

Salvation by Faith alone (Jesus' teaching)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 November 2014

Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0 : 00] The Lord God indeed, powerful justification by faith alone, and then two weeks more, justification! by grace alone. And I'm going to do something very dangerous. I'm going to show you a book! that I haven't actually read. In fact, I didn't even know that it existed until this morning when Ross told me about it. But it is on the subject of justification by faith alone.

So you might want to start turning the recording on. Five solas of the Reformed faith. Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone. Sola Fide, Faith alone. Sola Gratia, Grace alone. Sola Christus, Christ alone. And Sola Dea Gloria, to God alone and the glory. In fact, though, only two of them can be unequivocally traced to the writings of the Reformers themselves. And those are the two that I've put up on the screen here. The words of Philip Melancthon, who I think Martin Luther described as his drinking buddy, didn't he? Philip and I had drunk our beer and the Lord worked. Well, that's the Philip I'm quoting from here. Philip Melancthon. Sola Gratia, Justificama, set sola Fide, Justificama. Only by grace do you justify and only by faith are we justified. And just so we're clear what the Reformers meant by this, I put another quote up there from Martin Luther. He's not saying justification by faith without works, but rather that faith is inseparable from works. And we'll look into that in a little bit more detail.

So, two of the five solas, but over the next few weeks we're going to be looking at those. So, Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith alone, we say Luther's doctrine, but of course he didn't invent it really. But it was Luther who, in a sense, rediscovered it as it had been covered over by tradition and amendments and rules that changed its meaning.

But that was 500 years ago, 400 years ago, 500 nearly now. Is it relevant now? Well, it is, because in fact it's recently come under attack. And even by relatively conservative scholars such as N.T. Wright, which I think was the motivation for writing this book, in fact, I think.

[2 : 58] Luther took the righteousness of God described in Romans 5 as being the righteousness of God God provides. And people have disputed that. Now, I'm not competent to get into a detailed argument over the meaning of Paul's writings. You have to leave that to the academic theologians, I guess. But though Martin Luther, for him, this was the eureka moment when he realized that this is the righteousness that God imputes to us. Of course, Martin Luther himself was a competent theologian.

He was an academic theologian. He didn't base his doctrine on one text. And indeed, if he had, we would rightly be very suspicious of it. And so what I would like to persuade you, really, that the justification by faith alone is the teaching of the whole scripture.

And if you look in the Old Testament, well, we know the verse, don't we? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. But you could look at all through the Old Testament. And the prophets always reminded the people of God that it's faith that really mattered. But I won't have time to do that. And you get other people, of course, who say, oh, well, this was all invented by Paul.

Jesus didn't really teach that sort of thing. So what I'm going to do, in fact, this evening, is just look at the teaching of Jesus.

[4 : 41] Even then, it won't be exhaustive, but look at some of the teaching of Jesus. Several people asked him, what must I do to be saved, or words to that effect. And interestingly, he gave different answers.

And yet, if we're going to look at those answers and see that actually, perhaps there was only really one answer that he gave, or that was given in different words. Justification by faith alone as well. Of course, the Roman Catholics, in a sense, believe in justification by faith. It wasn't that it was something that completely, you know, anathema to them as such. It's the alone bit that worried

them.

And it was the alone bit that they wouldn't, well, they spoke against in the Council of Trent. Because the Catholics argued that after conversion, works are required to maintain a state of grace.

And unfortunately, Ben was telling me that even some evangelicals, in the Ukraine, sometimes you find a similar doctrine being taught.

[5 : 55] That if you don't believe that salvation is by grace alone, then somehow you think you have to maintain the state of grace by your own efforts.

And of course, people argue that you can't say justification by faith alone, because if you do, there's no motivation to live a holy life. Well, of course, that's not a new argument.

Paul himself faced it, as did James. But the Protestants replied that this argument reintroduces salvation by works, if you say we've got to have works after conversion.

