

Who Has Believed?

This violence has got to stop,” said an elderly black man whom LaDonna did not know to a woman he was sitting next to. “When are we going to stop killing each other?”

LaDonna was at the funeral of De’Shane Thomas, her friend Regina’s cousin. He was eulogized as having “accepted Christ at a young age.” At the time of his death, the drug dealer was gunned down during an altercation that police are still investigating.

More than a week later, LaDonna visited her friend.

“What’s going to happen to us when we die?” Regina asked. “I know you’ve always walked with the Lord. But I don’t do real bad stuff. I’m a good person. I just wonder sometimes. Will that be enough?”

“No, it won’t,” said LaDonna. “God loves us and has prepared a way for us to be with Him forever in heaven.”

“I know. Jesus. The Cross,” said Regina.

“Yes. Jesus. The Cross,” said LaDonna. “So?”

“So? What?” asked Regina.

“So, have you ever confessed that Christ is Lord and asked Him to be your Savior?”

“Well, no, not really,” said Regina.

“Well, that is the way to Christ and to heaven,” said LaDonna. “But only if you mean it with all of your heart. It’s not a formula or a secret code. God is looking at your heart.”

1. *What obstacles do people often voice when hesitating to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior?*

2. *Why is the choice to trust Jesus for salvation such a personal decision?*

3. *What factors played an important part in your own decision to follow Jesus?*

Zealous for God

Romans 10:1-4, KJV

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Romans 10:1-4, NIV

¹Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ²For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Though Paul was a missionary to the Gentiles, his first stop when visiting a town was the synagogue. He felt compelled to communicate the Gospel to Jews.

Paul hoped that one day, his Jewish brethren would accept Jesus and commit their hearts, souls, and minds to Him. While they were zealous for God, they had expectations of a Messiah who would destroy the Romans and restore Israel to the golden age of Solomon.

Paul exceeded most of his countrymen when it came to compliance to the law. It was from this vantage point that Paul reminded his readers that there was no way anyone could attain the righteousness demanded by God. Since Christ represented the total fulfillment of the law, and its demands for sacrificial atonement, only He could be the source of true righteousness.

4. *What was Paul's hope for the Israelites?*

5. *What was keeping the Jews of Paul's day from believing in Jesus?*

Belief and Justification

Romans 10:5-13, KJV

5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Romans 10:5-13, NIV

⁵Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." ⁶But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷"or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

⁸But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The sacrifices in the temple were to “cover” the Israelites’ failure to keep the law, but even Paul realized the blood of goats could never atone for his sin. After Paul’s conversion, he realized the futility of trying to be holy by keeping the law. Only Jesus could accomplish on Paul’s behalf what he could never obtain on his own.

In our belief after repentance, we are trusting Jesus to do for us what we cannot accomplish on our own. Part of saving faith is believing that the Resurrection actually took place.

Paul goes on to say that when the mouth expresses what the heart believes, that is the evidence a person has experienced saving faith. What results at that moment of belief is justification—the one-time event in the life of the new believer that declares him or her “not guilty” in God’s eyes, not because of works, but by the acknowledgement that they are dependent on Jesus to save them.

Paul states that there was no difference between a Jew and a Gentile when it came to salvation. God’s grace was available to anyone through a commitment of heart, soul, and mind to Jesus. Salvation is the free gift of God, given without hesitation to those who repent and believe.

6. *What is unique about the type of righteousness that is obtained through faith?*

7. *What does a person have to do to be saved?*

Faith by Hearing

Romans 10:14-17, KJV

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they

Romans 10:14-17, NIV

¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can anyone preach unless they are

preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

¹⁶But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

¹⁷Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Paul experienced a major change to his theological narrative when Jesus confronted him on his way to Damascus. But he realized that his fellow Jews would not likely be able to do this without some help. How would they find out what Paul discovered without someone telling them the truth?

The other apostles had Jerusalem covered when it came to proclaiming the Gospel—and then seeing thousands turning their lives over to Jesus. Peter and Paul were spreading the Gospel through the Roman Empire. But the newly established churches must also proclaim Jesus. Those who have been tasked with proclaiming the good news of God to others will do so regardless of the consequences.

The community of believers must convey the Gospel in a way that increases receptivity and addresses the God-shaped hole in a person's heart that he or she is trying to fill. The Holy Spirit softens a person's heart to God's grace, and salvation is found.

8. *What was necessary for the Jews of Paul's day to understand the Gospel?*

9. *What is the usual means by which people understand the path to salvation?*

Righteousness and Faith

Many in Paul's audience believed they could achieve righteousness through their historical position as "God's people" and by following the law of Moses. A key part of Paul's message to the Jews was that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah predicted by God's prophets. The fulfillment of prophecy in hundreds of details forms a convincing argument that Jesus was indeed God's Messiah, the Savior for the world.

We may say we are not bound by extensive Old Testament laws, but Jesus summarized the whole law into only two commands: Love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40). If we're honest, it doesn't take long to realize we can't even fully keep these by our own ability alone. Therefore, we cannot stand in our own righteousness before a holy God. But God has made this possible through Jesus' sacrificial death in our place. His resurrection proved He triumphed over death and fully paid the penalty for our sins.

What we need to do to claim this righteousness is to believe in our hearts that Jesus is fully God and Lord of all. Saving faith trusts that Jesus accomplished what we cannot do on our own. We confirm our belief and heart change when we confess Jesus as the living Lord. Our belief and confession work together to bring us to salvation, and we stand righteous (not guilty) before God.

Once we have received God's mercy and gracious salvation, He calls us to share that news with others. Many people come to faith through hearing about Jesus, the Word of God, who freely gives eternal life to all who ask.

10. *In what ways do we rely on our perceived righteousness?*

11. *Why can our good deeds not save us from the penalty of sin?*

12. *In what way(s) is God calling you to share the Good News about Jesus with others?*

My Story

Some of us already have a testimony to share of when we heard the Gospel, believed it in our hearts, and then confessed Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Others are still searching for Him or perhaps scoffing at the thought of needing a Savior. Sharing your story with such a person may help that person see how much they need the wonderful, life-changing message of Jesus as Lord and Savior.

► *If you are a follower of Jesus, briefly write a few sentences about how believing in Jesus and declaring Him as your Lord and Savior has changed your life. If you are still skeptical about Jesus and the Christian faith, invite someone from your class to share his or her testimony with you and why it's the greatest message they have ever heard.*

KEY VERSE

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. —Romans 10:9, KJV

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. —Romans 10:9, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 27 through June 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 43:8-13—God's Witnesses.
- Tues.** Psalm 113—Praise the Lord!
- Wed.** Galatians 3:19-29—God's Children Through Faith.
- Thurs.** Proverbs 10:19-25—The Lord's Blessing Makes Rich.
- Fri.** Matthew 6:19-24—Your Treasure Is with Your Heart.
- Sat.** Matthew 6:25-34—Seek First God's Kingdom.
- Sun.** Colossians 1:24-2:3—Christ, the Most Precious Gift.