

33 | Percolating on Faith | Salvation  
Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:16

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts the restoration offers for today's world. We aim to feature a variety of guests with roots in the restoration tradition from Community of Christ and our friends from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The music has been provided by Ben Howington. You can find his music at [Mormonguitar.com](http://Mormonguitar.com).

**Carla Long** 01:08

Welcome to another episode of Percolating on Faith. Today, I'm here as always with Charmaine Chvala-Smith and Tony Chvala-Smith. Hey guys!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 01:19

Hi Carla!

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 01:20

Hey!

**Carla Long** 01:21

Today we're getting... we have a very exciting topic to talk with you about. Today we will be discussing SALVATION!

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 01:30

Hallelujah!

**Carla Long** 01:31

Hallelujah! Talking about salving!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 01:33

Are you saved?

**Carla Long** 01:35

Are you saved indeed? You know, there's a lot of different ways to look at salvation, I think. Some people look at the word perhaps with a lot of fear, because it seems to be something that's out of their control. And others might look at the word as something that's very freeing, maybe even for the same reason, who knows. And we hear about salvation a lot, I think. We hear about it from sermons and definitely during funerals. And just recently, I saw them on a couple billboards and church signs. You know, just driving here today I saw a church sign that said, "How will you spend eternity, smoking or not smoking?" Yeah... Another billboard I read said something like, "Hell is real!"

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 02:25

Hmm.

**Carla Long** 02:27

And one more was “Jesus is the ONLY way to God,” and the Word “only” was underlined, and italicized and bolded. And that really shows that Jesus is the only way to God. And so this topic seems to be on a lot of people's minds. And there's also a lot of words that people seem to get mixed up and caught up in like, the word *salvation* or the word *saved*, or *atonement* or *judgment*, or... Oh, what's that book series?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith and Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:00

*Left behind.*

**Carla Long** 03:01

And there was a movie I watched one time when I was a kid that was terrifying, called “Thief in the Night,” when - I don't know if we have time to talk about that - but the one scene I remember is an airplane was all of a sudden... had no pilot, and a hairdryer was left running, sitting on the bathroom counter. People just disappeared. These are the terrifying things I remember.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:23

The Twilight Zone version of salvation.

**Carla Long**

Exactly.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 03:27

Yeah, and I think that's part of the issue is that there's so many things that get attached to the basic idea of what does salvation mean? And yeah, and those kind of spin off into their own universe of concerns and thoughts, and who is God and all of that. So yeah, we probably won't get to all of them today, though. There's a lot.

**Carla Long** 03:52

I brought up everything I knew about it. So anyway, let's talk a bit about those words. Why are there so many words that describe something that, you know, we all think about all the time, like the words I was talking about: salvation, saved, atonement, judgment. Like how are they connected? How are they not connected?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 04:14

Maybe a good place to start is with the word *salvation* itself, which, as most people probably know, it has a Latin root. In Latin, the word *salvus* means wholeness, or health, or well-being. And so that's... that would have originally been part of the English meaning of the word. But now what's happened to the word is lots of very specific meanings have been imported to it from some very specific Christian traditions. So, I mean, it's an important concept. Jesus' name, as Matthew's Gospel tells us, means salvation. And the words salvation or save or savior appear quite a bit in the New Testament. So I mean, for starters God's concerned with our well-being and that's a pretty good thing.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 05:04

What does it mean in Old Testament/New Testament, just real briefly?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 05:08

Well so like the word *salvation* and *save* in the Hebrew Bible appears a lot. Yaweh is the savior, the deliverer, and in Hebrew the word *yasa'* or *yasha'* has to do with deliverance from something that is oppressing you. So in most of the Hebrew Bible, it can be pretty this-worldly, that is, you know, to be delivered from a famine, to be delivered from enemies, to be delivered from death, to be delivered from

**Carla Long** 05:42

...from slavery ...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 05:43

...from slavery, right. For example, the exodus is the premier example of salvation in the Hebrew Bible. That was a political, social, religious act. So the words got lots of different meanings there in the New Testament. The Greek word *soteria* means deliverance, and so when the disciples are in a boat with Jesus and the boat is going down, they say "Save us Lord, we are perishing," and they mean "get us out of here, this is nasty," right? It doesn't... they're not talking there about, you know, save our souls, right? It's deliver us from this storm, from this bad circumstance. But I think it's also important to know that in the New Testament the terms *soter*, which is the word for savior, and *soteria*, salvation, are really, really political words, because the Roman Empire uses these as part of its imperial propaganda. The emperor was the savior, and what the Roman Empire brought to people was salvation or deliverance. Deliverance from their ignorance of their not being ruled by the Romans, mostly.

**Carla Long** 06:57

Of course!