And it's a denial of the grace of God. And it actually leads to unscriptural practices, such as the Maria's and self-flagellation, penance, which are not found in the scripture or in the apostolic teaching, certainly not in the teaching of Jesus.

And things like the sale of indulgences, which of course was one of the things that sparked the Reformation. If you don't know what an indulgence is, they were sort of get out of jail card that was sold by the Pope and the church.

[7 : 06] You contributed to the funds of the church, and you got an indulgence either for yourself that would reduce your time in purgatory. And what's more, if you don't teach justification by faith alone, it results in hypocrisy.

And for example, priests who take a vow of celibacy, but are unable to live up to it. We came across that just recently by the Roman Catholic priest in Arundel, bishop in Arundel, didn't we?

No, I'm not saying, of course, that evangelicals are without sin or live up always to what they claim to believe in. Of course, we know that's not the case.

But if salvation is by faith alone, then there is always hope. There is a way back. And in the end, we can't resolve this issue on a basis of pragmatism.

We need to look and see what the scriptures actually say. And why does a 500-year-old doctrinal argument matter? It matters because it goes to the very heart of the gospel.

[8 : 14] And in fact, it's only the doctrine of justification by faith that makes true holiness and genuine good works possible. That's what that quote from Martin Luther was getting at, really. The doctrine gets to the heart of the gospel itself and says, does the gospel really have life-changing power?

Now, as I said, we could start in the Old Testament, which has much to say on the nature of faith, but instead we'll start with Jesus' own teaching. But I can't do this just by picking out some random verses.

And I want to give, if not a complete overview, which is almost impossible, at least, unless you want to be here till midnight anyway, but at least give you a, well, I suppose an overview in the sense of looking at various things that Jesus said.

So I'm going to read some relatively long passages of scripture and just comment on them briefly, which is why I've decided to split it up and to do it slightly differently. I wonder if this is going to work. Let's see. Yeah, so I want to split the talk actually into three parts. And first of all, the problem stated, and we'll look at briefly at part of the Sermon on the Mount.

[9 : 34] And secondly, we'll look at some, what I call winners and losers, but they're case studies. Jesus was very keen on case studies. Some of them are hypothetical ones, which we call parables.

And other times, they're teaching to real people. But in either case, the teaching is always illuminating. And so we'll look, just in Luke's gospel, at some of those.

And then we'll look at the problem or the issue resolved. And I've called that the work that God requires, which is, we find in that particular phrase, we find in John's gospel.

So we'll look in John's gospel. So we'll look first of all at the Sermon on the Mount, and then we'll have a brief break, and then we'll look on Luke, and so on.

So if you'd like to find Matthew, oh, next one, Matthew chapter five, I'll just read verses 17 to 22, and if you have a church Bible, it should be around page 969.

[10 : 45] So Matthew chapter five, verses 17 to 22. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.

Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Let me just read that sentence again.

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard it said to the people long ago, do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.

[12 : 08] But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And again, anyone who says to his brother, Wacker, fool, it's an insult, will be answered to the Sanhedrin.

But anyone who says, you fool, will be in danger of the fires of hell. I'll stop the reading there although Jesus goes on to give other similar examples but the one I've given here illustrates the point.

All that rule keeping of the Orthodox Jews, people who had spent their lives studying the law and trying to understand it and try to keep everything that it said.

It's not good enough, says Jesus. Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why is that? Well, these illustrations like the one about the saying, calling your brother a fool, make the point. Why not? Because just keeping the law, just doing good works, as it were, doesn't involve a change of heart.

[13 : 21] And it's a change of heart that is required. So let's pause. So is it hopeless then?

Is the only sensible reaction despair? Is the only sensible philosophy? Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Well, in Luke's gospel we find some case studies.

I say some of them are real life people and we'll look at them shortly. Some of them are parables, which is a story that Jesus tells in order to illustrate the point.

The first is a parable. I don't think it's meant to describe a real event, but it describes two, if you like, typical, two archetypal people who both go to the temple.

