

June 11, 2017

Deut. 30:11-14 / Acts 16:25-34 / Romans 10:5-13

If You Believe in Your Heart... You Shall Be Saved

Today we come to the essence of the Gospel message – a message of salvation by grace, through faith. And thus, all I want to do is simply take us through this text, step by step, which gives us the answer to the most important questions anyone could ever ask, like:

How can I be put right with God?

How can I know that my sins are forgiven, all my disobediences have been pardoned, and that when I die I will go to be with God in heaven, instead of suffering the penalty for all my sins myself in that place the Bible calls hell?

How can I receive eternal life, and know that if I were to die tonight, I would go to heaven?

Or let me put it to you more personally: Do you KNOW whether or not you are saved? If you were to die today, tomorrow or in these next few weeks – do you know where you would spend eternity? Can you say you are sure? Do you want to be sure?

You see, that's the place Paul brings us to in this text. He's spoken of some who were not saved, and some who were. Gentiles who were, and a vast number of Israelites that were not. Some who were confronted with the claims of Christ and embraced Him by faith, and others who considered those same claims and were hardened (or remained) in their unbelief.

Hardened by what? The deeply seated inner conviction & stubborn belief that they could earn God's acceptance by their good works or religious works. That's the belief that leads so many people to reject the grace of God that could be theirs in Christ.

So, what does Paul do today? He answers for us the question, “What must I do to be saved?”

And you say: *“But pastor Jeff, this is a church! Shouldn’t you be sharing this with people who DON’T even go to church? Many of us have attended here for years – some for decades – are you suggesting we aren’t saved?”*

But that’s where it was helpful to have the dad I had. Because he went to church all his life (except when he went off to fight in WWII). He was extremely moral. His nickname was, “Honest John.” He was voted the Town of Norfolk Citizen of the Year and people trusted him implicitly. He sang in the choir every week, helped out at all church events, and was named a deacon for life.

But as I’ve mentioned to some of you before, He didn’t come to faith in Christ or receive baptism until the year 2002, when he was 78 years old – just 7 years before he died. He was “religious” and moral all his life. / But that was a major part of the problem – he felt God would accept him because of his religion & good works.

And it wasn’t until I wrote him three rather lengthy letters between 1999-2001, afraid for his salvation, and explaining the way of salvation from the Bible – that the Holy Spirit changed his heart, he came to a saving faith in Jesus, and sought to be baptized.

So, yes, you can attend church every Sunday, be heavily involved in all its activities, and still not be saved. You can read the Bible, sing the hymns, and serve in the church – and still be as lost as the person who has never heard of Jesus or darkened the doors of a church at all. (Maybe even more lost -- *if that’s possible* -- than the person who’s never heard of Jesus at all, because they have heard the Gospel, and resisted it, and become hardened to its call.)

You see, according to the Bible, the issue is not, “*what have you done*” (resume style)? The issue is, “*do you believe in Jesus,*” and “*have you therefore received the righteousness of God that comes by faith alone?*”

So, let’s take this passage step by step – starting FIRST in v. 5 where Paul says: “Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.”

And he means, “will attain life by them,” or “eternal life by them.” He *COULD* be saved by them if he could do them all as God prescribes in the first five books of the O.T. He *WOULD* gain life by them if he were able to do them as God commands.

Things like loving God with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind, and all his strength – all the time! And loving his neighbor in the same way that he loves himself. Doing for his neighbor everything he does to love and care for himself.

And that’s only two! Then comes valuing nothing more than God, having no idols, never using God’s name in a vain or irreverent way, refusing to break the Sabbath, or ever dishonor your parents! No murder, no adultery, no stealing, no lying, and no desiring the things that belong to others!

No lust, or gossip, charging interest on loans. No mistreating the alien (that is the foreign immigrant among you), nor the orphan, fatherless or widow. No cursing the ruler of your people and no disobedience, “*for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry*” (I Sam. 15:23).

If you could do all those things (and many more) without ever breaking any one of them at any time, then it’s true – you would, as Moses says, “live by them,” or “gain eternal life by them.”

But let me ask you honestly: Can anyone here say they have kept all those laws, all the time, without ever breaking one? No! Not if you're honest. To do them in such a way that we could, "live by them," or "gain life by them (eternal life)," we would have to keep each one, and never, at any time, or in any way, break any of them!

That's why Paul can say that those who strive to earn salvation by their works, or good deeds, are lost. In fact, that's the foolishness of thinking one can be saved by their works. Because no one has been good enough, or ever could be good enough, to measure up to the standard God has laid out in His Word.

