christians we've got to be careful about what we say, and make sure it accurately reflects what the Bible says.

This urban legend that we are looking at today comes to us from a misinterpretation and misuse of a couple of passages of Scripture, which are:

¹ [Sources for this series/sermon:](#)

David A. Croteau and Gary E. Yates *Urban Legends of the Old Testament* (B&H Academic, Nashville TN 2019)

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John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)

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1. Revelation 3:20

2. Romans 10:9-10

We are going to look at these two verses in that order to make sure we aren't misunderstanding what they say, and to make sure we aren't repeating incorrect information, especially when we are sharing the Gospel with others in the hopes of introducing them to Jesus Christ. In fact, there are some folks in this room today or joining us online that are still contemplating becoming Christian, so it is important to know what all that means.

So let's begin by looking at that first passage, which comes to us from Revelation 3:20. Many of us have heard this verse many times and are familiar with it, but here is what it says:

1. Revelation 3:20 -

(This is Jesus speaking.) **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Revelation 3:20, niv)**

Rufus McDaniel was an Ohio pastor whose young son Herschel tragically died in 1913. The next year Pastor McDaniel wrote a beautiful hymn. The song's popularity in American culture quickly took off, because the famous preacher Billy Sunday incorporated it into his evangelistic campaigns in 1915. Some of you who have been around the church will recognize the song: "Since Jesus Came into My Heart." Billy Graham further popularized the idea at all of his crusades for many decades. That song has come to express some of the truths of Scripture, including this notion of how one is saved: by praying to accept Jesus into your heart. After all, isn't that what Jesus meant when he said, "Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus wants to come into your heart, and all you have to do is ask him and then say you believe.²

But is that what this verse from Revelation 3:20 is really all about?

As a pastor, I've met with so many people who have come to me for counseling or spiritual instruction or advice, and I've asked them to tell me about their faith story. Many will say to me, for example, that when they were young, they asked Jesus into their heart by repeating a prayer that was recited to them, or by simply saying that they believe.

But let me ask you: what's missing from that "testimony"? It says nothing about sin, faith, repentance, the cross, or the resurrection. Almost every element necessary for a gospel presentation is missing! Part of the problem is that Revelation 3:20 has been used time and again by evangelists to compel people to accept Jesus into their hearts, as if that's it – that's all. But is this concept accurate with what this verse

² David A. Croteau, *Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015), 233.

actually says, and is it a good way to explain salvation to those who are in desperate need of Christ?³

Let's take...

A closer look.

If you've been with us for any of this series over this summer, you should be able to answer this question: what is the best way for us to take a closer look at what this passage means? By taking a look at it within its...context. If we're going to understand the passage, we can't just pull it out of its context as if the verse were written all by itself. When we do understand the context, we learn something very interesting about it. This verse comes as part of a "letter" that Christ is writing to a particular church. In Revelation chapters 2-3, Jesus is dictating letters to each of seven churches, acknowledging what they are doing well and correcting what they are doing wrong. The verse we are looking at today comes at the end of the section of chapter three, in verses 14-20, and it is for the Christians who are gathered in a city called Laodicea.

So this is our first clue: when Jesus said he is standing outside the door and knocking, he is saying it to *believers*, not to unbelievers. But there's more than that. In verse 19, Jesus tells the church, "I correct and discipline those whom I love. So be earnest and change your hearts and lives." (19, ceb) Those words are very similar to Proverbs 3:12, *which are directed to God's chosen people, the Jews*. And when Jesus says that he corrects and disciplines those whom he "loves," the word for "love" that Jesus uses is "phileo," which means "brotherly love." That word is *never* used in the Bible to describe Jesus' love for unbelievers; in that case the word "agape" is used, which means "unconditional love." Jesus uses the term "phileo" to describe his love for those who are *already saved*.

That changes the meaning of the verse a little bit, doesn't it? It is for the *saved*, not the *unsaved*. But there's more: does it really say that Jesus will come into their heart? No, Jesus doesn't say anything about coming into their hearts. In fact, if you paid attention, Jesus doesn't say "I will come *into* them..." Jesus is saying, "I will come *in to* them..." The original language isn't about "entering into" anything; it has more to do with coming *toward* someone. It is a highly relational word.