So Luke chapter 18, verse 9 to 14. To some, who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.

[14 : 39] Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector, which of course would mean a dishonest man. All the tax collectors in those days were dishonest.

A tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evil doers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven but beat his breast and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

The Pharisee thought that he did not to change, didn't need to change. I mean, he's not really praying for anything, is he?

[15 : 48] What he was already doing was enough. I mean, he says, I thank you, God, but he's not really thanking God at all. He's saying, look at me.

I've got there. He didn't realize that he needed to change, needed a change of heart. But the tax collector knew that his life was all one.

But he believed that change was possible through the mercy of God. And so that's the first point there, that change is possible through the mercy of God.

God. Now just a few verses on from that parable, Luke gives us a real life example. Chapter 18, verses 18 to 24.

A certain ruler asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good? Jesus answers.

[16 : 55] No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony on your father and mother.

All these I've kept since I was a boy, he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, you still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. And when he heard this, he became very sad because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. What a tragic case this is. The man knew that all his rule keeping was not putting him in touch with God. but he couldn't quite see what the problem was.

He knew something was wrong but he couldn't put his finger on it and so he went to ask Jesus. Unfortunately, he didn't like the answer he got.

[18 : 05] And let me point out, we get hung up on this, don't we? Set everything you have and give to the poor. This man had come by his wealth honestly as far as we know.

Either he'd inherited it or earned it honestly. There were other rich converts, think of Matthew or Zacchaeus, whose wealth was gained less honestly and yet neither of those was required to give it all up.

Zacchaeus did say he gave up half his wealth. It's not the selling your everything you have and giving to the poor that's the point here. It's the come follow me.

The problem with the money was that that was what was keeping his heart from God. And Jesus saw that unless he was prepared to give that up then he would not be able really to follow Jesus. He could keep struggling on with the rules that he said I've kept since my youth but that wouldn't do him any good because his righteousness would not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

[19 : 15] The money occupied too large a place in his heart. It was crowding out his love for God. Turn back a few chapters to Luke chapter 10 page 1042 or thereabouts.

What this young man had forgotten and perhaps what most of the scribes and Pharisees had forgotten as well although not this one at least was what was at the heart of the law.

Luke chapter 10 verse 25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

What is written in the law, he replied, how do you read it? He answered, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.

These are two quotations from the Old Testament of course. You have answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live. But he, the man, the scribe, wanted to justify himself so he asked Jesus and who is my neighbor?

[20 : 45] In reply, Jesus said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite when he came to the place and saw him passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan as he traveled came where the man was and when he saw him he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds pouring on oil and wine.

Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. Look after him, he said, and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.

Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert replied, the one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, go and do likewise.

[21 : 49] In other words, which of these three were the ones who had really kept the law? At first sight this might seem to be teaching salvation by works until you realize that the goody in this story isn't the priest or the Levite.

why did they pass by on the other side? Well of course the man might have been dead and particularly if they touched a corpse they would have been ritually unclean and unable to carry on their priestly duties.

But the Samaritan didn't have that problem. He knew that in many ways in the eyes of the law he was unclean anyway. But his heart was changed.

He had a love for God that was reflected in his love for the man in need. Now whether the expert in the law took this advice we don't know.

But at least this particular expert in the law was on the right track. He realized that all these keeping of rules was not really what the law was about. But the wealth of the ruler and the religious

concerns of the priest and the Levite in the parable and possibly the intellectual concerns of this scribe as well were both distractions which kept them from seeing the really important issue.

[23 : 18] Even legitimate concerns can be a distraction. The priests and the Levite were supposed to serve in the temple. There's nothing wrong with wealth as such particularly if it's honestly earned.

But these things were taking their eyes off what was really important distracting them from what the law was really about and what it was that God really required.

So once again just move on a few verses to Luke chapter 10 verse 38. As Jesus and his disciples were on their way he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

She came to him and asked Lord don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me. Martha, Martha the Lord answered.