That's also why Paul can say (3:20) that the law was given to show us we're sinners. Because the honest person who looks at what the law really requires, realizes very quickly they could never do it! Like the rest of humanity they fall short of the glory of God. That is, the rest of humanity – except for Jesus. He's the only one who perfectly (or sinlessly) obeyed, fulfilled, and lived out all the commands of God, all His life – without ever breaking even one.

Which brings us to the **SECOND** thing Paul tells us in vv. 6-7. Having addressed the "*righteousness that is by the law*" (which is always insufficient, and will never do anything but condemn us, since no one can obey it as God requires), he now moves on to "*the righteousness that is by faith*," or the righteousness that saves all who believe.

So, in v. 6 we read: "*But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."*"

The words, "*Do not say in your heart*," mean, "*Do not believe deep down inside*." And what are we **NOT TO BELIEVE** deep down inside?

In essence, we are NOT TO BELIEVE that the way of salvation has to be tremendously hard, or take great effort, to be real or true! In fact, it's the belief that we must do something tremendously hard which is the stumbling block for so many people.

As Stuart Briscoe rightly points out: *“For the Jewish person deeply steeped in the idea that salvation came through the fulfilling of the law through their own efforts, this message (of a righteousness received by faith as a gift) seemed so simple and so free as to be insulting... the funda-mental attitude of many people is that they must do something to merit or earn (or pay God for) their salvation... [So] The task of the... evangelist is... to explain the impossibility of salvation through self-effort [which I already did!] and the availability of salvation through faith in Christ”* [which I'm about to do!].

You see, believing in one's heart that they must, *“climb up to heaven to bring Christ down,”* or *“descend into the depths (of the earth) so as to bring Christ up from the dead”* – both refer to the belief that we must do something hard, or difficult (in addition to what Christ did), to save ourselves. They are both examples of extreme self-effort, even *impossible* self-effort.

And Paul says, “DON'T LET YOURSELF BELIEVE THAT!” Salvation is NOT about us making some colossal self-effort, be it climbing up to heaven, or digging down to the depths of the earth! It's about the mercy and grace of God in reaching out through Christ to do for us what we could never do for ourselves! It's about God's unbelievable kindness in giving us a gift we don't deserve!

It's NOT about US vainly trying to do something worthy enough to merit, or make ourselves worthy of salvation. It's about HIM (out of His love for helpless sinners) doing all that was necessary to save us.

That's what people need to see! The effort or price that was paid to secure our salvation DID require the greatest effort ever known to man! It required the colossal efforts of Jesus to resist sin every day of His life! It required the everything-in-Him determination to stand His ground against the onslaughts of the Devil's temptations in the wilderness.

It required Him "sweating as it were great drops of blood" as He contemplated submitting to the will of the Father by enduring the horrors of crucifixion. It required Him enduring the unspeakably painful tortures He endured before the cross, and on the cross, when He bore the awful penalty for sin in the place of all who would ever believe!

So, please *DON'T EVER THINK* salvation is too easy! It may cost US nothing, but that's only because it cost Christ everything! It's only easy for us, because it was so hard for Christ – the one God chose to be the "Suffering Servant."

That's the Gospel message, my friends! Through the colossal efforts of Jesus on our behalf, He secured for all who would ever believe, the salvation we could never possibly earn, polluted as all our efforts are by the sin that will remain in us till the day we die.

That's why the belief that we can earn our salvation by the things we do is so offensive to God. Because to even suggest we could earn it by our half-hearted efforts – is to make a mockery of the colossal efforts Jesus made.

Paul addressed this very thing when he said in Gal.2:21: "*If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.*" That is, if we could save ourselves by our works, there was no reason for Christ to die! If we were able to make ourselves acceptable to God – *by our efforts* – Christ wouldn't have needed to come, or live, or suffer, or die!

God would NEVER have sent Jesus to do what He did, or suffer He did, unless it was absolutely impossible for us to be saved in any other way!

That's why Paul says of ANY salvation-by-self-effort schemes: "Do not say in your heart," or "Do not believe it deep down inside!"

As the old saying goes, *"The pathway to hell is paved with good intentions."* And the "good intention" that's written on the vast majority of the pavers that line that yellow brick road to hell have this written on them: *"I don't need Jesus. I can earn my way to heaven by my good deeds."* Folks, it's the surest way to end up in hell.

Then **LAST**, Paul brings us to what we need to know. In vv. 8-11 he asks, *"But what does it say? (That is, "what does the righteousness that is by faith say?) "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" (actually, in the Greek it simply says, in a more from-the-heart affectionate way, "If you confess with your mouth "Lord Jesus,") 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 confess and are saved."*

Which means there are two ways that we evidence (not earn) salvation.

1st) We confess with our mouth, *"Lord Jesus."* It's a little awkward sounding to us at first, but that is what it says in the Greek. It's not so much a dogmatic confessional statement spoken for others to hear, as it's a form of believing, personal address, spoken to Jesus Himself, in an almost prayerful and adoring way.