In fact, in chapter one of Revelation (1:10, 12, 15), it describes Jesus' voice as "a trumpet" and like "the sounds of rushing waters." But here it is the voice of a friend outside of a door who is calling out, earnestly seeking to share a meal with the person. It is a call to return to close table fellowship; to a restored relationship around a leisurely evening meal.⁴ In other words, it is a call to a church with whom Jesus once enjoyed brotherly fellowship and friendship, but now he is lovingly

³ David A. Croteau, *ibid*, 233–234.

⁴ Rotz, *ibid*

rebuking and correcting those people in order to call them back into that friendship and fellowship. So it is not at all about “coming into someone’s heart.”

“But wait a minute Pastor Mike,” you might say. “Doesn’t Ephesians 3:17a talk about Jesus living in our hearts?” That’s a very astute question and you are smart to have asked it! Let’s look quickly at that verse just to make sure. That verse says,

“...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (Ephesians 3:17a, niv)

“Yea! What about that verse?! That clearly states that Jesus lives in our hearts!” Weeeeee, does it though?

What should we look at to find out? Maybe we should look at the context? Good idea! Let’s take...

a closer look

...at this verse.

First of all, this comes as a part of Paul’s description of his prayer for whom? It is called Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which means it was written to the *believers* in the church in Ephesus. So neither can this be used to tell unbelievers to ask Jesus to come into their hearts. And, in fact, Paul is writing in Ephesians 3 to *correct* the believers from some things they were not doing right.

Not only that, Paul isn’t really saying that it’s *Jesus* who indwells them. Let’s back up and get a better idea of the context by looking at this verse along with the verse that comes right before it:

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power ***through his Spirit in your inner being***, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (Ephesians 3:16-17a, niv)

So Paul is essentially saying that when the Holy Spirit has filled a believer, the Spirit is strengthening us in our inner being, and so that’s how Christ leads us from the heart. This isn’t just a matter of semantics; we are talking about the Trinity, or God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – the three-in-one – about what each one does for us and in us. This is very important to understand and get right.

The point is that these references to Jesus in Revelation three and Ephesians three are written to Christians as part of a correction or a rebuke for them to start living as they should. They are not suggesting that Jesus enters into a person like a version of that old sci-fi movie, “The Invasion of the Body Snatchers.”

So if you are a Christian, maybe you are asking, wait a minute –

Who’s in my heart, then?

Well that’s a very good question. A verse that maybe helps clarify this question is from Galatians 4:6. Listen carefully:

“Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts...” (Galatians 4:6)

Did you catch that? Who is sent into our hearts? It is the Holy Spirit who lives in the heart of every Christian. Again, this is about recognizing the different roles of the Trinity in our lives.

This is also important to realize when we are sharing the Gospel with folks in order to introduce them to Jesus, because becoming a Christian is not about asking Jesus into your heart; it involves repenting and responding in faith. You are not saved because you invited Jesus into your heart – that would imply that your salvation is based on something you do. You are saved because God the Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for you and rose from the dead. Your salvation comes as a result of your repenting and your faith response to what Jesus did for you. And when you respond appropriately, the Holy Spirit begins working within you.

If you are not a Christian, this is really important for you, so you can understand what happens should you step into this life of faith. And if you are a Christian, this is really important so you can understand what it means that you are saved.

So now let’s look at the second part of that urban legend. Remember, the legend is ***Jesus is knocking at your heart’s door. Invite him into your heart, just say you believe, and you are saved.***

We’ve already clarified that Jesus is *not* speaking to unbelievers when he talks about knocking on the door, nor is he talking about the door of your heart, nor does he move into your heart (the Holy Spirit does). But what about the other part of that legend: “just say you believe, and you are saved”? Remember that part comes from a passage in Romans, so let’s look at part two of these verses,

2. Romans 10:9-10

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10, niv)

So is this verse saying that all you have to do to be saved is just declare that you believe in Jesus? Or is it saying that we have to declare it *and then* believe it, in two steps?

Like before, let’s take...

a closer look

...at the verses, and we do that by looking at what? At the context. First, Paul is not writing to the unsaved. This instruction is for the Christians in Rome.

So in the verses leading up to what we just read, Paul is explaining that God has not made salvation too difficult for us. We don't have to go up into heaven to get it, we don't have to go down into the abyss to get it. Instead, the word of faith is very near to us. Then in verse 8 Paul paraphrases Deuteronomy 30:14. In that verse in Deuteronomy, God is talking about the relationship he will have with his people *by His Spirit*, so that they will know what God's word says. God is describing a relationship with himself that he has made available to people. In that verse it says: "The word is very close to you. It's in your mouth and in your heart, waiting for you to do it." Paul is paraphrasing that passage here in Romans. So Paul is *not* giving us some kind of order of steps that we have to go through in order to be saved; Paul is *not* saying that we have to declare and then believe to be saved, and if we don't do both, we're in trouble. Neither is Paul even saying we have to just declare that we believe and then *that* means we are saved. Again, Paul is writing to already-believers.