[24 : 31] You're worried and upset about many things but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her. Now of course if you're organising a dinner party then lots of things are needed.

Doubtless we come up to Christmas many people will be already planning and it's only November planning menus and dinner and things that have to be brought in and there are so many things that you need so many things you have to think about.

You're going to have a successful dinner party and there's a lot of work too. Somebody has to do all the cleaning and somebody has to chop up the vegetables and skin the chicken or whatever it is that you're doing.

It's a lot of work. For a dinner party lots of things are needed but Jesus is talking about salvation here and he says as far as salvation is concerned only one thing is needed.

Not all this worry and work that you're doing Martha. What is needed is to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to what he actually said. that's what is needed.

[25 : 54] Too far sorry. So how do we unlock this enigma? What is the way forward? Back a chapter to Luke chapter seven.

Sorry three chapters to Luke chapter seven. Here we read about somebody who was not a Jew or even a Samaritan.

Presumably a Roman or at least a Roman officer anyway. Luke chapter seven. When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum and there a centurion's servant whom his master valued highly was sick and about to die.

The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus they pleaded earnestly with him this man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.

So Jesus went with him. He wasn't far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him Lord don't trouble yourself for I did not deserve to have you come under my roof.

[27 : 17] That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself and a man under authority and with soldiers under me.

I tell this one go and he goes and that one come and he comes. I say to my servant do this and he does it. when Jesus heard this he was amazed at him and turning to the crowd following him he said I tell you I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. You don't very often hear that Jesus was amazed yet this is one occasion when he was.

he was amazed by the man's faith. And what was the basis of that Roman officer's plea? Not his status as a Roman citizen and a Roman officer.

It wasn't even a claim to have treated the Jews fairly although it seems from what's said there that he had but that wasn't the basis of his claim. He admitted he had no right or worthiness to ask for help.

[28 : 33] As a non-Jew really Jesus as a law-keeping Jew shouldn't have come into his house and indeed he didn't even ask him to do that. But his request was based on something he did understand and that was if you want a job done you find the man who has both the authority and the ability to do it.

He had authority over his own soldiers and he recognised in Jesus the power of command even over the forces of evil he understood that just as for his servant all he had to say go and clean up

the kitchen and it would happen.

And he realised only a need from Jesus was required and his request was granted as he believed it would be. If he hadn't believed it he wouldn't have even bothered to ask.

and we were told that Jesus was amazed at his faith. Our final case study at the end of Luke's Gospel we find a man who had absolutely no opportunity to put right his sins at all.

And the scene if you're not familiar with it is the crucifixion where Jesus has been crucified this sign of Roman execution narrowed up on a cross along with two criminals.

[30 : 08] Luke 23 verse 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him aren't you the Christ save yourself and us but the other criminal rebuked him don't you fear God he says since you are under the same sentence we are punished justly for we're getting what our deeds deserve but this man has done nothing wrong.

And then he said Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise.

Note that both criminals in a sense appeal to Jesus for salvation don't they? But the first does so on the basis of anger. He thinks that Jesus either cannot or will not save.

He says if you're the Christ bring us all down from these crosses. But he doesn't really believe that Jesus is the anointed king or he would behave differently. So his plea is ignored.

But the second criminal who's the partner in crime of the first suddenly comes to understand.

Another gospel tells us that initially even he held insults at Jesus but in his extremity he suddenly rediscovers the fear of God.

[31 : 40] He acknowledges that he's messed up his own life and it's too late to put things right and he admits and realizes that the condemnation by the Roman authorities is perfectly fair and just in his own case.

So what can he do? Does he despair? He's only one recourse and that is to appeal to a high authority to throw himself on the mercy of a greater king than Caesar.

for this life he's too late but for the coming kingdom it turns out that he's just in time but he didn't have time to put anything right and have time to do anything much he was on the verge of death but Jesus said today you will be with me in paradise but you need to take a warning here though notice that remember that only one of the thieves was saved why was one saved and not the other?