I can say "Jesus is Lord" as a memorized phrase I've been taught, without any faith – just repeating what I'm told to say, or know I'm supposed to say (as happens in many churches where people are led to say it responsively).

But you know what? I can't really say, "Lord Jesus" without there being a sense that I truly believe it, and am actually calling upon Him as the Lord I believe Him to be – in a somewhat prayerful, personal and affectionate way.

In fact, to cry out "Lord Jesus" in the way Paul speaks of, I must believe He's alive. And to believe He is alive, I must believe He rose from the dead and lives forever more!

Which brings us to the 2nd) way we lay hold of the righteousness and salvation of God. We believe in our HEART that God raised Jesus from the dead. The first time I ever read that it threw me off for a minute! Because like most Americans, or Westerners, I was taught to believe that the mind is the seat of all believing.

So why does Paul say we must, "*Believe in our HEART that God raised Him from the dead?*" You know! Because the heart is the center and core of our being. That's why we say things like, "Let's get to the heart of the issue." The real issue. The central issue. The thing that's really at the core of everything!

In reference to the mind, I might be able to say "I believe" because I've considered it, and it seems somewhat feasible... maybe. But I can't really say I believe something in my heart unless I really do! When I speak of heart belief I move it to a whole new level of believing. For I'm saying I believe it deep down inside, in the center and core of my being. I'm saying it's something I believe so much it's central and indispensable to how I view my world and live my life. To say I believe it in my heart means I REALLY believe it!

As John Calvin once wrote in relation to these very verses: "*The seat of faith, it deserves to be observed, is NOT the brain, but the heart, not that I wish to enter into a dispute concerning the part of the body which is the*

seat of faith. But since the word HEART generally means a serious, sincere, ardent affection, I desire to show the confidence of faith to be a firm, effective, and operative principle in all the emotions and feelings of the soul, NOT a mere naked notion of the head.”

And when we do believe it in our heart, says Paul, God “justifies” us. That is, He joins us to Jesus, and credits to us (on the basis of our faith) the perfect righteousness of Jesus! And on the basis of Jesus perfect righteousness credited to me, He counts me as forgiven, pardoned, free from the guilt and punishment of *ALL* my sins, and no longer under *ANY* condemnation!

He counts me “Just As If I’d Never Sinned” and accepts me fully as His child. Something He does for Jesus’ sake, the One who lived and died to secure my pardon, and attain for me the only righteousness God accepts – *the flawless righteousness of His Son.*

And when I receive all that, as the gift of His love to me, my tongue cannot help but speak of Him, and declare before others what He has done. Why? Verse 11 tells us: *“As the Scripture says, ‘Whosoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’”*

Which surely, placed where it is in the context, means, “won’t be shamed into silence” or “shamed into not speaking about the Jesus who has so graciously, freely, and lovingly endured so much to save me.”

They are words similar in meaning to the words of Jesus’ who said: *“Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”*

You see, whenever it comes to this issue of public confession, it didn’t simply mean in the walls of the church. In fact, it likely meant just the opposite. In Paul’s day (as in many parts of the world today) public

confession of Jesus as the risen Lord, could cost them their jobs, their well-being, their freedom, or their life.

As Stuart Briscoe rightly points out again: *“The person who believes thoroughly enough to make confession of their faith in situations which may not be conducive to such testimony [due to the potential for persecution] is of necessity a convinced person.”*

Where confession of Jesus COSTS us nothing, it often MEANS nothing. People who are only willing to confess Jesus around people who believe in Jesus, should probably question if they truly believe in Jesus. If I only confess Jesus inside the four walls of this church, but never even mention Him once I leave, I need to seriously reconsider what true faith in Christ really is.

Do you believe? I mean really believe, in that heart sense? Have you considered the claims of Jesus – the claim that He left His father’s side and came to be born of a Virgin, lived a sinless life, died for sins that were not His own, rose from the dead, and now reigns as Lord over the universe – moving His chosen ones to come to Him in faith.

I’ve rarely done this before, but since the text itself calls those who believe in Jesus to make a public stand for Him, confessing Him to be Lord – I will (like Paul) invite ALL who have never done so before to come forward and publicly confess your faith in Jesus, remembering the promise of God in v. 13, that, *“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord [and it means the Lord Jesus] will be saved.”*

It isn’t the coming forward that saves you, it’s the HEART BELIEF! But true faith (as Paul points out here) is always accompanied by the *PUBLIC CONFESSION OF HIS LORDSHIP* with your mouth, unashamedly confessing Him before others. And not just in HERE where it’s safe. But OUT THERE in the world where it may not be.