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 06:58

So when Jesus is called Savior in the New Testament, it's a very politically loaded term that basically they're saying he's the deliverer, not the emperor. And when Jesus brings salvation, it's not imperial well-being, it's a whole different kind of well-being. So those are a little... some background to the terms.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:16

And I think the other... another part that's really helpful, and Tony can probably be more specific here than I will be, but the whole idea of being saved as a one-time thing or as something that comes in a more Pentecostal kind of way is really not a very old idea. This is something that emerged kind of on the western frontier in the whole, you know, with all of those tent meetings and this second great...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 07:56

... second great awakening...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:57

...second great awakening (thanks Tony), where, you know, there's all of this preaching about "You could die tomorrow. Will you be right with God? This is your chance tonight to make this commitment." And as I said this is only a couple of centuries old. Before that, and within Christianity, the idea of salvation was very, very different from that "Are you saved? Have you had that one experience, or have you said the right words to be okay with Jesus?" And part of the reason that is really important is because this is the time period in which Joseph Smith would have been growing up and would have been influenced very much by that. And so, you know, our tradition as a whole tradition, we were very much influenced by that, but also reactive to that. The idea that it's a one-time thing was rejected in many ways and in more of the impetus was put on living out a different kind of life, you know, that actually within our tradition the idea that salvation is an ongoing process. Though I think for RLDS for a long time that ongoing process was about getting to a particular glory, rather than living Jesus in the present, which is more about where we are now. But that's kind of a short overview. But I, you know, I think that the idea of "Are you saved?" is really probably only in the last 50 years that that has been... in the US anyhow and in Canada, that's become a predominant view for those outside of Christianity to assume that that's what Christians mean by salvation. Before that time there were many different ways of understanding what salvation meant, but that's become the predominant way of understanding it. Well sometimes within Christianity, but definitely for those who are looking at Christians as a whole, because that's become the louder voice and the most recognizable one about salvation. I said I wasn't gonna say much and I was gonna have you share, Tony, and put this in kind of a context.

**Carla Long** 10:07

Well, that was a really helpful starter for some of these words that we hear all the time. I don't know, if you want to discuss some of the other words that I was mentioning like atonement? I don't..., I mean maybe we need to discuss that or judgment or something like that, where, like, where do those fit in? And what do they... what would they mean?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:26

So, I mean, I think it's important to piggyback off what Charmaine was just saying, and recognize that, certainly in western Anglo-religious culture, because of the influence of that revivalism, these words have been put together into a particular relationship. Salvation is based on believing certain things about Jesus, namely, that he died in your place. That's a particular view of a particular interpretation of the meaning of his death. And that when you believe that you then have an experience called "being born again," and in some traditions, you have to be able to trace that to a particular day or moment in time, that is a particular way of interpreting some parts of the New Testament. That is fairly recent. So what if we take these words and separate them from that tradition and put them back in the New Testament context and try to take a look at them? That's how I would approach that question, I think.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 11:28

So, Tony, why don't you go ahead and take the word atonement? And then I'll do just a little bit on judgment.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 11:34

Sure. So first of all, the English word atonement is an old word that was created by putting together three words, at-one-meant. It's an act or an event that makes us 'at one' in some way with God. So in the New Testament, words that were translated with atone or atoning sacrifice or atonement, for example the word *hilasmós*, which is in 1. John 2, hark back to the Old Testament. And they hark back to the idea of a sin offering. So basically, in the New Testament, the authors were trying to find whatever metaphors or images they could find from the Hebrew Bible to interpret the meaning of the death of the Messiah. And that's kind of how atonement theologies begin. They never see Jesus' death as somehow separable from who he was, or what he did and taught. That's really important, because sometimes, in some kinds of Christian theology, it's as if they want to take the cross and separate it from the whole experience of Jesus, of the incarnation, of Jesus' birth, of his life, of his teaching, of his passion or suffering, and of his resurrection. As if somehow that's the separable piece, and that's... only that thing is what makes us right with God. But New Testament authors don't typically see it that way. So atonement is a word that refers the New Testament to the salvific meaning of Jesus' death, that somehow his death creates a new arrangement, a new circumstance, a new relationship between human beings and God. That is symbolized in the gospels by the rending of the temple curtain at the moment of his death. It's a powerful symbol of how Jesus now has, through his life, and his death, has created kind of open access to God. I think that's really important. Atonement has to do with open, free access to God, and with a whole new way of relating to God. So I think that's pretty interesting. The New Testament authors have different ways of interpreting the meaning of Jesus' death. For example, in John's gospel, Jesus' death is his 'lifting up'. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all people unto myself." And the word in Greek for lifting up is... it's a double entendre. It means, you know, physically being lifted up on a Roman cross, but also it means to exalt. So Jesus' death is his exaltation, which again, is very political, because you know, the Roman Emperor is exalted by the people after he stomped on the enemies of the state. Jesus is lifted up. He is exalted by suffering for others in self-giving love. So it's a quite anti-imperial way of looking at Jesus death.

