

November 6, 2011

Isaiah 45:20-22 / Romans 3:21-31 / Acts 16:16-34

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

After answering the question, "***What does it MEAN to be saved?***" in last week's message, we saw that it meant being "saved" from the power, and penalty and consequences of our sin.

And this week I'd like to move on the second question which we would hope would follow any conversation where the first question was answered. The question the Philippian jailor asks Paul and Silas in Acts 16:30: "***What must I DO to be saved?***"

And here, I don't have to give suggestions or personal opinions. And rightly so. For when SALVATION is at stake, personal opinions are the last thing we need! All I need to do is offer the answer Paul gave the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:31: "***Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved.***"

Yet, you know what we find when we look around? We find that that answer does not satisfy many people. WHY? Because it doesn't seem HARD enough. It seems to make the attainment of eternal salvation too easy. And I know the sentiment well, for I myself used to be of that mindset the first 5-6 years I was a Christian.

Many people believe that God should make salvation dependent upon MORE than merely believing. That He should make it more difficult, thus weeding out the people who really want salvation / and are willing to work hard for it / or do anything they have to, to get it / from those who come simply because it appears so easy to lay hold of.

That's why many people have taken that clear, simple, apostolic answer, and have changed it, modified it, or replaced it with other terminology.

They have taken the Scriptural command to "believe in Jesus" and have replaced it with alternative admonitions like: "*Accept Jesus into your heart*" / or "*Accept Him as your personal Savior*" / or "*Ask Him to come into your life*" -- none of which are found anywhere in the Bible.

In fact, one site I looked at (after giving a severely stunted presentation of the Gospel) encouraged people to simply, "pray the following prayer..." And then, assuming one read that prayer the site suggested, it made this declaration: "**CONGRATULATIONS!!! If you prayed that prayer you are now saved!**" Really?? Is one saved by praying a prayer, or by believing?

You see, I once hired a local Bible School student to help with the Sunday School in my church in Westport. And after a couple of months he gathered all 24 of the children together in the downstairs room / shared the Gospel / told them they all needed to pray with him / and then, after they prayed what he told them to pray, he announced that they had all been born again.

And I'm not just being picky. It's not a mere matter of semantics. We're dealing with what is required for salvation! We're dealing with people's eternal destiny. Heaven or hell lie in the balance. And since the Bible says we need to "**believe**" in the Lord Jesus to be saved, it borders on dangerous to substitute phrases which do not mean the same thing as "believe."

As Tozer once asked: "**What does the term 'accept Jesus' even mean? How did we ever get derailed into using a dubious catch-phrase like 'accepting Jesus as your personal Savior.' Are we not commanded to believe?**"

And I know such phrases dominate the scene in evangelical spheres. It's HARD not to fall into using them. Yet it would be better if we did not. Or if we do use alternative statements (and that is ok if they mean the same thing) let use phrases like: "**TRUST in the Lord (Jesus) with all your heart,**" or "**Place all your FAITH for salvation in Jesus as Lord.**" / "**Look**" and "**lean**" and "**come**" are also alternate scriptural words for faith or belief.

So, what I'm going to do today, is simply stick with the answer the Bible gives us, because I'm one who believes that the biblical answer is the best answer -- and explain it as best I can -- since it can obviously be misunderstood.

And since "salvation" (biblically speaking) is rooted and grounded in believing, all I'm going to do is point out the FOUR elements of saving faith found in v. 31: **1st) "The NATURE of Saving Faith"** (since the Bible makes it abundantly clear there is a faith that does not save.)

2nd) *"The APPEAL of Saving Faith."*

3rd) *"The OBJECT of Saving Faith."*

And 4th) *"The WARRANT of Saving Faith."*

So **FIRST**, let me address, *"The **NATURE** of Saving Faith."* Because it's confusion about this one thing that has (more than anything else) led people to feel it was necessary to change, modify or replace the answer Scripture gives with others that are not biblical, and may not even save, even though they feel they are better than the one the Bible gives.

You see, contrary to what the Bible would call faith, many people today actually think that it is possible to believe in Jesus, without that belief having any significant or lasting effect on how they think, feel, speak, act, relate to others, live their life or prioritize all they do.

