

Salvation Belongs to the Lord (Conversion Part 1 – Saving Faith)

In Jonah 2:9, we read: “**Salvation Belongs to the Lord**” (Also Ps. 3:8; Rev. 7:10). This means from beginning to end God, from before the foundations of the world, all the way to the consummation of all things, God is the author and the orchestrator of the salvation of his people. If this were not true, no one would be saved. And for all of eternity, we will cry out “*Our God saves.*” And as we’ve seen in this series, salvation involves so much more than just making some decision to “get saved.” There are many components, many spokes in a beautiful wheel that comprise the work of God in salvation. A good place to see this truth is found in Rom. 8:28-30: “**And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**” In these verses, we get a glimpse of God’s plan to save his people from eternity, way back even before time, as He “foreknew” and “predestined.” And as we’ve seen, God effectually “calls” his people in Christ, giving them life in the great power of regeneration. As Titus says, “**But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life**” (Tit. 3:4-7).

So far in these teachings, we’ve only seen the gracious work of God as it comes down to us in POWER. Well, for the next couple weeks, we will consider the RESULT of God’s gracious power. What is this result? It is FAITH! When Jesus healed the man who was born blind, what happened? Jesus asked him, “***Do you believe in the Son of man?***” And he said, “***Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him***” (John 9:38). After Jesus raises Lazarus, he tells the people, “***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?***” And Martha says to him, “**Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world**” (John 11:25-27). In Acts 16 Paul and Silas were in prison. And by a great miracle all the doors of the jail and all the shackles of the prisoners were undone. As the jailer saw these things he fell down before Paul and said, “**What must I do to be saved?**” Paul says, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .**”

In these stories, we’ve moved from behind the scenes and the powerful work of God in calling and regeneration to the subject of CONVERSION. Here we see our part in salvation: “**Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.**” Faith is a big topic. Years ago, I preached 4 sermons on Eph. 6:16 where Paul tells believers to “***take up the shield of faith.***” There, the emphasis is on prayer and how faith helps us in this life. But, for today, I want to focus on how faith is related to salvation.

1. Saving Faith is a gift. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is a gift. Let me read a few verses. Eph. 2:8 says, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God . . .”** In Rom. 3 Paul speaks of salvation and how it comes down to sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In vv. 21-24 he says, **“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . .”** And, the Bible also teaches that no one is saved without faith. Faith is ESSENTIAL to salvation. We cannot separate faith from salvation. Since salvation is a gift, it simply follows that faith is also a gift.

It is interesting that in some of my conversations through the years, most agree that salvation is a gift, but then they try and separate faith from salvation and think that in some kind of way, faith is not a gift, but instead some kind of good decision that leads to salvation. I think I understand this kind of thinking. After all, the Bible says over and over ***“Believe in God,” “Believe in his promises,” “Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”*** Also we often see verses where Jesus says, ***“YOUR faith has made you whole”*** or ***“YOUR faith has saved you.”*** (Numerous verses). When I came to Christ (when you came to Christ), WE BELIEVED. It was OUR FAITH. And this is true! It is OUR faith.

But, we must ask, ***“How does faith come to us?”*** It is gifted to us! James 1:17 says, **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”** Just this week, Emily and Hunter gave Abigail and Chandler a car. We went to the bank and signed the title over to them. They drove it back to Kansas City yesterday. Question: Who does the car belong to? Chandler and Abby. Did they do anything to deserve it? No. Did they ask for it? No. Will Emily and Hunter ask them to give it back? No. It is a gift. It belongs to them to use. In the same kind of way, saving faith is God’s gift to his people. And this gift of faith is the most beautiful gift of ALL. For it is the means by which we are united to Christ and are saved! And Yes, it is gifted to us. But, it is ours! And no matter how difficult it is to many and to the world to understand, saving faith is not gifted to everyone. If this were so, everyone would be saved.

Listen to these words from Peter as he considers this gift of faith! 1 Pet. 1:3-9 **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that**

perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

(Food for thought: If what we’ve said about predestination, foreknowledge, calling and regeneration in previous sermons on salvation is true, then faith must be a gift. How could it be otherwise? It can’t be something we conjure up ourselves. I think what we’ve learned so far also rules out “prevenient grace.” This is the teaching that, after the fall, God gives grace to every person (Roman Catholic view). Then, it is up to the person to exercise this grace. But, if this were true, why even speak of calling and regeneration? Why would the Bible proclaim the powerful work of God in calling a sinner in such a way that results in a new birth if faith were not a gift.)