**Carla Long** 14:35

And what Gospel was that in?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 11:37

That's John's Gospel. Luke, on the other hand, sees Jesus' death not so much in terms of it producing salvation, as it being a model of faithfulness to the end, that disciples are to follow. Jesus' death is the example of the perfect righteous martyr. And if you want to see that all you have to do is compare Luke's version of Jesus' final moments with Matthew and Mark, where Jesus dies in Luke's Gospel saying "Into your hands I commend my Spirit," rather than as in Mark and Matthew where Jesus dies with the sense of abandonment. So each New Testament book has its own way of construing the meaning of Jesus' death. Atonement is a concept in theology, which ought to have multiple meanings and multiple images, and not just one meaning.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 15:30

Paul approaches it even differently again.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 15:32

Yeah, I mean, Paul even in one letter, like Romans, can use multiple images and metaphors for the meaning of Jesus' death. He can use the sin offering metaphor, he can use the imitation metaphor in Philippians. Jesus's death is his self-emptying. It's Philippians 2. Jesus empties himself. And this...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 15:55

Of his power...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 15:56

Right, yeah, absolutely. And then this becomes the way that the Christian community should live, we should live in self-emptying love for each other, and for others. So, yeah.

**Carla Long** 16:06

So maybe that's one reason why there's so many different words to discuss this one thing all about salvation, because there's so many different ways of looking at it, even with the biblical writers.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 16:16

Right. And I think one of the things that they all keep pointing back to is that Jesus is that sign of salvation, a very intentional act on God's part, to help us know that there is a path to be good with God. And so I think the idea that there are many ways of understanding and interpreting that is really consistent with who we see God as. As one who is constantly trying to open doors for us to be in relationship with God, to know who we are before God, to know that we are loved and accepted, which all of that is a very long definition. But it's a good definition of grace.

**Carla Long** 17:02

Oh, we definitely want to talk about grace at some point, but I think you are going to define for us or are talking a little bit about judgement first.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 17:08

Yeah, again, that's another word that I think probably because of people's inherent fear of punishment, or of not getting it right, or of death, and it's been through all kinds of Christian literature through the centuries, that there's a lot of fear with the idea of judgment. And it's a very negative thing. It's related to punishment in the, you know... There was a church billboard that as we were thinking about this, we've been trying to pay attention to church billboards. And one of them said, using a part of scripture, "The wages of sin is death." And then it had been added on, "Do you really want what you've earned?" Something like that.

**Carla Long** 17:54

Oh that does sound scary!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 17:55

It does, it does! So, the idea of wages and earning. And so that permeates a lot of Christian ideas of judgment. But even in the Old Testament, the idea of God's judgment is not so much about some, you know, eternal punishment, it's really much more about God, helping us see ourselves as we really are.

So for instance, a really easy one to think about is King David, after he's ordered Bathsheba to come and be with him. And however you want to.... all the things that that might mean. Um, the prophet Nathan comes to him and basically says, "God has revealed to me what you have done." And David in being known, or that being uncovered, revealed, then can acknowledge and repent for what he has done and try to become right with God again. But basically, there God was not judging. God was not saying, you know, "You're damned," or whatever. But basically, God is saying, "Let me help you see yourself as you really are." And so judgment is about that! And which of us does not need help seeing ourselves as we really are? And I think some people would still hear in that the possibility of criticalness or judgment. But I think the thing that has come into Christian view of judgment is that God has also given us Christ. So when we think about seeing ourselves as we really are, yes, we get to see those places in ourselves that need growth, that need changing, that need discipline, so that we don't get so angry so easily or self-righteous or greedy or whatever. But the other side of it is, if God is seeing us as we really are, God is also helping us see our ourselves as God sees us, as known and loved and accepted. And so that part of judgment is not only seeing ourselves, honestly, with all the different sides of ourselves, but also seeing ourselves as God sees us. And that you can see throughout the New Testament and Old Testament. You know, Paul is always in awe of how God sees him, and he, in all of his righteousness, he says, counts as nothing. All those things I did so I would be seen well by people around me, those don't matter, that's garbage. What matters is how I'm known by God, and who I am in Christ. So Paul understands, I mean, Paul's a really good example of this judgment. He sees himself as he truly is. He sees himself as broken. He sees himself as weak in here. He's struggling with that all the time. And yet, he also knows that as he's seen by God is what really matters. And what he's called to by God, even if he makes a fool of himself, even if he's beaten, even if he's rejected, who he is, is strongly rooted.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 21:12**

So in the Bible, both testaments' judgment is actually meant to set us free.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:17**