A faith one can claim to possess and yet be virtually indistinguishable from any other typical, semi-nice, moral, unbelieving, religious or non-religious American citizen. (Working side by side for 20 years w/o knowing?)

They think that to "believe" is simply to affirm something intellectually / or confess they believe it is true (as happens every Sunday in churches the world over where people recite creeds from memory, but never exhibit any of the fruits of saving faith).

Fruits like earnestly pursuing holiness / living a repentant life of turning from sin / sharing the Gospel with others out of a burden to see the lost saved / being possessed by a reverence and love for God which makes them rejoice to worship, serve, honor and obey Him / having a faith that knows God can and will answer prayer / considering Jesus, His kingdom and His salvation the greatest of all treasures / and trusting in nothing else but the saving merits of Jesus for their life and salvation.

So what I'd like to do is give you the **THREE** essential aspects of saving faith that are all found in Paul's response to the jailor. And please listen well, for the Bible makes it very clear on numerous occasions that there are expressions of faith that do not save. The Gospels and James tell us that.

So what are the **THREE** elements found in saving faith?

1st) We find that faith is knowledge or facts believed. Notice that Paul and Silas DO NOT simply tell this jailor what he must do to be saved, and then immediately ask him to believe (or lead him in some type of prayer for salvation) simply because he has expressed interest (an earnest, heartfelt interest) in being saved.

They wait. And why he delay? Because they KNOW that this jailor knows virtually nothing at all about the Jesus he must believe in to be saved! And they would never ask anyone to "believe for salvation" in a Jesus they knew absolutely nothing about!

Remember, Paul is visiting Philippi on a missions trip somewhere around 45 A.D. And in Philippi, at that time, Jesus and the tenets of Christianity were still virtually unknown. The jailor may have heard some rumors about a man named Jesus who was crucified for insurrection in Palestine / and was then rumored to have risen from the dead. But since they had no newspapers, radios, televisions or evening news, even that's questionable!

Which means that unless someone had preached or explained the Gospel to him: He would NOT have known that Jesus death paid the penalty for the sins of all who would ever believe.

NOR would he have known that Jesus rose, not simply to come back to life, but for our justification! / And He would NOT have known that Jesus was Lord of heaven and earth! For to know those things someone would have to explain or preach the Gospel to him! And that's exactly what Paul and Silas go on to do!

Note what Luke tells us in verse 32: "**Then they (Paul and Silas) spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house.**" They left the jail / went to his house / sat down with him and all the other people that were there (wife, children and possibly servants) and told them what they needed to know about the Jesus they needed to believe in for salvation!

And they do it because they knew that TRUE SAVING FAITH requires some degree of knowledge about the Jesus they must believe in! In fact, the Greek word translated "in" (where Paul says, "Believe IN the Lord Jesus") is actually "epi" and not "eis" -- a word best translated, "*upon.*" "**Believe UPON the Lord**

Jesus." That is, let your faith rest upon Him. / Cast the full weight of your lost soul, and all your faith for salvation UPON Him.

And maybe the best way to picture it is to imagine yourself hanging off the edge of the crumbling cliff, where far below are jagged rocks. And Jesus, the divine one, is floating there in the air telling you to jump into His arms. To cast yourself in full trust that He will save or keep you from perishing.

As the godly John Murray of Westminster Seminary once wrote:

"In our ordinary human relations do we trust a person of whom we know nothing? Especially when that for which we trust him is of grave importance for us? [No.] We must know a good deal regarding his identity and his character."

(After all, would you entrust your house / and all your earthly possessions in it / and the lives of your spouse and children, to some complete stranger who just happened to come and knock on your door some Saturday night? Would you? NO! Of course not! Right?!))

"How much more," says Murray, ***"must this be the case with that faith which is directed to Christ. We must know who Christ is, what He has done, and what He is able to do. Otherwise faith would be blind conjecture at best and foolish mockery [or gullibility] at worst. There must be an apprehension of the truth respecting Christ."***

He's right folks. Faith NEVER exists in a void! / It must have something to rest upon! / And thus, what Paul and Silas do, is take this man and his household and give them the knowledge they needed to have about Jesus before he could savingly believe "upon" Him.

2nd) We find that true faith, or saving faith, contains a conviction that moves the one who possesses it action. JESUS tells us the one who says he believes (or calls Him, "*Lord, Lord*") must obey and do what He says!

