

Introduction

Today, I'm going to ask and answer what is arguably the most destiny determining of all questions. It's the question that the Philippian jailer asked Paul in Acts 16:30, **"What must I do to be saved?"**

Some of you may be thinking I'm **"preaching to the choir."** After all, we're in church and everyone in church is saved, right? Wrong! I know a man who regularly attended his Friends church for almost 40 years – and then got saved. The moral of the story is that not everyone in church is saved.

Besides, some truths are so well known that they're unknown. Christian leaders assume their people know some well-worn truth of the Bible and so never bother to explain it in any depth. The result is that their people don't know it in any depth. If a secularist asked you, **"What must I do to be saved,"** could you intelligently answer him or her?

My point is that central truths like what one must do to be saved need to be periodically addressed. So, that's what I'm going to do today.

Saved

Let's start with the word **"saved"** in verses 9 and 13 and its noun form **"salvation"** in verse 10. I saw this tasteless cartoon on a website. It says, **"Jesus saves – coupons."** I talked with a pastor who won't use the word **"saved"** because it's **"out of date"** to quote him. Non-Christians may mock the word **"saved"** and Christians ignore it, but it's a Biblical one. So, I don't hesitate to define and use it.

To be saved means to be made alive to the spiritual realm (God and the realities of His kingdom). Think of it in terms of your dog. It's dead to mathematics. It can't interact with or respond to mathematical equations, formulas, or concepts. In the same way, unsaved people are dead to the spiritual realm. They can't interact with or respond to God and the realities of His kingdom. But saved people can. Imagine that your dog suddenly comes alive to mathematics. He's able to calculate

what 30% of 90 is or how many times 14 goes into 56. In the same way, saved people come alive to the spiritual realm. They're able to hear the Holy Spirit's still small voice, speak empowered words, pray effective prayers, love their enemies, have Jesus-joy, and so on. They're able to interact with and respond to God and the realities of His kingdom now and forever.

That's what it means to be saved. But what I want us to focus on today is how we're saved.

We Must Do Something to Be Saved

Verses 5-8 teach us the first thing we need to know in that regard. Father God *initiated* and *initiates* our salvation.

First, He *initiated* it. He acted in history. Verse 6 refers to Him sending Jesus in the flesh to live and die for us. Verse 7 refers to Him raising Jesus from the dead. Three divine acts – the incarnation of Jesus (His birth and life), His crucifixion, and His resurrection – make our salvation possible. Father God *initiated* our salvation.

But, He *initiates* it as well. Verse 8 says that He brings “**the word of faith**” to us. That means He makes saving faith possible in us. Through the Holy Spirit, He works in our inner dimensions to enlighten, convict, and empower us. That in turn makes saving faith possible in us.

We see then that being saved is first and foremost the work of Father God. He *had* to do something and *has* to do something for us to be saved. Without that work of His, none of us could be.

But is there something we have to do? Do we have a part to play in it? Many of us don't know how to answer that because we've gotten so many mixed signals about it. I was in a revival service years ago as a boy that illustrates what I mean. Our church had a fiery evangelist who spent 50 minutes trying to convince us that we were saved by grace – that there wasn't anything we ourselves could do to be saved. He then gave a 25 minute altar call trying to get us to do something to be saved. I was confused I admit and it took me years to clear up the confusion.

Paul emphasizes in numerous verses that we're saved by grace. There's nothing we can do that makes us deserve salvation. But there is something we have to do in order to get it. Based on the finished work of Jesus, Father God could save everyone, but He doesn't. He chooses or elects to save only those who do something. If we do that something, He elects to save us. If we don't do that something, He elects to damn us.

That raises of course the million dollar question. What is that something? What must we do to be saved? Paul tells in our text.

Believe in Your Heart

First, according to verse 9, we must "**believe.**"

The word "**believe**" means to be convinced that something is real or true. Flossing teeth inhibits the buildup of plaque. Nothing enters the mind without affecting it for good or ill. Whatever can be done with anger can be better done without it. I'm convinced all of those things are true. And that's what it means to believe.

Now, verse 9 reveals that we must believe something to be saved. It's that Father God raised Jesus from the dead. That implies two things.

First, we must believe that Jesus is a real life person who lived on earth 2000 years ago and still lives today. If we believe that He isn't a person or that He's a dead person like Mohammed is, then we won't respond to Him. And if we don't respond to Him, we can't be saved.

Believing that Father God raised Him from the dead implies a second thing. We must believe that Jesus is the greatest and best. We must believe that He's a unique supernatural person whose competence and character are unequalled. We must be convinced that He's utterly capable and utterly lovely. We must be confident that He's "**the One.**"

My mother's cousin Lester had a sixth grade education and probably a less than average IQ. He said of Jesus, "**There ain't no one like Him.**" Robert Funk was an eminent Bible scholar who thought that Jesus was just a man who didn't rise from the dead. He said, "**I do not want my faith to be in Jesus but in what He believed.**" Based on what he

believed, Lester eventually responded to Jesus and was saved. Based on what he believed, Funk didn't respond to Him and was damned.

Those men illustrate the first thing we must do to be saved. Believe that Jesus is a living, unique, and supernatural person who's the greatest and best – who's utterly competent and utterly lovely.

Let me ask you a personal question in that regard. Do you believe that? If not, there's something you need to know. Belief is a gift from Father God. It's a gift that He Himself gives through the Holy Spirit working in our mental, emotional, and volitional processes. You can't just choose to believe in other words. But there is something you can do. You can choose to understand. I mean by that choose to understand Jesus. Father God can then give you the gift of belief as you do so.

