



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 1 - Number 11
The week of December 13, 2015

Saving Faith

Acts 8:4-25

THIS WEEK'S CORE BELIEF

Salvation by Grace - We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful humanity, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The following is an excerpt from John Wesley's sermon, which was preached at St. Mary's Oxford, at the university chapel, on June 18, 1738. The sermon is entitled "Salvation by Faith."

"All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of his mere grace, bounty, or favour; his free, undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved; man having no claim to the least of his mercies. It was free grace that 'formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul,' and stamped on that soul the image of God, and 'put all things under his feet.' The same free grace continues to us, at this day, life, and breath, and all things. For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God's hand. 'All our works, Thou, O God, hast wrought in us.' These, therefore, are so many more instances of free mercy: and whatever righteousness may be found in man, this is also the gift of God.

Wherewithal then shall a sinful man atone for any the least of his sins? With his own works? No. Were they ever so many or holy, they are not his own, but God's. But indeed they are all unholy and sinful themselves, so that every one of them needs a fresh atonement. Only corrupt fruit grows on a corrupt tree. And his heart is altogether corrupt and abominable; being 'come short of the glory of God,' the glorious righteousness at first impressed on his soul, after the image of his great Creator. Therefore, having nothing, neither righteousness nor works, to plead, his mouth is utterly stopped before God.

If then sinful men find favour with God, it is 'grace upon grace!' If God vouchsafe still to pour fresh blessings upon us, yea, the greatest of all blessings, salvation; what can we say to these things, but, 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!' And thus it is. Herein 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died' to save us. 'By grace' then 'are ye saved through faith.' Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.

What faith is it then through which we are saved? It may be answered, first, in general, it is a faith in Christ: Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper objects of it. Herein, therefore, it is sufficiently, absolutely distinguished from the faith either of ancient or modern heathens. And from the faith of a devil it is fully distinguished by this: it is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart. For thus saith the Scripture, 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness;' and, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.'

And herein does it differ from that faith which the Apostles themselves had while our Lord was on earth, that it acknowledges the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection. It acknowledges his death as the only sufficient means of redeeming man from death eternal, and his resurrection as the restoration of us all to life and immortality; inasmuch as he 'was delivered for our sins, and rose again for our justification.' Christian faith is then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us; and, in consequence hereof, a closing with him, and cleaving to him, as our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,' or, in one word, our salvation."

It is my hope that our understanding of salvation by grace through faith matches the one provided by Wesley above.

This Week's Complementary Passage

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Marking Guide for Acts
(not all words occur in the passage)

appointed

baptized

Caesar

enemy/demons/Satan

eternal life

fathers & children [in one color
different from Moses]

Gentiles

gospel

grace

Holy Spirit

in the name of Jesus Christ

Jesus

Jews

Law (of Moses)

men of the council

Moses [in different color from
fathers & children]

prayer

repent (repentance)

resurrection (raised up)

salvation

suffering

the Way

the promise of the Father

witnesses

word of God

STEP ONE . . .

READING what the passage says
(Read it at least three times)
Acts 8:4-25 (ESV)

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

STEP TWO . . .

OBSERVING how the passage moves

Return to the passage and **Mark key words, phrases and movements:**

- Circle all of the words in this passage that speak of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, etc.).
- Underline the significant verbs/action words in this passage.
- Highlight Acts 8:4.
- In Acts 8:5, highlight the phrase "proclaimed to them the Christ."
- In Acts 8:6, highlight the phrase "the crowds with one accord paid attention."
- Highlight Acts 8:8.
- In Acts 8:9-13, underline the words "amazed," "great/greatest," and "believed."
- In Acts 8:14-24, underline the word "received" and the phrase "laid their hands on them."
- In Acts 8:21, highlight the phrase "your heart is not right before God."
- In Acts 8:24, highlight the phrase "Pray for me to the Lord."
- Highlight Acts 8:25.