2. Saving Faith Believes in Jesus. The faith that God gifts to his people always results in salvation. Why? Because faith BELIEVES in Jesus. John 3:16 says, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** Brothers and sisters, this is the purpose of faith. This is why it was created and given to us! The reason John wrote his gospel is found in 20:31: **“but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”**

I think of an archer aiming at a target with a bull’s eye in the center. This is the goal. What if he/she shoots all day and misses the bull’s eye? Would he/she be successful? No! Not until the arrow hits the center. In the same kind of way, the arrow of faith always finds the bull’s eye in Jesus. This is why Jesus says to us, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”** (Matt. 11:28-30). This is why Jesus the Messiah says to the woman at the well in Samaria, **“Drink the water that I will give you!”** (John 4). This is why Jesus says to the hungry, **“I am the bread of life . . .”** And, **“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day”** (John 6). This is why Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead and then says to the people, **“Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live . . .”** (John 11:25). This is why he says to those who walk in darkness, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have everlasting life”** (John 8). This is why he says to those wandering in the desert of sin, **“I am the good shepherd, follow me”** (John 10). This is why Jesus says, **“I am the vine . . . apart from me you can do nothing”** (John 15). This is why Jesus says to us: **“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”** (John 16).

Brothers and sisters, if you are a Christian, you understand these words perfectly. Why? Because FAITH believe and understands these things. Your faith has hit the mark, the center, the bull’s

eye. It has come to rest in Jesus, the place in which it was designed to land. What a glorious truth!

Today as we take the Lord's Supper, we "remember" the death of Jesus. And we do this by faith! Today, we don't remember ourselves and our own good works. This is what the religions of the world do. Muslims must pray, give alms, fast, take pilgrimages, and confess Mohamed as God's prophet. Hindus and Buddhists are saved through the "way of works." Animists must pray to the "spirits" and appease their gods through good works. On and on I could go with ALL the religions of this world. But, as Christians, what must we do to be saved? Remember what Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer when they asked what must we do to be saved? **"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved"** (Acts 16:31).

As we remember the death of Jesus this morning, we bring nothing to the table. We believe. Now, as concerns salvation, we do nothing to gain our way to God. This is why we can say that we are saved by "faith alone." But, in a manner of speaking, our faith is not blind. We believe certain things about what has been revealed to us in the Scriptures (and in history). Consider Heb. 11:6 (turn with me) which says, **"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."** The implication here is that faith believes certain things about God. Faith is not blind to what God has revealed about himself. This morning we believe God sent his Son. And we believe in the works of his son, particularly his death (this what we remember particularly in the Lord's Supper). We believe the Son came in the flesh. We believe he was sinless. We believe he laid down his life as a sacrifice on the cross. We believe he rose again after three days and conquered death. We believe he sits at the right hand of the father where he makes intercession for us. And just as much as Jesus told the listeners of his day to come to him, so do we today. This is faith! And, as we will see next week, faith is a repentant faith. We are sinners! We have sinned against God! God is holy; we are not! (Consider your sins and the sins of this world.) This is how we remember today.

Before we partake, let me end with some general comments about faith in Jesus.

No one is converted without faith in Christ! I think this is the obvious truth from such a sermon. Without hesitation, Christians says, "Christ died for my sins. This I believe." In Acts 4:12 Peter says, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The result of faith is always salvation! Though conversion experiences are vastly different (from children to hardened criminals to deathbed conversions) faith is the common denominator.

As regards salvation, there is no such thing as "weak" faith. FAITH LOOKS TO JESUS. FAITH RESTS ON THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS. Now, to us we may speak of having weak faith, poor faith, feeble faith, low faith, etc. And from a manner of speaking this is true. But, a weak faith still fixes its gaze upon the same strong Christ. If you are converted today, it is

because of FAITH. Though it is given by God, is still yours. And it believes in the Lord Jesus and him alone for salvation. Let me end today with Gal. 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”