

Sunday School Lesson for August 1, 2021

“Salvation For All Who Believe”

Background Scripture: Romans 10:5-17

Life is short and uncertain and eternity is forever, the most important question anyone can answer is, How can I be saved? How can I know for certain that I am right with God? A common belief is that to be saved, we must be good people. If we try to do our best, if we don't hurt anyone, if we help others, then we will get into heaven. Often faith in Christ is combined with good works. If we believe in Jesus and do the best we can, the combination will get us into heaven.

The Bible teaches clearly that we are saved by grace (God's undeserved favor) through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from our own goodness or good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Sometimes even those who know and believe that truth personally do not live it in terms of its practical application. For example, we may think that God can save someone who is a notorious sinner, but surely that person must first clean up his life a bit. But to say that is to deny God's free grace.

Peter and the other apostles knew that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by our good works or efforts. Up till now they also believed that to be right with God, a pagan Gentile had to become a Jew in the sense of obeying the Jewish laws regarding circumcision and ceremonial issues. The thought of a Gentile getting saved without coming through the door of Judaism was foreign to them. As we've seen, God has been breaking down Peter's Jewish prejudices on this matter. Now they are all swept away in an instant, as the Gentiles in Cornelius' house clearly get saved and receive the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the Jews had on the Day of Pentecost.

The wonderful truth is: everyone who believes in Christ receives God's salvation. When the power of the gospel is released by the Spirit, it can do what human effort cannot do—change lives forever. The problem is getting people to listen and by faith trust Jesus Christ for salvation. People are not saved because of their religious enthusiasm. They are saved as they respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This week's lesson reminds us of how powerful the gospel message is and that salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

In Romans 10:5-11, Paul quoted from the Old Testament to prove to his readers that they didn't even understand their own law. He began quoting from Leviticus 18:5 saying "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law." That the man which doeth those things shall live by them." Moses had described "the righteousness which is of the law" by stating the purpose of "the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them." If Israel obeyed the law, they would live by it. The problem was that even though the Old Testament stressed obedience to God's law, no human being was ever able to perfectly obey it. If someone could attain righteousness by keeping the law, it would mean that they had perfect obedience. Jesus Christ was the only one who perfectly obeyed the law of God, so He was qualified to be a sinless sacrifice so that all who believe would "be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

In verse 7, Paul continued to make the point that salvation was not difficult or complicated. Just as the sinner does not have to go to heaven to find Jesus Christ, neither would they have to go among the dead to bring Christ back to life again. Just as Jesus has already come down from heaven to save the sinner, He has also risen from the dead once, so He's not among the dead anyway. Paul's point once again was that the sinner does not have to perform difficult works in order to be saved. The gospel message of salvation is that Jesus Christ has already done the necessary work.

With verses 9 and 10 Paul said that two things are required as conditions of salvation. First, he said "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the LORD Jesus." Meaning that we openly profess a relation to Him and dependence on Him as our LORD and Savior. Confessing our faith in Jesus Christ is necessary is seen in Jesus' words: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (see Matthew 10:32-33). But simply stating that we believe in Jesus is not enough unless we truly "believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead." Belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not optional; it is the essential core doctrine of the Christian faith (I Corinthians 15:1-4, 13-14). The heart represents the inner person where faith exists. The mouth must then express what is in the heart.

The quote means that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will not be ashamed or disappointed. Paul's point was that since the LORD always keeps His promises to His people, we can be confident that the promise of salvation is secure for those who come to Christ and confess Him as LORD.

Paul believed that humans were necessary instruments in evangelical work. The logic of Paul's questions is easily seen when we put those questions in the form of statements. It would be something like this: "Before people can pray to the LORD for help, they must believe in Him. And before they can believe in the LORD, they must hear about Him. And for anyone to hear about the LORD, someone must tell them."

The cure for Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ is hearing the Word of the gospel and believing in Him. Those who come to us with the gospel, or the good news, they bring a message of peace. Through Jesus Christ we can be at peace with God and one another. If the truth be told, what the world needs are fewer

high-level peace negotiators and more true preachers of the gospel of peace. When this gospel is preached, the preacher or messenger is bringing glad tidings of good things. The good things refer to every blessing that comes from being saved.