And Paul, likewise, after telling us Jesus was shown to be Lord and Son of God by His resurrection from the dead, says that his commission from God was to, ***"call... people to the obedience that comes from faith."*** Because true faith, or saving faith, will always produce some degree of obedience.

Faith that doesn't produce any obedience / or any works of righteousness over time is what James calls "dead faith" -- and dead faith, as he is so adamant to stress, justifies or saves no one.

"We are saved by faith alone," as R. C. Sproul rightly points out, **"but not by a faith that remains alone."** Because true or saving faith, cannot help but produce God-honoring fruit in the life of the believer, over time.

For instance: I have a friend from Holland who is an expert marksman with a bow and arrow (I believe he actually qualified for the Dutch Olympic Team). Now, say I invited him to our church (with his 55 pound bow) and I had him stand at the front of this sanctuary, while an assistant he has brought along (his wife maybe) stands at the back door with an apple on her head!

And then, as you all watch, he draws back that string, and lets that arrow fly, and it splits that apple in two -- dead center! And then he does it a second time, to show it wasn't just luck -- thus giving you the knowledge of his skill which is necessary for you to believe he could do it again.

So if he then asked you: *"Do you believe I could do it a third time?"* most of you would probably say, *"Yes. We saw you do it twice and we believe you could do it again."*

And in doing so you would give verbal or intellectual assent to the fact that you believe he could do it one more time. You would SAY you believe -- like millions the world over do every Sunday, even though multitudes of them are not yet saved.

And the difference between that kind of faith and saving faith would be this: If my friend then turned to YOU or YOU or ANY ONE OF YOU (based on your claim to believe) and said, *"OK then please take the place of my assistant and put the apple on your own head,"* you would willingly do it!

True faith, because it REALLY BELIEVES: Would cause you to confidently jump up / walk over to the back door / grab another apple / place it on your head / give my friend the thumbs up / and then stand there and watch with eyes wide open / as he lifted his bow / drew back the string / and let the arrow fly.

You see, until you're willing to stand there and let him shoot the apple off your head, you really don't believe -- regardless of what you may say. Not really. Faith that falls short of a conviction that leads to action is not saving faith. / Faith that will not act upon what it says it believes, doesn't really believe. / It's the difference between a person saying they believe and a person who really believes.

Then **3rd**) We see that faith involves a committed ongoing trust, or a confidence in Christ that looks to Him, and clings to Him, as the sole source of salvation. Remember, this jailor was a jailor! That is, he may not have known much about the faith, but the one thing he DID KNOW about the faith is that it got Paul and Silas severely beaten and then thrown into jail!

In other words, he KNEW that believing in Jesus and following Jesus IN PHILIPPI might mean that he would likewise be beaten and end up in jail -- losing his freedom, his possessions and his family for believing in and thus following Jesus.

Yet notice what Luke tells us. The jailor and his family don't simply listen to Paul and then merely "nod the head" in affirmation of the things he says about Jesus. No! Luke tells us he believed in such a way that his heart was filled with joy (an indication he had received the Holy Spirit) / and he also tells us that he and all his family were baptized -- baptism being an act of commitment and evidence of a willingness to follow Him in a life of ongoing discipleship, come what may.

"Faith," as John Murray states, "cannot stop short of self-commitment to Christ; a transference of reliance upon ourselves and any human resources, to a reliance on Christ alone for salvation." For, "Faith," as he says, "is trust in a person, the person of Christ, the Son of God and sole Savior of the lost."

You see, the word "believe" here, is a VERB that implies ongoing action! So it's not like we "believe" in a once done sense, and can then say 20 years later, "Oh yes, back in 1991 I believed and got saved. Only lasted a few weeks (maybe it was less than that). But I'm all set even though I don't believe anymore."

Not at all! Saving faith isn't that way! It involves an ongoing trust and evidences itself in a continuing commitment to Christ and a lifelong reliance upon Him alone for salvation.

And thus, any "claim" to believe that stops short of a conscious ongoing commitment to trust / obey / follow / and rest upon the person of Christ for salvation is NOT saving faith! After all, how can one really believe what the Bible says and not trust, love, obey or follow Jesus?