Right! Right, so that we don't have to live under these illusions that we or others place on us. We can be ourselves. And, oh, we spend so much time hiding stuff from ourselves and from other people, setting up this image of who we want to be known as. And when we get embarrassed by something, because we..., people don't see us like we wanted to orchestrate it. But they would see us, you know, we're all embarrassed and feel shame and all those kinds of things, you know, so we're freed from that when we accept what God may be telling us about who we really are.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 21:51**

I like that this is analogy we sometimes use. It's like God's judgment is a loving act, in the same way that if I'm going to be speaking in front of people, and I have spinach between my teeth, a very loving thing for Charmaine to do would be to say, "Um, you got spinach between your teeth. And you're gonna embarrass yourself if you don't take care of that." And you know, if I react to that it's because I don't want to know, because I have some illusion about myself. But I really do need to know! Carla, do I have something between my teeth, by the way?

22:21

Well, just a little bit. But I wanted to tell you earlier about it, but you just continued to talk.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 22:27

This is from a couple days ago, it'll be okay.

**Carla Long** 22:28

I've actually stopped seeing it.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 22:34

That's the nice thing about podcasts. There's no visuals.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 22:38

Thank you for adding that in. Because that is one of my favorite things to... as an illustration about what judgment can mean, in its most positive way.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 22:48

You know, that's that story in John's Gospel about the woman taken in adultery. It's a perfect example, in the sense that the crowd that gathers around her, they're interpreting judgment as their right and ability to condemn and harm her because she isn't living by the rules. Jesus, on the other hand, calls them all out by asking them to think about whether they've committed sin. And then by speaking lovingly to her and saying, "Where are your accusers?"

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 23:17

Another excellent example in John is the woman at the well, who has had five husbands and is living with somebody who isn't her husband. He knows that, and he doesn't reject her at all. In fact, he says, "If you asked, I would give you the water that is the spring eternal." So yeah, if once we..., when we start taking these terms back in into scripture, it's like, oh, well, there it is. There is judgment, and it's not scary at all. It's an amazing gift.

**Carla Long** 23:47

It actually is. It sounds like what judgment is, is asking us to take a spotlight and not look out at other people and judge them. But take a spotlight and turn it inward, and look at ourselves more closely about what are those things that really drive us crazy about ourselves? And perhaps why or what we can do.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 24:09

And it's a loving spotlight!

**Carla Long** 24:11

It's a very loving, a gentle, 60 watts. 40 watts maybe. Well, it kind of sounds like that we're moving into this discussion about grace a little bit.



**Tony Chvala-Smith** 24:20

Yes.

**Carla Long** 24:21

So what is it about grace? You know, where does grace fit into this discussion about salvation and being saved?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 24:27

So, let's start with the Greek word for grace in the New Testament, which is *charis*. And it's connected to the word *charisma*, which means gift. So the word grace and the word gift are etymologically connected. So the first thing to know about grace is that it refers to God's gifting nature. God gives us stuff. God is gracious to us. God embraces and accepts us in spite of ourselves. That's grace. This is demonstrated, shown, embodied in Christ. I mean, Christ is God's grace in person. And so when we say that..., in Community of Christ theology when we say that we're saved by grace, we mean generally what the Christian tradition has typically meant. I mean that our well-being with God, whatever our role is in that, it's always first a gift, it always starts with God. And it's not because we've somehow done all the right things on a list, or that we've grown up with the right people versus the wrong people. And it has nothing to do with what country we're from, has nothing to do with gender or right ideas. It's God's disposition towards human beings is gracious. God gifts us and yearns for us to be in right relationship with God and each other and self. That's grace as I see it. Charmaine, how do you see grace?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 26:08

I think for me, most simply, it is God's knowing and accepting nature of us. And always reaching out to us even knowing all those sorted things about us. All those hidden things, or all of those things that bring us embarrassment, or shame or whatever. God knows all that, and yet keeps holding out God's hand and inviting us to know our real worth. But for me, that's what grace is, is knowing us and calling us into that relationship.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 26:42

I like that image. God is always reaching out to us. Before we even knew to reach back, God was reaching out to us. That's grace.

**Carla Long** 26:50

I don't know if you see this the way I see it, but you have actually reminded me of a story of when I was teaching high school math a couple... ehm, maybe many years ago, and I had a student and his name was Chris, and I loved him, he was a wonderful student. He would always get his work done really quickly. And he would be very willing to help other students in my class. And I was always willing to have him do that. And so I was gone one day, and I came back and the substitute teacher had written that Chris was the worst student she had ever had, that he was acting out, that he swore at her, that he was acting in a very bad way. And I was shocked, because I had never seen him act that way before. And so I went around to his other teachers to ask what he was like in their classes. And I got the same story as the substitute teacher. He acted out, he was one of their worst students. And he was just horrible. And so I was so shocked. So the next day when he was back in my class, and I was there, I

pulled him aside, and I said, Chris, I don't understand why you were like this, why I got this report about you. And when I don't see you that way at all. And he said, "You know what, Miss Long, you see me as I really am, nobody else can see that." And so that reminded me of what you guys were saying. I'm not putting myself in God's place at all. But that story to me symbolizes that God really sees the best in us and wants what's best for us.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 28:24

And frees us to be that self we know we want to be. Yeah, oh that's an amazing story.