So, if you don't believe that Jesus is the greatest and best, choose to understand Him. You can do that by reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John over and over again. These are historical gospels. Carefully examine the things Jesus said and did in them. Ask and answer this question about each thing as you do. What kind of person would He have to be to say or do this?

Examine texts like Matthew 5:27-30, Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 13:15-16; and Luke 20:41-44. You'll know if you do that Jesus is the Master Logician. He uses logic more skillfully than anyone ever has. Or examine texts like Matthew 14:25-32; Mark 4:35-41; Mark 6:33-44; and John 2:1-11. You'll know if you do that Jesus has a practical mastery over all of reality. He can do things like change molecular structures, alter barometric pressures, create something from nothing, and defy gravity. Or examine texts like Matthew 9:10-13; Mark 8:1-10; Luke 23:33-34; and John 4:7-42. You'll know that His love for people is non-discriminating, never-ending, and completely emptied of self.

That's just a sampling of what you'll come to understand or know about Jesus if you study what He said and did in the gospels. That knowledge of yours in turn enables the Holy Spirit to give you the gift of belief. You can then come to believe that Jesus is the greatest and

best. And that is the first thing we must do to be saved.

Confess with Your Mouth

There's a second thing we must do to be saved. According to verses 9 and 10, it's to confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord. This second thing flows naturally from the first. It necessarily follows from believing that He's the greatest and best.

The word "**Lord**" here connotes divine kingship. It refers to one who is absolute master of our persons and lives - who has total authority and control over us. Notice what we must do in that regard. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Declare that He is the absolute Master of our persons and lives - that He has total authority and control over us.

But confessing means more than just declaring. In the Bible, the word carries with it the idea of acting as well. We live out what we confess. We live as if what we confess is so. Do you realize what that means? We must act as if Jesus is the absolute Master of our persons and lives in order to be saved as I defined it earlier.

We do that in a specific way. We make the decision to be with Him to become like Him and to do all that He says. We then arrange our affairs around carrying out that decision as best as we can. That is, as a practical matter, what confessing Jesus as Lord means, and as you can see, it's a discernible thing. It's easy to assess whether a person has done that or not.

A few years ago, an out of town Friends pastor called me and asked me to follow upon on a new convert. He lives in Boardman but had gone forward in this pastor's church "**to receive Jesus**" and I'm quoting him. So I went to see him and informed him that he needed to learn how to be like Jesus and to do all that He says. I also offered my services to meet with him on a regular basis and to teach him that. He declined my offer though and explained why: "**The reason I went forward was to get rid of my guilt. I did some really bad things that needed forgiven. But I don't want to get involved with learning and changing things.**"

I like my life now that way it is."

That's the gist of what he said and what it shows is this. He believes, apparently, that Jesus is great enough to forgive His sins. But he doesn't believe He's great enough to confess Him as Lord. He has no intention at all of trying to become like him or to do all that He says.

Christians today, as I did early on in my ministry, endorse a dichotomy. They think and act as if people can receive Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. But Jesus, precisely because He is Lord, won't cooperate with that. It'd be contrary to His nature and acts to become people's Savior but not their Lord. A.W. Tozer pulled no punches in that regard. He wrote: **"A notable heresy has come into being through evangelical Christian circles – the widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need Him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to Him as Lord as long as we want to."** He's absolutely right. It's contrary to His nature and acts, and thus heresy, to think and act as if Jesus will become our Savior but not our Lord. We intend to be like Him and to do all the He says. We then carry out our intention as best as we can. If we do that, we're saved as I defined it. If we don't, we aren't.

Conclusion

Verses 11-13 are a fitting conclusion to what I've preached about today. Paul's quotes Isaiah 28:16 and Joel 2:32: **"Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed"** and **"Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."** His point is clear. All of us are born unsaved, need to be saved, and can be. A popular Christian counselor was asked how she got saved. She replied: **"One day I got Jesus' number and we've been connected ever since."** I have no idea what that means. I don't know what she did that day. But I do know what she and we need to do. Believe that Jesus is the greatest and best and think and act as if He's Lord. We'll be saved – have abundant life now and eternal life forever – if we do.

I ask you that question, clear and easy to understand. Personal salvation is by works only. It is given to all those who care for the poor and disadvantaged -- people who care for anyone who is without food, without friends, in need of clothing, are sick are imprisoned, etc. Salvation and eternal life in Heaven is denied to anyone who did not help the needy while he or she was alive on Earth. One interesting twist is that the "sheep" were surprised that their good works were in any way related to Jesus. They had apparently helped the poor and disadvantaged out of love and compassion, and not with any expectation that their good works would have an effect on their eternal destiny.

One interesting feature of this passage is that salvation is solely based upon a persons acts of charity to others; it is in no way dependent upon what the individual believes about Jesus' status, or what God -- if any -- the person worships. So, Matthew 25 would imply that [Agnostics](#), [Atheists](#), [Baha'is](#), [Buddhists](#), [Christians](#), [Deists](#), [Hindus](#), [Muslims](#), [Satanists](#), [Wiccans](#), and others will attain [Heaven after death](#) if they are kind to others by observing their faith's [Ethic of Reciprocity](#) -- the Golden Rule.

The literal, straight-forward interpretation of this passage reveals that salvation is by works, not faith. This is a profound thought, which leads directly to religious [inclusivism and pluralism](#).

This conflicts with the teachings of many religions that only their followers will attain Heaven. Also, fundamentalist and other evangelical Christians generally teach that salvation is by faith, not works. They have various [alternate interpretations of this passage](#) that make it compatible with their beliefs.

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