

I remember the day I realized my child had learned the concept of currency and the use of money. He was excited and thankful when he received five dollars in a birthday card. We went to a local store, and as I was closing the doors to the van he ran ahead. He had a plan. In the atrium there was a crane machine with bright lights and great prizes. Someone stopped me in the parking lot to say hello. By the time I got to the entry way, the crane arm was retracting empty handed back to its perch, and my son was out of all his money. The bigger the prize the harder the crane machine is to win. Five tries. Five losses. How would you do? What about when it comes to our salvation? Many leave it to chance or their best efforts. We're tempted to try too, but Paul shows the only way to be saved.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1) Because you think you can do it, but can't, so he did.**
- 2) Because it's his gift to believe, confess and live.**

"Moses writes about this righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But 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: 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. For 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. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The apostle Paul grieved that many of his countrymen rejected Jesus Christ, the only way of salvation, and were living under the delusion, as Paul had once done, that by their actions, lineage, and performance of the law they had earned God's favor and a spot in heaven. But they were wrong. They were going to end up in hell if they died trying. **They thought they could do it, but they can't.** *"Moses writes about this righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."*

God gave his law through Moses to the children of Israel at Sinai. He didn't set aside his promises of mercy and salvation through the coming Messiah. God's people were to keep the laws as they lived in the promised land. The Lord would bless them in that land. But if they failed, broke these commands, and worshiped idols, the Lord would punish them. But this could never be a means of salvation for these people. The many bloody sacrifices for their sin proved it. They were sinners, conceived in sin, born enemies of God. Only by the Messiah would they be saved.

But it's the sinful nature's serpent-like logic to try to make us think we can or have to earn God's favor and his approval by our deeds and efforts, or at least part of it. Why? I'll tell you a secret. Deep down inside our sinful nature we don't want God, or his charity. We want to do it ourselves. It's messed up. We want to believe that we have the power. Long ago Protagoras said what mankind thinks, "Man is the measure of all things." Why does part of us want something like Evolution? Why does part of us want to redefine marriage, gender, sexuality, God's commands, and what is sin or isn't sinful for me? Why do we want others to praise us and never speak something ill about us? Why does part of us bristle when others are praised while we are not? We think we are enough on our own. Why are we reluctant to go to counseling, or talk to a friend about our struggles? Why do we struggle to say we are sorry (we think we are never wrong.)? Why do we lie and try to cover up sin? We don't want to admit we are wrong, failed, not enough. We don't get to measure ourselves. God does. Your sin condemns you. And all your efforts to cover over it scream at your absurdity, like throwing some more paint on rotten wood. The claw comes up empty. **You think you can do it, but you can't, so he did.**

Paul writes about a different righteousness, not from ourselves, but one that is real and stands up to God's inspection, *"But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down)."* Moses spoke these words to the Israelites to show them it was no mystery where to find the Lord's will for them or all he had done. It is in the Word. Paul goes a step further, *"Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."* Paul speaks of the absurdity to try to do for yourself what Christ has already done and accomplished. Listen to Moses. Listen to Paul. *"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim.*" All the world can offer you is a religion of "doing" – "Maybe I've

done enough.” “Maybe I’m good enough.” “I’ve been a pretty good person.” But it’s never enough. The claw machine comes up empty.

The message that saves is not you, nor do you have to go to heaven or to the depths to find it or earn it. It’s right in front of you. **Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.** God took on flesh for you. Jesus came from heaven. He lived a perfect life in your place. What you couldn’t do, he did. And for all the times we arrogantly thought we could do it, he suffered. He suffered for all the times we went after idols of lust, greed, pride and self. He suffered the pangs of hell, forsaken by the father so we weren’t. He died the death we deserved. That was the price of your forgiveness. Jesus rose from the grave, to show that what was impossible for us is now ours by his gracious gift, *“But the righteousness that is by faith...”* The Spirit uses this Gospel message in Word and Sacrament to give to you all that you could not accomplish, and all that you would never achieve, forgiveness won by Jesus, purpose in life given by Jesus, and life eternal secured by Jesus. This is no secret, but God’s gift to you.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because you think you can do it, but can’t, so he did. Because it’s his gift to believe, confess and live.

Paul wrote to the Romans about this gift that God had given to them, and how to put it into practice. *“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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess and are saved.”* In a cross arrangement Paul speaks about believing and confessing. These gifts go hand in hand. *Declare – believe in your heart, with your heart that you believe, with your mouth you profess.* This gift from God overflows. Jesus said, *“from the overflow of your heart the mouth speaks”* (Matt. 12). When you have a great meal at a place you tell someone about it. When you are gifted the restaurant, you are speechless, and you invite others to eat there. Jesus didn’t just give us a pat on the shoulder like a coach sending us out to a hopeless game. Jesus gave us the victory and gave us victory hats to hand out.

Live your life for Jesus. Take God’s strength to confess him whether its popular or not. Live for him by following his commands, turning from sin, whether people agree with you or not. The faith in your heart overflows into your words that you speak, and in not speaking words of anger, hurt, or pride. The faith in your heart overflows in the time you spend in the Word, helping others, sharing, and avoiding sin and repenting of it. The faith in your heart overflows in how you take your thoughts captive to Christ, filtering everything through Jesus’ love and forgiveness for you, and his will for your life. Live your life for Jesus. It’s his gift to you. But is it worth it?

We might fear and ask, “Won’t that leave me a sitting duck, a target for the world and the devil?” Paul quotes the Scriptures, *“Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”* The claw doesn’t come up empty with Jesus. Trusting in Jesus and living your faith, while everyone is watching, or only Jesus is watching, is worth it. You receive far more than you ask, imagine, or realize. One of the devil’s tricks is to have us focus only on the difficulties in life and not on the tremendous blessings God pours out on us, like having our day wrecked because of a scratch or dent in the door of our car, and forget we have a vehicle that carries us and multiple others in comfort faster and more safely than generations of people could have ever dreamed of over the past thousands of years. No, in life and in death, Jesus will never leave you hanging. He gives us blessings we could never deserve or earn in this life, and then eternal life.

Ok, it’s that good, but can it possibly be for me? *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* Jesus saves you and everybody the same way – by his blood covering over our sins and his merit credited to our accounts – ours by grace through faith. He gives us this to all by the means of Grace – this good news communicated to us through Word and Sacrament. *“Go and make disciples of all nations”* (Matthew 28). This is for you. Through our baptism he made us his children and connected us to Christ through water and the powerful Word of God. In the Lord’s Supper we receive Christ’s body and blood given and poured out for us for our forgiveness. In the Word we daily grow, just like milk nourishes a growing infant, so we cry out for this Word and mature in it – trusting it, living it, confessing it. **This is his gift to you, to believe, confess, and live.** So live, dear Christian. It’s worth it. It’s for you.

One evening we were at a restaurant with a claw machine. The kids each took a turn or two trying it, and most walked back to the table with a look of disappointment. They tried but they couldn’t. But on the way out, the owner pulled out a bag and gave them each a prize for free. The smiles and surprise on their faces were priceless. Jesus freely gave you what was impossible for you to earn. His claw never comes up empty. Smile in your heart. You have forgiveness, peace with God, and eternity with him. **Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because you think you can do it, but can’t, so he did. Because it’s his gift to believe, confess and live. So live. Amen.**