“Isaiah 53:1 introduces one of the greatest messianic chapters in the Old Testament. Traditionally, orthodox Jewish scholars have applied Isaiah 53 to the nation of Israel instead of to the Messiah, but many ancient rabbis understood it to be a picture of a suffering Messiah bearing the sins of His people. It was this very chapter Isaiah 53 that led the Ethiopian eunuch to obey the gospel (see Acts 8:26-46). In Isaiah’s day, many Jews did not believe God’s Word, nor do they believe it today. John 12:37-41 refers to Isaiah 53:1 to explain how Israel saw Christ’s miracles and still refused to believe. And because they would not believe, judgment came on them and they could not believe. The fact that orthodox Jews don’t read Isaiah 53 in their synagogues reveals much of why they don’t believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. There may be many reasons why Isaiah 53 is not read, but one reason stands out and is offered by Paul who was a Jew. He writes that “blindness in part has happened to Israel” (see Romans 11:25) and the result is that “a veil lies over their heart” when they read the Old Testament (see II Corinthians 3:15). Jewish synagogues follow a yearly reading schedule through much of the Old Testament. There are designated readings for each Sabbath as well as special readings on holy days. Every Sabbath includes a “parshah”—a reading from the Torah, the first five books of the Bible (Genesis-Deuteronomy, which they read completely through every year) — followed by a reading from the Prophets, called the “haftarah.” The same schedule is followed every year and has been for centuries. If one looks up the yearly synagogue reading schedule (see <https://www.jewfaq.org/readings.htm#Weekly>) you will find that Isaiah 53 is never, ever read at all; not in the weekly Sabbath readings or on any special holy day. This may cause one to reason that since the Old Testament is pretty long, all of it can’t be read just during Sabbath synagogue readings and holy

days. One may also reason that there has to be many other passages that are not read as well. If you thought this, you'd be correct, for there are many other passages that are left out. But not reading Isaiah 53 makes one really wonder, why? Although Isaiah 53 is considered to be a unit itself, from a structural and literary viewpoint, the passage actually starts in Isaiah 52:13 and runs to Isaiah 53:12. But why is that important? Every year around September, one of the scheduled Sabbath readings is Isaiah 51:12-52:12. But notice that this reading stops at Isaiah 52:12. One would logically think that on the next Sabbath, the "haftarah" or "reading from the prophets" would begin with Isaiah 52:13 and continue through Isaiah 53. But that's not the case, for the next reading skips Isaiah 53 and continues with Isaiah 54:1-10. That might seem like a coincidence, if it wasn't for the fact that during a seven-week period, the Sabbath "haftarah" or "readings from the prophets" cover Isaiah chapters 49, 50, 51, 52 (up to 52:12), 54, 55, and 56. Notice that Isaiah 53 is missing from this seven-week schedule. It's hard not to believe that Isaiah 53 has been purposely removed from any regular, public, Jewish reading of it. The point is that Jews can't see Jesus in Isaiah 53 because they aren't looking at it. It goes back to what Paul said in Romans 11:25: "blindness in part has happened to Israel" and in II Corinthians 3:15: "a veil lies over their heart" (jewfaq.org). Orthodox Jews don't believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah so they spend very little time if any at all with Isaiah 53. This is because Christians believe that Isaiah 53 describes the Suffering Servant who we believe to be Jesus Christ, but orthodox Jews believe it describes Israel and their sufferings.

The lack of hearing was one of the Jews' failures. For people to come to faith in Jesus Christ, they have to hear the message that produces faith. This message is found in the gospel, or as Paul said here the word of God. For us, the Word of God is the entire Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit and profitable for spiritual growth (II Timothy 3:16). If we want a stronger, deeper faith, it will only come as we hear, read, and study God's Word

regularly. The Word of God, hearing, and faith are fundamentals of evangelism and salvation, and they always will be.

This week's lesson has reminded us that the gospel of Jesus Christ, when presented, is the only thing that can lead to salvation. As believers in the gospel message, we are commanded to share it with everyone regardless of race, color, creed, or nationality. This is because Jesus is not only the LORD of saved folk, He's also the LORD of sinners. We must spread His gospel to all.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen.

Next week's lesson August 8, 2021, "Meaning of Faith"

Background Scripture: Hebrews Chapter 11 and 13:1-19

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Commentary, Salvation For All Who Believe, Logos Adult Bible Community, by Dr. Don Fanning, Individual Salvation Available For Everyone in This Age, Romans Chapter 10, and The Present Word Lesson.