

Dear members and friends of St. John,

I don't remember what grade I was in when I was taught about good newspaper reporting – how to cover a story so that there are no missing pieces, so no one would be left in the dark (I think it was the fifth grade, but that's another story). I do remember the content of my instruction. We were taught to look at the **"who, what, when, where, why and how"** of a story. If you covered all of these "w's" (and an "h"), you'd provided your reader with the complete story.

So how would a good cub-reporter cover the **story of salvation?**

Starting with the **"who"** of salvation, you'd describe the principle players in this story. That, of course, would be a loving God, the Creator of heavens and the earth. God is described in the Bible as three persons: Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. Not three gods – only one God. Of course, we need a person who needs saving: that's **you**. The story also includes an adversary, called Satan. So far, so good.

Next, we need to cover the **"what"** of salvation. What needs saving? The world might interject here, and say, "nobody". But that's denying the first and foremost character in the story: God. God gives us an account of His creation (called the Bible), including the human body and a human soul. Now, we're told by God that the soul lives on after death. So the "what" of salvation is **your soul**. We've said that 'death' will come, so we understand that the body will wear out. So the "what" of salvation includes **your human frame**. Since we can't buy train or airplane tickets to heaven, the "what" includes **the gift of new life**. Let's move on.

Next, we need to cover the **"when and where"** of salvation, and this adds a little complexity to the story line. The "when and where" takes place in the **past**, the **present**, and the **future**. Let's start with the **past or historic** "when and where" of salvation. Outside the city limits of Jerusalem, Jesus Christ dies on the cross, on a Friday called 'good'. And He rises on Easter – to overcome the power of sin, death and Satan in our lives. We were baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, and so we were given the gift of new life (we didn't deserve this gift, nor did we earn it). This is all past-tense stuff.

The **present tense** of the **"when and where"** of salvation is our imputed righteousness – our declared goodness today. This salvation follows us wherever we go. It's like a covering that protects our coming and going. That gift that I just mentioned is that we live in a state of grace, fully reconciled to our creator God who is in heaven. The **future tense of the "when and where"**, is the great and triumphant return of God. We will go to live with Him forever on the new earth that He will create. Still with me? Good.

Now, let's cover the **"why."** Why do we need this salvation? With that, we need to go back to the creation of man, by the Creator God. God created man to live forever. God gave man a set of rules to follow, promising to provide man with everything he needs for life – He even put him in a garden full of the best food on earth. All of this was God's gift to man. Man immediately turns from God, and

tries to go it alone, without God. God, a stickler for rules, confronted man about not keeping His rule (this rule-breaking is called 'sin'). Found guilty of sinning, man is kicked-out of the garden, and has to work hard to survive. Even so, every human life would come to an end, because sin leads to death, and the condition of man is 'sin'. Man, from that moment on, would die.

The **"why"** is really quite simple: We inherited sin from the original man and woman, and we cannot, on our own, stop sinning. God is perfect, and can't abide with sin. We need to be declared "not guilty", so that upon death our soul can go to heaven to be with God. Without this "not guilty" verdict, our soul will go to hell to be with our adversary, Satan. Hell is bad. Really bad. We need to be saved from hell. We need salvation.

That's how we get to the final part of the story: the **"how."** The "how" is profoundly simple and profoundly mysterious. Let's start with the simple. **God speaks His word of life over you, and you believe in Jesus.** Over time, you learn about and trust in the "who, what, when, where and why" of salvation. God promises that if you believe – you are saved. He has given His Son, Jesus, to die with your sins on the cross. He takes on your punishment – you go free – declared, "not guilty." That's the profoundly simple truth about salvation. Now for the mysterious.

There is nothing more mysterious in God's Holy Kingdom than the working of salvation among men. I use the word "mysterious" since **human reason** is at a loss to define *how* it works. We know the mechanics of salvation: God comes through His word to deliver saving faith (see Romans 10:17). Faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in His payment for our sins on the cross. This faith assures us of the forgiveness of sins (all of our sins). And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life eternal in heaven. That's the "how" – profoundly simple and mysterious.

That's the story. But it's not over. Remember, you are part of the "who" of this story, and you have a future ("when and where"). God continues to use His word and the gift of His body and blood to sustain you in this saving faith. You need Him – as desperately today and tomorrow, as you did in the past when you were brought into this story. We rely on our Creator God to keep the story alive in us. We believe – and the story lives on. Thanks be to God!

Pastor Travis