STEP THREE . . .

Ask the five “W” questions and the one “H” question:

1. **WHO** is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? And, to **whom** is it speaking?
2. **WHAT** is the subject of the passage? What does the passage say about the subject?
3. **WHEN** do or will the events occur? When did something happen to a particular person, people, or nation?
4. **WHERE** did or will this happen?
5. **WHY** is something said or mentioned? Why would or will this happen? Why at this time? Why this person?
6. **HOW** will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

STEP FOUR . . .

UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

Commentary on Acts 8:4-25

8:4 - Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Notice it was *not* the Apostles, because they remained in Jerusalem, but the Hellenistic Jewish Christians scattered throughout the region who became the early evangelists. It is amazing that the worldwide mission of the church was instigated, not by the Apostles, but by Stephen and Philip.

8:5 - Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews because they had a mixed racial background. This was related to the Assyrian exile of 722 B.C. that repopulated the area of the northern Ten Tribes with pagans who intermarried with the small remaining Jewish population. “Samaria” in this verse reminds us of Acts 1:8 – *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

8:9 - A man named Simon. Whether this man truly believed or was simply a charlatan seeking power is uncertain. Perhaps we should give him the benefit of the doubt based on his answer in vs. 24. Some versions of the Bible call this man “Simon Magus,” because ‘magus’ is the Greek word for ‘magician.’

Practiced magic. Many magicians claimed to be able to manipulate the supernatural or forces of nature. Often these forces (or gods) were seen to be in conflict with humanity, and by taking the side of this force or that force the possessor of the knowledge could control the forces for personal gain. These individuals claimed they could foretell future events, control future events, interpret future events and dreams, or administer curses on or provide protection for individuals, cities, nations, armies, etc.

8:12 - Both men and women. Contextually there may be two significances to this phrase. In Acts 8:3, Saul persecuted both “men and women” and here, the gospel was also saving “men and women.” Also, in Judaism only men participated in the Jewish initiation rite of circumcision, but with the advent of the Christian faith, both men and women participated in the initiation rite of baptism.

8:13 - Simon himself believed. Most evangelicals use this term “believed” in a very definitive sense, but there are places in the NT (John 8:31) where it denotes something less than conversion (John 8:59). Initial faith is not the only criteria for conversion (Matthew 13:1-23). Continuance in the faith and obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ are also evidence of a true relationship with Him.

8:14 - Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John. Apparently the Apostles wanted to give their official sanction to this radical and unusual movement of the Holy Spirit among the Samaritans, who were traditionally a hated racial group. Philip, like Stephen before him, caught Jesus' implication of world-wide evangelization quicker than the Twelve. Also, notice that believing in Jesus is parallel to "receiving the word of God." It is noteworthy that Peter and John were sent. Peter was the acknowledged leader of the apostolic group and John was the one who earlier wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans (Luke 9:54).

8:15 - Prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. It is very difficult to build a theology of salvation from the book of Acts because the order of salvific events and the salvific events themselves differ from passage to passage. The Holy Spirit in this passage refers to a confirmation, like at Pentecost, showing that God had accepted and saved these Samaritans. They could not have truly been saved in the first place without the work of the Holy Spirit. The experience of Pentecost set a pattern, which God reproduced in the experience of different racial and geographical people groups, to show and confirm to the believing Jewish church that God Himself had fully and completely accepted a new group. The Spirit's manifestation in Acts is thereby theologically different from the Corinthian tongues. This text cannot be used to demand a Corinthian-like experience to confirm salvation. Luke simply records what occurred, not what should occur every time.

8:18-21 - The interaction between Simon and Peter in these verses causes us wonder whether Simon was saved or not. Peter's word can be taken as a curse or as a warning. All new believers have weak and incorrect information about the gospel, but does Simon's demand for the power to give others the Holy Spirit have an added element of egotism? Can people be saved with conflicting priorities in their lives? These are import questions to reflect upon.

