

Sunday December 31st sermon: "The Blessing of Believing Faith -- Salvation is of the Lord! (Pt 6)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,  
by John Pittman Hey

Romans 4; John 20:24-29

Jonah teaches us that Salvation Belongs to the Lord!

A large part of the miracle power of God in our salvation is displayed in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ to be our redeemer.

He was born of a virgin, and is our Immanuel, God with us!

Christ had to be God manifest in human flesh, miraculously born of a virgin, or else we could never be saved, and our sins could never be taken away. In no other way could God find a Lamb that could save us!

It is the impossibility of it all, that requires the miraculous gift of faith to believe it, and to trust in Christ and His Gospel!

And yet in each of the minds and hearts of God's people, we have trusted in the Lord, and cried out for mercy, and He has saved us!

Just as God exercised His mighty power to save Jonah from the sea, and to save Nineveh from wrath, so too our God works a mighty miracle in poor sinners to bring them to trust in Christ and His sacrifice for sin.

In John 10, Christ Himself explained why most people do not believe in Him. It wasn't enough for them to see His glorious miracles, nor that He Himself had preached the Gospel to them. They still did not believe in Him.

So Christ explained it to them: "You do not believe, because you are not my sheep."

Many false preachers today are sure that Jesus got that backwards. They suppose the truth is, that when people believe in Jesus, then they become His sheep.

But Christ puts it correctly: a person believes on Him only if that person is His sheep. A person does not believe because he is not Christ's sheep.

Belief doesn't make us Christ's sheep! Instead, we believe BECAUSE we are Christ's sheep already.

Jesus didn't teach that if we first believe on Him, then we will follow Him and become His sheep!

That's because sheep do not decide who their shepherd will be. They do not decide who they will follow and listen to.

Then Jesus makes it clear how He got His sheep: His Father gave them to Him!

Because God gave Christ His sheep, therefore they believe in Him, and follow Him, and know His voice.

The consequence of all this is that Christ lays down His life to save His sheep, and gives them eternal life, and they cannot and will never perish!

It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that God draws Christ's sheep to trust in Him. Faith is God's gift, given to Christ's sheep.

Indeed, Christ never loses a single one of the sheep that God gave Him!

When Jesus rose again from the dead, most of His disciples refused to believe it, even though both Christ and the psalmist had promised it!

We like to fantasize that we would have believed it, and staked out the tomb to see it happen. But we wouldn't have.

Think of what this says about faith, and how impossible it is for us to believe without the Holy Ghost's power working in us!

Jesus confronted their unbelief when He showed them His wounded hands and side. Only then did most of them believe!

But Thomas the apostle wasn't there, and still didn't believe that Christ had risen from the grave. He demanded to personally examine the wounds of Jesus before he would believe it.

The resurrection is impossible for natural man to believe. It is so contrary to the universal experience of humanity.

It is astounding that God chose to couple salvation by faith in Christ's death in the place of sinners, with Christ's resurrection, and His promise to raise up His people at the last day!

Neither of these truths can be believed by poor sinners on their own.

And yet, Paul makes it clear, that the Gospel includes both the substitutionary death of Christ for sinners, and His subsequent bodily resurrection, as witnessed by a host of His disciples.

Perhaps this is because man will not believe in Christ's substitutionary death unless he also believes in Christ's resurrection. Without the resurrection, there is no reason to believe that when Jesus died, He took away our sins and perfectly atoned for them to God.

Christ had mercy on Thomas, and showed him the wounds, still borne by His glorified body.

Thomas cried out to Jesus, "my Lord and my God!"

Jesus replied to Thomas, that while he had seen and then believed, those who never saw Christ risen, and yet believe, are most blessed by God.

Jesus was talking about us! We have never seen the risen Lord, and yet we believe.

Why do we believe when most in this old world refuse to believe?

The reason is, that God has blessed us with the faith to believe. That faith is worked in us by the Holy Ghost; it is given to us as God's precious gift to us!

He has changed our cold dead hearts to trust in Jesus' obedience and shed blood for our crimes, to take away our sins!

"Blessed are those" does not mean that we are to be congratulated for our belief in Jesus! This is not a commendation of those who believe.

Rather, Jesus is declaring the truth, often denied by false teachers, that we do not believe in Him under our own steam. Rather, we trust in the Gospel because God has blessed us, by giving us the faith to believe what lost men will not believe!

Think of it! We are blessed in a way greater than Thomas, who saw the risen Lord Jesus and believed!

This is so that the excellency of what God did to us by His Spirit might be displayed in us, we who walk by faith and not by sight, all by the grace of God toward us.

We not only believe on Jesus, but better yet, we love Him so!

Peter explained that we are kept through faith by the power of God unto salvation. That faith is more precious than gold, and after it is tried, it will redound to the glory of God when Christ returns to receive all His loved ones.

It is God's power that keeps us believing to the very end, when we will see Jesus come again.

Meanwhile, Peter points out this truth: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

God causes us to trust in Jesus, and preserves us in that trust in the sacrifice of Christ to the saving of our bodies and souls.

That all results in our rejoicing and praise and love for the One Who died to save us!

As William Featherstone wrote:

"My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;  
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;  
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

"I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me,  
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;  
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow;  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now."

No doubt about it: Salvation belongs to the Lord! It is all of God's mighty power to save us, and change us, and give us faith to trust in Jesus.