**Carla Long** 28:32

Oh, he was a great kid. I loved him so much. The other teachers did not. But I sure did!

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 28:37

I think it's important to say that in past Community of Christ or RLDS theology, grace was sometimes treated as a negative word. We used to want to try and prove we weren't like protestants, we used to actually even preach against the idea of being saved by grace. We've changed over the last 50 years as a church. Grace has gotten a hold of us. And we've changed.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 29:00

Yes. And I think partly it's because we, whenever we heard the word grace, we assumed there was the word cheap in front of it. So we had a misunderstanding of other denominations. A caricature that when they said 'grace,' they meant, "Well, we've said the right words," or, "And that's all we have to have in order to be right with God." And so we would say, well that's cheap grace, because you don't plan on living it out. You just want the easy way to heaven or something like that. And so for... that was part of our understanding of other denominations. But grace actually has... the concept, maybe not always the word, is really woven into our own history and our own unique scriptures. The concept is there, but the term was avoided because we might then look like other protestant denominations.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 29:57

The problem with avoiding grace is that then you turn the relationship with God into a transaction in which you're constantly being graded and in which you constantly have to somehow live up, otherwise you're not acceptable. And that completely distorts what the relationship with God is intended to be. It's not supposed to be for a grade. It's a relationship based on God's love which is acting for us before we can even imagine what it is. And so we watch people over the years who are devoted ministers burn out. Sometimes they burn out because they're..., even though they might say the word grace, grace, grace, grace, deep inside they really are trying to prove themselves to God still and so they do too much, when in fact God says "You don't have to do anything for me, you are mine, I have claimed you already. So live like you've been claimed, but don't think that somehow I'm going to love you more if you get an A on the test."

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 31:01

And that's had a really big effect on us as a church theologically, because when we didn't want to make much room for grace, though the ideas were there in our story and in our scriptures, we very much in some of the early parts of RLDS history were about earning our way. Earning our way to celestial glory,

earning our way to esteem within the body, you know, especially for priesthood members. You had to look a certain way and even if you were struggling, you had to look a certain way because that's what being a priesthood member meant, you know. And which led to a lot of inner dishonesty about personal struggles and issues. But so the 'earning our way' then, whatever happened in the afterlife, because there was a lot of focus on the afterlife, was what we had done to get there. So there really wasn't much need for God, you know. We were kind of paying our own way by working on earning.

**Carla Long** 32:07

And making sure those boxes were checked off, right?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 32:08

And everything... Right! And it is! It's still about that idea of the negative idea of judgment. We're trying to avoid the negative, and we want to get an A, you know? We want to get the top glory. So then it's fear as the motivator. Fear... What we might not get or what we might get then on the negative side becomes why we do things, whereas grace is responding because we've already been loved. Just like your Chris, you know? He wasn't loving you back, he wasn't acting well in class and being helpful because he was afraid. It's because something had been freed and released in him that he loved being known that way, and so he wanted to respond. It's the same way with grace understood well, is that when we let the awareness of God's love be real in us, then what can we do but love others better, love God's creation, and love God back, and that leads for a whole different path than checking off all the boxes.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 33:19

Yeah it's really, really important not to turn the relationship with God, both individually and communally, into a kind of capitalist marketplace of achievement, you know, where somehow those who do more get more. That's a real distortion. I think that if we look at the breadth of the biblical tradition and the breadth of our tradition, we see that God is gracious, not just towards human beings, but towards the whole creation. That there is anything at all is an act of grace, and therefore salvation is not just about individuals, it's about community, it's even about the cosmos, it's about all things being drawn more fully into God's life. And so that's something I like about our tradition today is this reference to quote "All the dimensions of salvation." And in our most recent section, I have to look at it here, "Let nothing separate you from this mission, it reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation. A fullness of Gospel witness for creation's restoration."

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 34:24

This is section 165.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 34:26

This is 165 that we just added to our *Doctrine and Covenants* at our recent World Conference.