Then **SECONDLY**, we come to the **APPEAL of saving faith**. What is it? It's a command! The verb "BELIEVE" is in the imperative or command form. It's as if Paul is saying, "*You want to be saved? Then I command you to believe in the Lord Jesus.*" Paul and Silas don't beg or plead or worse yet, make it seem like God will be sad or disappointed if he refuses to believe.

To "believe" IS to obey the Gospel! And God never begs or pleads with people to obey. He demands or commands it! / ***"This is His command," says the apostle John, "that you believe in His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He commanded us."***

He does not beg, barter or bargain. He doesn't make compromises, deals or reduce Himself to the position of a sad God who tearfully pleads for people to believe. He commands us to believe in Jesus, for to "believe" is to obey the Gospel, and to obey the Gospel is to be saved (II Thess. 1:8).

Then **THIRD** we come to the **OBJECT of saving faith** -- the Lord Jesus. Paul says "believe." He say "believe" in the command form. And he tells us whom we must believe say in -- the LORD JESUS." He alone is the sole object of saving faith. It's NOT anything we do, have done, pledge to do, say, feel or desire. The ONLY saving object of faith is the Lord Jesus.

"Salvation," says Acts 4:12, "is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men, by which we must be saved." Faith in any other object will not save! Faith in my works, or my religious duties, or my attempts at being righteous, or my morality, or civic duties or charitable giving or anything else will only damn me.

That's the problem I have with that web site which stated: *"If you prayed that prayer you are now saved."* WHY? Because although it is ever so subtle, what are they really asking people to place their assurance for salvation in? Christ? NO! It's the prayer they just prayed!

They didn't say, *"If you have believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ to save you, you are now saved."* They said, *"If you prayed that prayer you are now saved"* - - as if it was the prayer and not faith placed in Jesus Christ that did the saving!

The same can be said of placing your faith for salvation in ANYTHING other than Jesus Himself. The command is, "Believe in (or upon) the Lord Jesus," for He Himself is the sole object of saving faith! Not reading the Bible / or praying / or church attendance / or church involvement / or giving to the church / its missionaries / ministries / or the poor.

It's not prayers / or the sacraments / or fasting / or penance / or loving / or sacrificing / or being a good citizen / or serving in any political, military, or religious office. / And its certainly not a generic faith in God.

In fact, it's not even the "FAITH" one has in JESUS. It's JESUS Himself! Many know that good works could never save them. But some of those same people will unconsciously make the mistake of looking to their faith as that which saves them, instead Jesus who saves them by faith! And by doing so they turn "faith" into a "work."

Listen: ***Don't place your faith in your faith; place your faith in Christ!***

And here again, no one states it better than John Murray when he writes: ***"It is to be remembered that the efficacy of faith does not reside in itself. Faith is not something that merits the favour of God. All the efficacy unto salvation resides in the Saviour. As one has aptly stated, 'It is not faith saves, but faith in Christ; strictly speaking it is not even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith'. Faith unites us to Christ [in whom all saving merit resides]... and it is this union which ensures that the saving power, grace, and virtue of the Saviour becomes operational in the believer. The specific character of faith is that it looks away from itself and finds its whole interest and object in Christ."***

And then in **CONCLUSION**, there is the **WARRANT** of saving faith. Years ago I had a dream, and in my dream God commanded me: "***Preach the Warrant of Faith.***" I didn't even know what the "warrant of faith" was! I didn't really know what "warrant" meant. So when I got up, I grabbed a dictionary, and read the definition: "*Warrant -- a pledge or guarantee.*"

And a few years later I came across this statement in Spurgeon: "***The warrant of faith is the PROMISE of God.***" How can one know that if they believe God will save them? The answer is simple: God says so! He promises to do so!
"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you SHALL be saved."

He doesn't say: Might be saved, or could possibly be saved. It's not a questionable salvation, it's a firmly promised salvation! And all who believe or place their trust for salvation in Him WILL be saved! It's guaranteed! And that promise to save those who believe is the warrant of faith!

Salvation, then, is a matter of taking God at His promise and nothing more. It's believing that if you believe, He will save, regardless of what you may think or feel (I'm too sinful / I've done too many horrible things / etc....)

If you will only place your faith in the Lord Jesus, God WILL save you. And with that guarantee, I call you (no God commands you!) to obey the Gospel and believe in the Lord Jesus to the salvation of your soul.