

*Salvation is More Complicated Than You Think:
A Study on the Teachings of Jesus*

Alan P. Stanley

London: Paternoster, 2007, 211 pp., £8.99, pb, ISBN
978-1934068021

SUMMARY

Alan P. Stanley has written a challenging book, with a number of obvious pastoral concerns as its starting point. Almost all of these concerns have their origin in what could be termed as the destructive influence of an 'easy-going' Christianity, a trend that makes use of formulas such as 'once saved – always saved' and 'God wants us to be healthy and rich'. In response to such a danger, the author attempts to convince the reader that salvation is really more complicated than one might think. Calvinistic theology is not openly criticised, but rather some of its popular perceptions. Arminianism is not openly advocated, but some of the book's arguments come quite close to it. The author's strong points do not rely on heavy theological argument, but rather on issues related to pastoral counselling. All in all this is refreshing reading for anyone who wants a more balanced Christian life.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Alan P. Stanley hat ein herausforderndes Buch geschrieben, mit einer Reihe von offensichtlichen pastoralen Anliegen als Startpunkt. Fast alle dieser Anliegen haben ihren Ursprung in dem, was man als den zerstörerischen Einfluss eines „locker-flockigen“ Christentums bezeichnen könnte: ein Trend, der Formeln benutzt wie „Einmal gerettet – immer gerettet“ und „Gott möchte, dass wir gesund und reich sind.“ In Reaktion auf diese Gefahr versucht der Autor, den Leser zu überzeugen, dass Erlösung in Wirklichkeit komplizierter ist als man meinen könnte. Offen kritisiert wird nicht die calvinistische Theologie als solche, aber einige ihrer populären Wahrnehmungen. Arminianismus wird nicht offen verteidigt, aber einige Argumente des Buches kommen dem ziemlich nah. Die starken Punkte des Autors basieren nicht auf schwerwiegenden theologischen Argumenten, sondern eher auf Fragen, die mit der pastoralen Seelsorge verbunden sind. Insgesamt ist das Buch für all jene eine erfrischende Lektüre, die ein ausgeglicheneres christliches Leben wollen.

RÉSUMÉ

Alan P. Stanley a produit un ouvrage très stimulant, prenant pour point de départ un certain nombre de préoccupations pastorales, notamment celles que suscite l'influence destructrice d'un christianisme à bon marché, qui s'exprime dans des formules telles que : « une fois sauvé, sauvé à jamais », ou « Dieu veut que nous soyons riches et en bonne santé », etc. Pour combattre ces tendances dangereuses, il tente de convaincre le lecteur que le salut est une affaire plus compliquée qu'il n'y paraît. Il ne critique pas ouvertement la théologie calviniste, mais certaines de ses présentations populaires. Il ne défend pas explicitement une position arminienne, mais certains de ses arguments

s'en rapprochent beaucoup. Les forces de l'ouvrage ne résident pas dans une argumentation théologique rigoureuse, mais bien plutôt dans son approche de problèmes pastoraux. Il y a là un exposé rafraîchissant pour quiconque aspire à une vie chrétienne plus équilibrée.

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This is the book to read if you want your presumptions challenged, and your faith and daily life revitalised. Written by Alan Stanley, a dedicated pastor who also teaches Old and New Testament at Mueller College of Ministries in Queensland, Australia, this book is taking its readers to an alert and entertaining review of their faith and on to a firm invitation to live as real a Christian life as possible, keeping close to Jesus's words in the NT. In fact, this is the crux of the book: to realise that salvation is somewhat more complicated, or rather, more complex and demanding, and more dynamic and more worth living out, than commonly thought.

The book starts by raising the question of how much those who are professing to be saved are actually saved, when for various reasons they lack either the spark of genuine Christian joy or any sustained interest in spiritual life or service for others and for Christ. In order to address this, Alan Stanley asks further questions and raises further important issues in this book which is divided into the following chapters: 1. Just who will be saved? 2. Grace and works: Are they opposed? 3. Faith and salvation: Do they always go together? 4. Apart from me you can do nothing... 5. I chose you to bear fruit... 6. Can I be saved and not love others? 7. Can I be saved and be wealthy? 8. Can I be saved and not persevere? 9. Will God's judgment affect my salvation? 10. Some pastoral reflections.

The first chapter emphasises that the formula 'once saved, always saved' cannot possibly function as a license for sin or for indifferent and careless living. Although this message seems unpopular, as the author acknowledges, there should be more to Christian life than lip service and the repetition of religious slogans. On the whole, the chapter is refreshing, drawing numerous examples from daily life in a remarkable pastoral ministry.

