

Salvation by Grace, not Works

Witnessing Made Easier—part 9

August 28, 2022

DAY 1: Is man good enough to be saved?

1. The testimony of the entire bible, from Genesis 3 through the book of Revelation, covering 1,600 years of history is this: no man or woman is good enough to be saved.
2. And yet, our secular culture, and even some in a religious culture, not only believe that man is basically good, but that virtually everyone will be saved.
3. This begs the question: how can secular man and even religious man believe that man is basically good and that virtually everyone will be saved?
4. The stunning answer is rooted in the nature of what it means to be a sinner.

5. The bible not only lists hundreds of sins, but also illustrates, in the lives of real people, how sin operates in every conceivable way.

6. What is abundantly clear is that man is blind to his own sin. How can that be?

- a. He deceives himself.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt. Who can understand it?

- b. He is willfully blind.

Isaiah 42:16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.

- c. He flatters himself.

Psalms 36:2 In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin.

- d. He only sees his good intentions, not his bad actions, bad words, and bad relating.

Job 32:1 So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.

- e. Any bad actions, bad words, or bad relating is deemed justifiable based on the circumstances he found himself.

Job 32:2 But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God.

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 2: How can someone be saved?

1. If a person is not saved by being good enough, then how can a person be saved?

Titus 3:5 ...He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

a. What is easily missed in this discussion about how anyone can be saved are Paul's first three words in this verse. God is the one who saves us. It is similar to a lifeguard saving someone caught in a rip current in the Pacific Ocean. Unless the lifeguard does the work, the person will drown.

b. To make sure we understand this crucial aspect of salvation, Paul plainly states that we are not saved by righteous things we had done—not good works, not good intentions, not meaning well, etc.

c. Paul finishes the first sentence with the reason God can save anyone when they cannot save themselves—it is His mercy. He is merciful to wayward sheep who realized and confess their waywardness.

d. The next sentence details two things that God does on inside us, in our heart, that makes salvation possible. What are they?

e. Paul says we have been justified—which means we are declared righteous in God's sight. That is only possible because of the substitutionary death of our Savior, who died in our place.

f. We are justified by grace—our salvation is gifted to us.

g. Our salvation guarantees eternal life after this life ends for us.

h. We are counted as an heir in God's family. We have family privileges, blessings, and power to meet the rigors of life in this world.

i. Lastly, we will inherit an amazing future in heaven!

2. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: Prodigal son: the audience

1. The parable of the prodigal son is probably Jesus' most well-known parable. Usually, the prime focus is on the prodigal son and the response of his father.
2. Secondly, we think about the older son, and his dirty, rotten attitudes toward both his younger brother and their father.
3. What is most easily missed in this story is the context of the story, and the audience to whom this story was told.

4. Luke tells us there were two very different groups of people present when Jesus told this story.
Luke 15:1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."
5. The first group was made up of "tax collectors and sinners." Both of these groups were considered the dregs of society.
 - a. "Tax collectors" were the equivalent of IRS agents for Rome. Whether they were Jewish or Gentile didn't matter to the populace. They were equally hated. One reason they were hated is that the tax collectors were given an amount they needed to collect. Rome didn't care how they collected it as long as they met their quota. These tax collectors were notorious cheats.
 - b. "Sinners" were those people looked down upon because of obvious moral failing.

6. The second group Luke mentions are "Pharisees and the teachers of the law."
 - a. "Pharisees" were the men at the top of the Jewish religious hierarchy. They were part of the Jewish religious ruling class as members of the Sanhedrin. They were best (and worst) known for their outward scrupulous fixation with ridiculous applications of Jewish law. They prided themselves as the exemplars of what it meant to be a moral Jew.
 - b. "Teachers of the law" were the educated class of bible teaching. They also prided themselves on their outward obedience to Jewish law and morality.

7. On one hand this second group looked down on the tax collectors and sinners as moral reprobates. They were outraged that Jesus would not only talk with them, but share a meal with them. Notice also, the tax collectors and sinners "gathered around to hear Jesus." They were drawn to Him. Meanwhile the pharisees and teachers of the law were repelled by Jesus.

8. The parable is primarily aimed at this second group—the Pharisees and the teaches of the law.

9. Those who know they are immoral, like the tax collectors and sinners are given hope by the parable.
10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: The younger son was saved.

Luke 15:11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

1. In this parable, the tax collectors and sinners likely relate to the prodigal son.
2. What did you notice about the prodigal’s son’s descent into sin?
3. What did you notice about the prodigal son repenting and coming home?
4. What did you notice about the father’s attitude and actions toward his sons’ return? (Jesus depicts God the Father in the character of the father in the story).
5. What is easily missed is that the Pharisees and teachers of the law should have been able to resonate with the prodigal son, but their pride, would never allow them to admit their sinfulness.
6. What strikes you from the story of the prodigal son?

DAY 5: The older son was not saved

1. We come to the climax of the story, especially aimed at the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They are depicted as the older brother in the story.

Luke 15:25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

2. The older brother had his stated reasons for his terrible attitude (vv. 28-30). But why do you think the older brother really had such a terrible attitude? Are there several real reasons?

3. The father in the story addresses the older brother (vv. 31-32). What strikes you about the father’s response to the older brother?

4. The episode with the older brother is a direct hit on the Pharisees and teachers of the law. What did they not understand about God?

5. Why did they have such horrible attitudes toward tax collectors and sinners?

6. We end this week illustrating that no one is saved by works, or being good enough. What is your biggest takeaway from this week’s devotions?