**Carla Long** 34:30

Well since we're already kind of here in this place, I think that we should talk a little bit about exactly what Community of Christ believes about salvation or what we think. Is it communal salvation, or is it

personal salvation. And does it bring in our enduring principle of sacredness of creation? Tony, like what you were talking about a little bit. So what are some points from Community of Christ salvation?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:53**

Well I guess salvation is really a hard thing to talk about in Community of Christ, because again there's so many different ways of understanding what it means and can mean, because primarily, salvation is about the quality of our life right now. Building that relationship with God, with others, with creation. That we can live a different quality of life now and into the future, whatever that can mean. And so it is individual but it's also about how do we live together? How do we live as community? How do we live in responsiveness to our relationship to the creation? How do we live in relationship to Christ, to the Spirit? So salvation is both intimate and macro, the bigger picture. And so we can talk about me and Jesus. When people are talking about "my personal relationship with Jesus," and the sense of rightness that brings a sense of purpose. That brings.., so there's room for that. And that's a really great place to begin, if that's where your experience starts. But in our whole idea of Zion, in the peaceable kingdom, the kingdom of God on earth, there's this sense that what God's desire is, is not just for individual souls. But that God's desire is that there might be harmony and peace, and a place for God's kind of love, here, now. And that there'll be places where that seed can be nourished and watered, and given sunlight so that it can affect more people, not just those who have the right information, or in the right church. But that God's desire is for all creation, to know God and to respond back. And then, so that idea of salvation can be individual, but also communal.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 36:58**

So it's kind of a both/and.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:00**

It has to be! I mean I think for us, it has to be.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 37:05**

So I mean, I think that captures it really well. Sometimes in Community of Christ, we're afraid to use salvation/salvation language, because in lots of ways in our..., certainly in American religious culture, 'saved' and 'salvation' has been..., the words have been hijacked by types of views, which really, to look closely at them, have very much narrowed down the meaning of salvation to just saving your soul or saving your carcass or something, you know?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:35**

Fire insurance!

**Tony Chvala-Smith 37:36**

Yeah, fire insurance. When in fact, salvation, the full breadth of the meaning of the term in the New Testament is individual, it's corporate, and it's cosmic. It's a much bigger concept than that. So for example, I love the story of Zacchaeus where, you know, where it says in Luke 19, where Jesus is coming to town. Zacchaeus, who is of small stature, I might add. Why am I adding that, Carla?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 38:00

Tony, how tall are you?

**Carla Long** 38:04

Tony, I wouldn't say that but if you want me to sing the song, I can sing the song.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 38:09

No, don't sing the song! But he climbs the tree and as Jesus passes by, Jesus looks up and says "Zacchaeus, I'm going to eat with you today." Zacchaeus is a tax collector; he's defrauded his own people. And Zacchaeus, before much else is said, says "I'm going to give back even more than I have to." And Jesus says, "Salvation has come to this house today." And Jesus doesn't mean in the text, "Great Zacchaeus, if you die today, you're going to heaven." It means that Zacchaeus has embraced a whole new way of life, in which the self is no longer the center, but the well-being of others, in imitation of Jesus, is the way of life. So that's individual salvation. But the thief on the cross in Luke's Gospel, later on Luke's Gospel, who's like..., at the last minute says, "Holy cow, I really screwed up." And Jesus says, "You will be with me in paradise." That's salvation! But then, you know what? There's Romans 8, where the whole creation is groaning and waiting for deliverance. So in our theology, the term 'Kingdom of God' embraces all of this, it seems to me. It embraces the Zacchaeus, or the thief on the cross, and it embraces the screaming out in pain of the creation.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 39:16

And I think something that is really helpful, and it's difficult for people to hear this, but that in the New Testament, and particularly in the gospels, Jesus talks very, very little about heaven, or hell. And yet, in some forms of Christianity, that's become the whole story about what happens after you die. And if you take that into your reading of the gospels, you begin to see that what Jesus is talking about when he is talking about the Kingdom of God, and here it's important to know that in Matthew, where it uses the word Kingdom of Heaven, it's talking about the same thing. Kingdom of God here on earth. It is that it's about right here on earth what Jesus initiates in his presence, in his ministry, and in his death, is God's reign here on earth, and there's very little there about heaven or hell. And yet, you know, we've got that all out of proportion, and so even in the gospels, salvation is primarily about the here and now, and about what God wants to release free in the world, so that the world can be in relationship with God in deeper ways.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 40:30

I'm glad you mentioned that, Charmaine. It's so interesting. To show you how deeply ingrained the default setting is in people's minds about what salvation is and so on, when Charmaine and I are teaching New Testament classes, we can go over 50 times with students: Kingdom of God, Reign of God, or Reign of Heaven in Matthew's gospel. This is God's power, active and present now, here and now in Jesus' life and ministry. And if you ask them on a quiz to define the term Kingdom of God, the simple answer they'll always give will be "It's going to heaven." Even after many times of going through this. That's because the default setting has so overtaken what the Bible actually says. It's quite amazing. But I think in our community, Community of Christ, we have some very powerful and transformative things to say. Society needs transformation, we need personal, individual, and relational

transformation, and the cosmos yearns for transformation. It's a whole great big breathtaking vision we're part of.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:34**