Well in a sense we can't answer that but it has been said the Bible contains one deathbed repentance so that no one need despair but it's only one so that no one should presume both these men were in extreme pain and agony of body and spirit to one it led to bitterness and condemnation to the other it led to throwing himself on the mercy of Christ and for that claim that call Jesus would answer positively so let's pause again this issue and we'll look in John's gospel there's a particularly large amount to say on this but remember we're just looking at the teaching of Jesus himself and we can't of course look at that without looking at John chapter 3 page 1066 and this was a conversation with a man who was both an expert in the law and a ruler presumably a wealthy man as well

Nicodemus it's the conversation that where Jesus says you need to be born again and perhaps we'll look at that later in the series but for now let's just read from verse 12 John 3 verse 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven the son of man just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the son of man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life now since I said I was going to work on the words of Jesus I should probably point out that the next verses may well be comment by the apostle John but we'll read them anyway for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son so as I say this last verse might be a comment of the apostle

[35 : 46] John but verse 15 is certainly the words of Jesus himself and he says that everyone who believes in him the son of man may have eternal life believes in him so there's a paradox isn't there at the heart of the human condition God requires us to keep the law but the more we try the more we fail as we've seen in some of these case studies in the very attempt we often make things worse instead of better and in any case we're actually in the same position as that thief on the cross it's too late for us we've already failed as far as God is concerned so surely he has no recourse but to

impose the full weight of judgment on every man and woman everywhere perhaps despair is the only answer but God has found a way out of this dilemma there is hope there is grace which of course means unmerited favour to be found next week we're going to look at how Paul and the other apostles expanded on this doctrine of justification by faith and in the following two weeks I say we'll investigate a bit more about how this grace works but we're going to conclude here with the words of Jesus taken from two further passages in John's gospel

John 10 verses 9 to 15 first of all should be around page 1076 John 10 verse 9 I am the gate whoever enters through me will be saved he will come in and go out and find pasture the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy I have come that they may have life and have it to the full I am the good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep the hired man is not the shepherd who owns the sheep so when he sees the wolf coming he abandons the sheep and runs away then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it the man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep

I am the good shepherd I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep in the old testament passover a sheep would lay down its life for a human family but here the shepherd lays down his life for the human sheep if we can put it that way here it's not the lamb that dies for the family but rather the shepherd that dies for the sheep because he loves them and he says that whoever enters by this gate will whoever enters through me will be saved finally let's perhaps look at the clearest passage of all if you don't believe that Jesus taught justification by faith alone and this passage alone ought to convince you let's look at

John 6 verses 27 to 37 do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life which the son of man will give you on him God the father has placed his seal of approval then they asked him what must we do to do the works God requires Jesus answered the work of God is this to believe in the one he has sent so they asked him what miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you what will you do our forefathers ate the manna in the desert as it is written he gave them bread from heaven to eat

Jesus said to them I tell you the truth it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven but it is my father who gives you the true bread from heaven for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world so they said from now on give us this bread then Jesus declared I am the bread of life he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty but as I have told you you have soon seen me and still you do not believe all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away what is the work that God requires to believe in the one he has sent to put our faith in Jesus Christ Christ now of course we have to say that that is a faith that leads to action when we're told that Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness what did he do of course he left his hometown and set out into the desert faith that does not lead to action is not faith but it is the trust in [41 : 34] God that leads to salvation the belief coming to the one that God has provided and has sent for that very purpose the Lord Jesus Christ and he is the one who says to me whoever comes to me I will never drive away we'll look at earlier passages later on in this in John 6 which talks about those that the father gives me will come to me and people say that Calvinists do not preach the gospel and I'd say that unless you're a Calvinist you cannot preach the gospel because the gospel is a gospel of justification by faith alone by grace alone so will you believe that salvation is found in Jesus Christ or would you prefer to look elsewhere stop there and sing again I have chosen one then