Let me explain: when Paul is talking about declaring and believing, they are two sides of the same coin. If you are a Christian, you will believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead AND – at the same time, if you are a Christian, you will declare to people what you believe. Both of those things will happen *if* you are a Christian. Telling people about Jesus is a manifestation of belief, not something you do in order to be saved. It is something you do *when you are saved*. For Paul, these are not two different things; they are the same thing.

So the question is...

Am I saved, then?

Listen: Here is where we take our conversation from Revelation 3 and this passage from Romans 10, and we bring it all together: *those who confess that Jesus is Lord and that he rose from the dead will identify themselves as belonging to Jesus*. It's not because they said the right words by inviting Jesus to live in their hearts. Those who are saved have repented and accepted what Christ did for them and they are allowing the Holy Spirit to change their lives, and the evidence is in the way that they live and by the fact that they tell others about Jesus. When Paul says to declare and to believe, he is talking about a person's commitment to a relationship that God has already made available. *You are not saved because you've done something; you are saved because Jesus Christ did something for you*. And your *response* to what Jesus did for you is to make a commitment that is demonstrated repentance in your life – a life that is changed by the Holy Spirit within. A belief that is evident in your life and you will declare it to other people who have yet to meet Jesus. You believe what Jesus did for you – you rely on the Holy Spirit within you to live out your faith, and you tell other people what God has done for you so that they can know him too.

So let me ask you, Christian: is your life demonstrating a holy life – a life like Jesus lived that we read in the Gospels? If not, I don't know if you are saved. Are you

telling other people what Jesus has done for you, introducing them to Jesus? If not, I don't know if you are saved.

The Bible talks about people who claim to be saved and yet don't live like it and don't tell others about Jesus:

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. (Titus 1:16, niv)

Those are pretty harsh words, but that's the point of Revelation 3:20 and Romans 10:9-10.

Remember, Jesus' words in Revelation 3:20 were spoken to believers who were not living out their faith, so Jesus is correcting and rebuking them. He's coming to them as a friend, asking them to please restore their relationship with him – and when they do, it will be just like sitting down to a leisurely dinner together. Likewise, Romans 10 is to believers who need to demonstrate their faith. In other words, these are Christians who need to repent and commit to a life of restored fellowship with Jesus, the evidence of which is belief and declaration.

Am I saved, then?

Don't be mistaken, friend – these passages are not a formula for how the lost can be saved. They are a strong rebuke and a desperate plea from Jesus to restore *your* relationship with him and for you to allow his Holy Spirit to lead from your heart in such a way that your life is the evidence, and you won't stop telling people about Jesus.

Does this mean that you're not saved if you prayed a prayer by repeating after someone? No, *it means you must live up to that prayer.*

But what about you – if you are not a Christian? If these verses are written to those who are already Christians, what is the takeaway for you? The answer goes back to God the Trinity. Here's what all this means for you: God the Father created you and loves you and cannot bear to think of life without you; of you living your life without the amazing relationship you can have with him. So God the Father sent God the Son to show the kind of life you can have, and then to die on a cross for your sins, paying the penalty and debt that will get you out of condemnation. And then Jesus rose to life to keep you out of a future destiny in hell and to make this abundant life available to you now through God the Holy Spirit, who can lead your life from your heart and transform your life into the life that Jesus demonstrated. That life has been made available to you. So you must respond by repenting of your sin and committing yourself to Jesus, and then you too begin demonstrating a life of belief and declaration.

So that leaves us all in this room needing to pray one of two prayers. You are either *not* a Christian and you need to pray a prayer of response by repenting and committing, or you *are* a Christian and you need to pray a prayer of repenting and *re*-committing.

Which is it for you?

This is so important that we need to spend a few minutes in prayer, and I strongly encourage you to consider demonstrating your commitment by coming to this altar as a place to kneel and pray. We'll wait a few moments if you want to come.

Prayer

Pastor Jason benediction (Ephesians 3:14-21):

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every ethnicity is recognized by Him. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!
Amen.