And it's what undergirds our understanding of peace and justice. I mean, that's why peace and justice has become so much a focus is because it's about this place and the systems in place here, and our misuse of natural resources now, and our marginalizing of people now, that is obscuring what the Kingdom of God can be, rather than this preoccupation with what comes next. But that God wants to and is doing something here now. That we can be a part of if we tune into it.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 42:10**

You mentioned a little bit ago that idea of cheap grace. That comes from the great German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. And you know, Bonhoeffer was thinking about grace as a Lutheran, but in a context of the emergence and rapid growth of Nazism in Germany. And he was really concerned about people who claimed to be Christian, claimed to be quote 'justified' in a right relationship with God. Essentially saying, "That's good enough. I've got the right answer, I'm good enough," but then standing by when Jews, gypsies, homosexuals were carted off and taken. That didn't work for Bonhoeffer. That was not what grace was about. If grace is God's unfathomable love for us, all of us, then you can't just stand idly by and say "I'm good, I've got the ticket." That would not be to have really grasp what grace is.

**Carla Long 43:10**

So it seems like it's more about, as we said before, that whole idea of peace and justice, and how important it is to see, to really see other people, and to understand what it's like to live in a community. To understand your own flaws and be okay with it. You know, I have to think about what it's like in Community of Christ tradition to go to a family camp or reunion, you know, to live with other families. And I've always heard that the Thursday of church camp, so after you've been there for five or six days, is the most real day of camp, because I'm just gonna borrow an MTV real world phrase, it's when people stop being polite and start being real. And so living with that real part of who you are, and with the family next door living with the real part of who they are, and seeing that people are people. And we have to love them anyway and care about them anyway, even though they're flawed, as we are flawed.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:11**

Absolutely! And that's part of where humility, whether chosen or forced upon us, comes in and is its own gift from God. Where we..., maybe it's judgment, too, from our earlier discussion. Where we are finally on that Thursday of reunion, forced, invited to be honest about our foibles and frailties. And to recognize that we will still be accepted with those, and we don't have to try so hard to pretend to everyone else that we are this stellar person in all parts of our lives, or without weakness. And that's..., it's amazingly free and it takes away the armor and lets us be loved by others, lets us be helped by others, lets us, in our brokenness, help others. And that's an amazing thing to see, because then we're not having to pretend, spend all that time on our wonderful mask that we want others to see, and instead, like Paul say, "In my weakness is God's strength, known in Christ, I'm already known and I'm willing to trust that others can love me too, and that others will let me serve them too."

**Carla Long** 45:36

So it's that personal salvation that you're just discussing, as well as that community salvation, kind of... It's really difficult to let someone that you've really seen and lived with, and who is made real to you, go through an injustice. It's hard not to stand for that, and walk with them through that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 45:55

Absolutely, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 45:56

Yeah, I mean that's..., that really hit home, if I can tell a little testimony here. When in a Bible study group that we had been part of, that one of the members of the group was incarcerated and in a maximum-security facility. And it's like... Previous to this it's like, oh well the bad people are in jail and we can forget about them because now we're safe from them, and they're, you know, where they should be. And suddenly, as we go to visit this friend, it's like everything changes. And it's like we know this person, we love this person, we know other parts of them besides this thing that they did, and which they eventually admitted to. And as we would take communion there and serve our friend in that setting, you know, it's... we became so much more open to the fact that we were just like anybody in that visitor's room, you know? People who were there for life, people who had done terrible crimes, that there wasn't that much difference between us. And of God's desire for each one of us to know that we can be forgiven, and loved.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 47:13

Interestingly, in one of those visits, on our way out, one of the prison guards who was there in the visiting room came up to me and said, "Pastor, would you pray for me? I'm going through a divorce, and there's the whole child custody thing, and things are just really bad right now." So absolutely, and I..., and when we got out to the car after getting back through security and all that, before we drove home we just said a prayer for him. I mean, so you have the inmates who need prayer, and the security guards who need prayer, and Charmaine and I who need prayer, right?

**Carla Long** 47:45

Definitely!

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 47:46

Yeah, absolutely!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 45:47

Absolutely!

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 47:48

It's like, there was this great equalizing sense of all of us being needy before God, but also unfathomably loved by God. It was kind of a cool experience over those years we did that.

**Carla Long** 48:02

And going back to..., gosh I'm going back to an earlier discussion again, it seems like maybe even like the prisoners in some ways have had that spotlight on themselves. So they actually recognize even more fully the needs and where they are flawed, and more so maybe than people who live outside of prison. I don't know!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 48:22

Absolutely! They don't have the luxury of pretending. And whether it was the justice system, or their own having to come to peace by acknowledging to themselves that, you know, what they've done or what's broken inside of them. Yeah, they're sometimes in a better place than those of us who think we're good because we're on the outside. It's..., it was a really, really good experience for us to begin to think about that, and that whole idea of judgment again. Again, how people who are on the outside want to judge those who are on the inside to make those of us on the outside feel better about ourselves. And in fact, we may be fooling ourselves more.

