

“I’m Saved! So What?”

Sermon – March 9, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

In my youth I often had, uh, let’s call them “discussions” with peers who were Christian but had different perspectives.

One that I found curious was “being saved.” For some of them today’s lesson in Paul’s letter to the Romans 10:9-10 said it all:

“...because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.”

Since this is an essential tenet of being a Christian, it wasn’t that I disagreed as much as the emphasis of being saved. Their attitude seemed to be that “I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior so I’m saved and so all I have to do be with others who believe that and convert those who don’t.”

They were good, sincere people of faith and, frankly, at the time were better at quoting the bible. For me, though, something was missing. You just say “I believe” and that’s it? The answer is, “No, but it’s a start.”

I have found over the years that saying something out loud in the physical presence of others does have a real effect on you. Mentally, it roots you to be more real. Emotionally, it makes you more invested. And socially, it lets people better know who you are.

The key here is that we engage other people with some kind of speech act, giving outward expression to something in our hearts. That’s why we say, “I do” at weddings and “I apologize” when we have offended someone.

Quoting from Deuteronomy 30:14, Paul says in verse 8, “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we

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proclaim.” The Greek here for “word” is not *logos* like in the Gospel of John and elsewhere, but *rema* [HREH-mah], which means “spoken word”. We say out loud—proclaim—our faith.

In other words, all sayings and deeds must be done through the lens of faith, which orients a person’s mind and heart toward God. Also, this lens of faith must see what Christ has done for God’s righteousness.

Christians proclaim what God has done through his Son Jesus.

Still, as I considered, “I believe, therefore I’m saved,” I recalled Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

Thus, faith, is more than a proclamation; it involves specific content and action. Faith means to acknowledge the power of God and to trust him and because of this confession, a person must live by the spirit of Jesus.

As Paul indicates in today’s passage this spoken word of God’s good news actually gets inside of people, that they believe in their hearts.

And “believe” here is a verb, not a noun. It is a word of action.

So, if we *believe*:

- How do we demonstrate that we have entrusted our whole being to God?
- How does having confidence that God raised Jesus from the dead shape the way we live now?
- How do our speech acts offer evidence that we have entrusted our whole being to God?

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- What are the different ways that we confess and what is it that we confess?
- When we think of the “people of God” whom do we include in that group? What do these people look like? Do they all look like us? In what ways? In what ways do they look different from us?

These are questions for us to consider in general but are particularly apropos for Lent. Because the life of faith is not one that works to be righteous but rather one that enacts the righteousness given by God through Christ.

Along these lines, we have the Gospel passage today from Luke in which Jesus and the devil engage in a verbal sparring match. Each of them quotes scripture, but only Jesus speaks with the integrity that connects lips and heart.

Underlying the dialogue between the devil and Jesus are two competing storylines.

The devil offers a storyline of
self-indulgence (make yourself bread from stones),
self-aggrandizement (all the nations of the world will belong to you if you worship me),
and self-serving religious identity (if you are the son of God cast yourself from the top of the temple).

Meanwhile, Jesus responds with quotations drawn from the Old Testament that show
awareness of the true source of life and identity (he knows that life is more than food),
his reliance on God (the one worthy of true worship and service),

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and his understanding of God’s character (not one to be tested).

Jesus’ responses are rooted in an underlying narrative that he is dependent on God, rather than self, for life, glory, and identity.

Because for Luke, the issue is not so much about personal temptations around faith, but rather to Jesus’ unique vocation as the Spirit-anointed Son of God. For Luke the temptation, or more accurately, the test, is about how Jesus will fulfill his Spirit-anointed vocation as Son of Man, Son of God.

You can see this because although all three synoptic gospels put the temptation narrative shortly after Jesus’ baptism, Luke uniquely sandwiches the story.

He precedes the temptation story with Jesus’ genealogy tracing back to Adam, the first man, thus highlighting Jesus as the Son of Man, the Human.

He then follows today’s story with Jesus’ hometown sermon-gone-awry in Nazareth, which we actually heard on 2/2/25, Scout Sunday.

This focus of Luke on Jesus’ vocation—literally his call—might play into the order of the tests is different from Matthew. Luke puts the test of Jesus throwing himself off the pinnacle as the third test instead of the second test as in Matthew.

The reason might lie in the last two verses: “Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him—until an opportune time.”

Jesus passed the tests—this time. But he’s immediately tested again when his first sermon in his hometown when they try to throw him off a cliff because they were enraged by his teachings, particularly his claim

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that God's favor would extend to foreigners and not just their own people.

He's tested in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prays for God to “remove the cup from me.” And finally, he’s tested, not from throwing himself off the temple, but to come down from the cross.

And, in some ways, God himself is put to the test to not step in to save Jesus. Jesus passes his final test by not being saved and as a result we are saved.

Being saved, though, doesn’t mean we get to sit back and continue to live however we want, comforting ourselves because we said we believe we’re going to heaven.

Believing in our hearts mean we are changed in who we are *and* what we do. Being saved means we are free to do his will without fear of consequences, just like those early Christians did when they were tossed into the arena for practicing their faith.

For if we truly believe, then as Jesus proclaimed at his first sermon in Nazareth we will work to bring “good news to the poor... release to the captives... recovery of sight to the blind... the oppressed go free... the year of the Lord’s favor” despite what forces around us do or espouse otherwise, including other “just believe” Christians or our Government. And, like Jesus, being tested in the process.

Believing in Jesus means doing something for those in need. Because while confessing “Jesus is Lord” is the start of our faith, it is hardly the end.

In name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.