8:21 - Your heart is not right before God. The terms "right" and "just" and their various forms in the OT, come from a term for a river reed found in Mesopotamia. These reeds were fifteen to twenty feet tall and straight. God took this word, which was used in construction (for checking the horizontal straightness of walls), to describe His own ethical character. God is the standard, the ruler, the straight edge by which all humans are judged. In light of this, all people fail the test. Some commentators think that Simon is not yet a true believer, but continues to be a slave to sin and needs to repent. Other commentators think Simon is a true believer, but is in need of instruction and discipline.

8:22 - Repent. This is a decisive and urgent command.

Pray. Talking to God through prayer is evidence of a personal relationship. Prayer is response to conviction, which leads to repentance, is evidence of the indwelling Spirit.

If possible. The term 'if' denotes a contingency based on Simon's willingness to repent and pray for forgiveness. His mindset and actions are a serious deviation from normative Christianity.

The intent of your heart. Sin begins in the thought life. Ancient rabbis said that the mind is like a plowed garden ready for seed. What we allow in through our eyes and ears takes root. If we dwell on it, these thoughts become actions. This is why the NT asserts that we should "gird up the loins of our minds" (1 Peter 1:13) or "renew your mind" (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23).

8:23 - the gall of bitterness. This phrase refers to a bitter spirit, usually associated with uncontrolled anger and the danger of apostasy. Gall may also mean poison or venom.

The bond of iniquity. Jesus could free Simon from this evil bondage (meaning shackled or tied to something) to personal power as he freed him from the penalty of sin. Sin has two aspects: (1) death both physically and spiritually and (2) who is in control in the sinner's life (it can affect both the saved and the lost: 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Sin must be dealt with both in time and in eternity; its penalty and power must be dealt with. Only Christ and the Spirit can do it, but we as believers must allow them to work in our lives.

8:25 - Preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. This shows the marked change of attitude on the part of the Apostles toward the Samaritan people.

STEP FIVE . . .

SUMMARIZING the message

Persecution against the church, beginning with the martyrdom of Stephen, compelled the early church to leave Jerusalem and move into the regions of Judea and Samaria. God used the pressure of persecution as a catalyst to fulfill Jesus' command to the church in Acts 1:8. Sometimes the pressure God allows into our lives is His way of stretching us into a new experience of ministry and outreach.

One of the individuals God used was Philip. He began preaching the gospel outside of Jerusalem and, as he spoke, people stopped and listened. In addition, powerful miracles accompanied Philip's preaching as a demonstration of God's power to heal, both physically and spiritually. Finally, those who believed the gospel experienced great joy.

Now there was a man named Simon who, for some time, had captivated the people of Samaria with his magical powers. (By the way, when the Bible refers to magic or sorcery, it does not mean slick little maneuvers in which the hand is quicker than the eye. Rather, it refers to the occult. It refers to someone who makes a connection with demonic powers and is then used to perform inexplicable acts). In Simon's case, people from every station of life, perceived his powers to be supernatural and causing a widespread delusion. But when the people of Samaria eventually believed the gospel, they experienced a totally different power—the power of God to transform their lives. The result was that even Simon believed. After he was baptized, he stayed with Philip for a while, and was amazed by the miracles he performed.

If this were the only thing we knew about Simon we would be convinced he had become a Christian. Luke's language even describes the simple steps of saving faith—he believed and was baptized. He publicly confessed Christ and openly identified with those who belonged to Jesus. However, the rest of the story makes it clear that Simon was not a believer. He was a fraud. He said the right words and did the right things. He was baptized. But Simon was not a changed man. His counterfeit faith was exposed when, on another occasion, he observed the Apostle's laying their hands on the believers of Samaria and the Holy Spirit coming upon them. He was impressed and offered the Apostle's money to be able to do the same thing. He thought the power of God could be purchased with currency. Today the act of trying to buy religious power with money is named after him—"simony." Simon did not understand the grace and mercy of God.