**Carla Long** 49:11

But we're so good at it!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 49:13

Well we've learned how to do..., we learned that to survive sometimes, don't we?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 49:16

I'm a student of the sayings of the desert mothers and fathers from the fourth, fifth, and sixth century. And there's this great saying, a great little story of the desert fathers, where one of the abbots (the abbots are the spiritual masters in the communities) had been summoned to come and meet with a group of monks. And when he gets there, he finds out the reason for the meeting is the monks have gathered to expel somebody from the community for committing a sin. And the abbot gets up and starts to walk out, and the monks are like: "Abbot, where are you going?" And the abbot says: "Oh, I too am a sinner!" I love that story.

**Carla Long** 49:56

I might as well go too!

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 49:58

So then the story goes on that the monks realized, "Oh, Jeez, of course," and they forgave the monk and let him stay in the community.

**Carla Long** 50:06

Awesome.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 50:05

Love that story!



**Carla Long** 50:06

Awesome! Well, we've almost reached the end of our time together. Is there anything else that you can think about, you know, that you want to say about in regards to salvation or the Community of Christ tradition of salvation, or all those other words we've been discussing this time?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 50:21

Well, I think one thing that might be helpful is that throughout our long tradition, and it's a tradition that preceded ours, in other Christian denominations as well, salvation is often seen as an ongoing process. Not a once for all, you know, get your passport, they haven't stamped kind of thing, but that salvation - because it isn't just about what happens in the afterlife, but because it's what happens daily - that we're invited into this right relationship with God daily. That salvation is an ongoing process, that coming right with ourselves, and with God and with each other is something that we get to do each day and ask for God's help in every single day. That there isn't a cutoff point where you're done. You know, it's a relationship with God. And God keeps giving us the life and the strength and the courage to keep going deeper into that relationship. So I think that's really kind of an important thing, because it's there in scriptures, our unique scriptures as well as the Old and New Testament. But it also makes this..., just like any relationship that matters to us, a possibility for going higher and broader and deeper with God. And that's where things like spiritual practices come in, and where particular disciplines come in, or where reconciliation skills come in, or learning to listen better comes in. That all of these things then make our lives richer, and make our relationships richer, give us more glimpses of the kingdom in our everyday life. And that's, I think, more true to our tradition's view of what salvation is. And that what we experience here as God's invitation to us to keep going deeper and richer, it's not just for..., it is now and this is where we begin, and this is where we go with it, but the same God that we know as gracious and loving, and calling here is the God who is on the other side of death, the one who calls and evolves and invites, and so that whatever is on the other side is a continuation of what we've already glimpsed here.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 52:39

Yeah, I second that. One of the great ancient Greek theologians, St. Gregory, I forget whether it's Gregory of Nyssa or Gregory of Nazianzus, but they refer to salvation as a voyage or journey into infinity, into the infinity of God. And, you know, if you walk into our Temple in Independence and look up at that spiral, that spiral so embodies that journey in which you go onward, and onward and onward, more deeply, more deeply, more deeply into the infinite life of God. And the cool thing about it is that we are loved every step of the way, we are even loved *into* the way. And whether we backtrack, whether we fall off, whether we make mistakes, whether we turn around and go backwards for a while, we're loved every step of the way.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 53:39

And the invitation is still there.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 53:41

It never ceases. And so that is to me truly the blessing of life, to recognize that that's what God invites us into.

**Carla Long** 53:51

Well, that sounds like a wonderful place to close our conversation. That's wonderful. Thank you so much for being with us and for sharing your thoughts and your testimony, Charmaine, and so many other ideas. And if you have any questions, please feel free to visit the website at ProjectZionPodcast.org. And if you have anything you want to say to Tony and Charmaine or me, we'd love to hear from you.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 54:15

Oh, yeah, there's that article I sent to Carla called "Jesus Saves - Finding Salvation in a Violent Age," an article I wrote a long time ago, some of which might still be helpful to this conversation. But in some ways, it was an attempt to express - about a decade ago - to express some of these concepts of salvation from a Community of Christ perspective.

**Carla Long** 54:37

That's right. That was in our Community of Christ international magazine called *The Herald*. It's the January 2005 issue. And again, it's called "Jesus Saves - Finding Salvation in a Violent Age," by Tony Chvala-Smith. So if you want to look that up, or if we can maybe try and post it on the website, you can have a read on your own. Thank you, Tony. Thank you, Charmaine.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 54:58

You are so welcome. Thank you, Carla.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 54:59

Thank you, Carla.

**Josh Mangelson** 55:29

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