The second and third chapters challenge two of the most common protestant (evangelical) convictions concerning salvation: that grace and works are opposing concepts and that faith by itself is a sufficient reason for one to enjoy assurance of salvation. The biblical conclusion is that true grace always leads to good works, and that real faith, as opposed to false faith, is very much like a captivating journey through life. No-one can safely avoid the tension of understanding that only if one is 'really saved, then he is once for all saved'. These two chapters are replenished with references to Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. (Cf. also Joel Green on Christian life and salvation seen as a journey or as a 'way', a stance that balances the common emphasis on 'the hour of decision', 55). The theological arguments are generally well built, although at times the exegetical work on the

Greek NT appears to be in need of more accuracy (cf. grace as power, 29).

Chapters 4 and 5 present Jesus' special provision for a fruitful Christian life, that is, his presence and his solutions (resources), and his commandments. Living out his commands is impossible without his presence, reminds Stanley, for Jesus transforms our paradigms (cf. the ten beatitudes in Matthew 5, 64-75) and invites his followers to a veritable tour de force of an invitation to repentance, which is a true and beneficial change of mind and direction. It is interesting to read here a number of references to social surveys run by George Barna (87, 99).

Chapters 6 to 8 have similarly formulated titles and lay before the reader three major tests of one's salvation. A genuine Christian should experience love (not anger) towards other people, should verify one's views and practice on wealth and properties (it is wonderful to think of John Wesley's diary and monthly expenditures here, 135), and should be able to demonstrate perseverance in the Christian life (i.e. continuity in the daily struggles for a holy life, etc.). Following in this sense, chapter 9 emphasises that God's judgement counts, and that every Christian will be accountable for their living before God, to be praised, rewarded or rebuked, although, on all counts, always received with love.

The book ends with the author's clear opinion that the qualities of repentance, assurance, continuity and progress should not be lacking in any Christian who indeed lives out their salvation. The book is very commendable for pastors and teachers, and makes for delightful reading for anyone willing to face tough questions about Christian living.

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What We Have Heard From The Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies

Tom Thatcher (ed.)

Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007, xiii + 423 pp., £26.99, pb, ISBN 978-1-60258-010-7

SUMMARY

This is a compilation of essays by senior Johannine scholars who describe their thoughts on the state of Johannine Studies. A response from a younger scholar follows each contribution. The essays track the trends in Johannine Studies over the last half century as scholars moved from the historical critical method to narrative criticism, and in a few cases to postmodern and postcolonial approaches. This is an excellent book for a description of the past, present and future of Johannine Studies.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dies ist eine Artikelsammlung aus der Feder von erfahrenen Autoren zu den johanneischen Schriften, die ihre Gedanken zum Stand der johanneischen Forschung darlegen. Jedem Beitrag folgt eine Antwort von einem jüngeren

Gelehrten. Die Artikel verfolgen die Trends der johanneischen Forschung der letzten fünfzig Jahre, in denen sich die Gelehrten von der historisch-kritischen Methode zu narrativen Ansätzen und in wenigen Fällen zu postmodernen und postkolonialen Ansätzen bewegten. Es ist ein exzellentes Buch für eine Beschreibung der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft der johanneischen Forschung.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage rassemble des contributions d'éminents spécialistes des études johanniques qui donnent leur sentiment sur l'état de ces études. Chaque contribution est suivie d'une réponse par un spécialiste de la jeune génération. Les exposés présentent les tendances qui sont apparues dans la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle, alors que les spécialistes passaient de l'approche historico-critique à celle de la critique narrative, et parfois aussi à des approches post-modernes et post-coloniales. C'est une présentation excellente du passé, du présent et du futur des études johanniques.

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The title *What we have heard from the beginning* should not be confused with the message received by the audience of 1 John. Rather this book is a collection of essays on the state of Johannine Studies. In a sort of Johannine pun, *What we have heard* refers to what has been written and taught about the Johannine Literature, and the Gospel more specifically, over the last half century or more. Tom Thatcher asked senior Johannine scholars 'to discuss, briefly and in a conversational tone, his or her journey with John. This discussion could include an evaluation of the state of the field, programmatic remarks on questions that merit further attention, a personal history of research, a summary of current work – anything that one might share with an interested student over coffee after class' (xvii). Each contribution of these senior scholars is followed by a response by a younger Johannine scholar. Thatcher describes this second group as those 'who will carry the study of the Fourth Gospel into the next several decades' (xviii).

What we have heard from the beginning has at certain levels already accomplished Thatcher's goal that the book 'be a sort of time capsule, a virtual conversation between future students of the Johannine Literature and some of the living legends of a golden era of scholarship' (xvii). Because of the number of contributors, the book does so in a diverse way. Some of the senior contributors focus primarily on their personal history of research (Beutler, Brodie, Schneiders), others reiterate their positions on Johannine topics (Borgen, O'Grady). Yet others seek to blend their personal history with the direction their research has taken and where they think Johannine studies should go in the future (De Jonge, Fortna, Kysar, Moloney).

Reading the contributions together, some similar themes can be noted. Most of them began their studies in a field that was dominated by historical criticism