Peter confronted Simon directly and bluntly. He said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" Our English translations are rather mild when compared with Peter's literal words. He firmly said, "To hell with you and your money!" Peter pointed out that Simon's real problem is that he did not possess saving faith. He said, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God." In effect, Peter says, "That's your problem, Simon. You may have assented to belief intellectually but your heart is not right before God. You're a phony. You have pretended to be something you are not." In addition, Peter adds that Simon's heart was full of bitterness and still enslaved to sin. He had never been set free. Peter then called him to repentance. Even Simon's response to Peter's appeal was shallow and spiritually unaffected. Instead of praying personally, he asked Peter to pray for him. Instead of repenting, he only wanted to escape punishment. Simon is the first example of someone in the early church whose "faith" was a sham.

The problem with Simon has been an issue in the church ever since—unregenerate church members. One of the greatest concerns in the church has always been people who wear the "look" of Christianity but lack the "heart" of saving faith. People call themselves Christians but remain unchanged in heart and life and render the church weak and ineffective.

Saving faith is a deliberate turning away from all hope and trust based on self-merit and self-improvement. It assumes an attitude toward God of trusting only in His power to save, based only in the death of Christ on the cross for our cleansing from sin and all unrighteousness. If you have never prayed to receive Jesus as your Savior, the following prayer is where it can begin for you today:

Dear God,

I acknowledge that I am a sinner. I have fallen short of Your glory in many ways. I have lived my life for myself. I am sorry and I repent. I ask You to forgive me. I believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. I believe He rose again and lives forevermore. I know that Jesus did what I could not do for myself. I ask You to take control of my life. I give all that I am to You. Help me to live every day in a way that pleases You. I love You and I thank You that I will spend all eternity with You.

STEP SIX . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

1. Read Acts 1:8. Why do you think it took persecution to force the church to begin communicating the gospel outside of Jerusalem?
2. Who were the ones that were scattered because of persecution? (cf. Acts 8:1). Why do you think the Apostles remained in the city?
3. The gospel spreads to Samaria. Why is this movement of the gospel such a significant event? What does this say to us about the gospel's role in healing racial division in our culture today?
4. Beginning in v. 8 we meet Simon. Take a moment and build a profile of Simon based on what Luke tells us in this passage.
5. What indications exist that Simon did, at first, believe?
6. Why did Peter and John travel to Samaria to see if the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit? Is this event prescriptive (something we must follow today) or descriptive (a unique experience in the early church)?
7. What do you think could have been Simon's motivation for offering to buy the power to be able give the Holy Spirit? Discuss the flaws in his thinking.
8. How did Peter react to Simon? Do you think Peter was unduly harsh?
9. Why was Simon's response to Peter's appeal inferior in terms of what was actually needed?
10. How would you define genuine repentance and saving faith?

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

The Godhead *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

The Sufficient Atonement of Christ *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

The Resurrection and Return of Christ *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Unity in Christ *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

Undiluted Worship *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

Constant Abiding *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

Desperate Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Total Forgiveness *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

Tangible Compassion *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

Generous Giving *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

God Space *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

Love - a sincere affection for others *1 John 4:10-12*

Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances *John 15:11*

An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

Peace - an abiding sense of harmony *Philippians 4:6-7*

Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

Patience - a willingness to stick with things *Proverbs 3:3-4*

Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart *Job 6:14*

An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly *1 Thess. 5:15*

Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty *Psalm 26:3*

Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

Gentleness/Humility - an attitude of humility without any entitlement; a lack of self-awareness *Philippians 4:5; 2:3-4*

Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Humility is considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely

Titus 2:11-13

The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

Hope - a certainty of what is to come *Hebrews 6:19-20*

Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.

Each week this Bible Study will feature either a core belief, practice or virtue vital for growing disciples.

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