

Faith and works

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Psalm 37 at verse 3. Trust in the Lord and do good. Trust in the Lord and do good.

When you speak to people outside the Christian church and you ask them what will happen after death, generally speaking, some of them will say that there's nothing after death, that you just die and that's all that there is to it.

And others might say, well, there's a heaven at the end of it all and they feel that they are going to be going to that heaven. People who believe there is such a place as heaven tend to be quite confident that when they die they will go there.

You hear it so often. You hear it on television, for example, people being interviewed about their lives and so on. And it's so often the case that they are quite confident that they will go to heaven at the end of their lives, even though they may have no great interest whatsoever in the Christian church.

People tend to think that they are good enough, that they don't do the evil things that other people do, and so therefore they are good enough for heaven.

[1 : 28] Now these people, like so many, sadly within the church, are relying on good work to save them. And ironically, the reason why people rely on good work is because of sin.

It's quite ironic that, isn't it? Because it is sin that affects our perception of what good works are. We underestimate, because of sin, the seriousness of sin.

Because of sin, we underestimate our own sinfulness and therefore tend to think that we are good enough for heaven.

And because of sin, we overrate our own good point. We think that we are good enough. And we fail to see what we are really like in the eyes of God.

That's the natural condition of human beings. It's a very sad condition. But what we have to do is see what we are like in the eyes of God.

[2 : 43] And for that, we need God to reveal that to us through his word. Now the gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that we must not rely on our good work for salvation.

That for salvation, for the opportunity to go to heaven, which we believe is a very real thing, that this is the truth, that there is a heaven, that it is a glorious place.

But to get there, to reach there, we must trust in Christ's sacrifice for sin alone. But if we do that, we have to then ask the question, what part do good works have?

And it's a very important question to see the relationship between faith in Jesus Christ and good works, the works of quality, which should be in the life of the believer.

And we find the answer to that in our text. Trust in the Lord and do good. That tells us that in a person's life, as they live their lives in this world, that both things are required.

[4 : 05] Faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ is required as the most basic thing. But as evidence of that, faith works are required as well.

We are to do good. So I want us to look at these words today. And let's think first of all of faith. Trust in the Lord.

Now who is the one that we are to trust in? He is the Lord. He is Jehovah. He is the covenant God. He is the one who has pledged to save his people.

He is the one who has promised to save those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And this name that he has, this name Jehovah, is a name which conveys to us his faithfulness.

It conveys to us the fact that he will not go back on his promises. And we know from what is said elsewhere in God's word that this God is faithful and that he is able to save.

[5 : 15] His power to save is absolute. He is the sovereign God. He is responsible for the existence of this world in which we live through creation and he is responsible for its continuing existence through his providence, through his, the exercise of his power moment by moment as the history of this world goes on.

And the fact that he has not destroyed us, the fact that we are here today, is evidence that he has a purpose of mercy. And we know that that purpose of mercy is that he promises to save everlastingly those who trust in him, those who follow his covenant requirements.

And his covenant requirements for us is that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. God is trustworthy.

He will not let us down. We are told in the New Testament that he is the God who cannot lie. Now if God cannot lie that means that everything he says is true.

And even this name Jehovah conveys to us, conveyed to the people of Israel the fact that God is utterly trustworthy. So that's the one in whom we trust.

[6 : 41] That's the one in whom we have faith. But how are we to trust him? Well, we are to trust our souls to it. We are to seek forgiveness of sins by trusting in Jesus Christ, the one he has revealed as the Saviour.

We are to trust in Jesus who is himself, fully God. We are to trust in him for the forgiveness of our sins. We are to trust that he died on the cross bearing the penalty of sins in place of ourselves.

ourselves. And that means that we no longer concern ourselves with our salvation. That's what faith really is. It is that we come to Christ and we put our trust in him and from then on we don't really concern ourselves with our eternal destiny because we know we are trusting in Christ and therefore we do not need to concern ourselves with that.

we can actually concentrate on the business that God has for us. We can concentrate on doing good. We trust in the Lord for salvation and having done that, having dealt with our eternal destiny, we then get on with the work of doing good.

So we put our eternal welfare in his hands. Now that's not the main aspect of faith that's spoken of here. It's the main aspect of faith in scripture but it's not the main aspect of faith here.

[8 : 12] It's included, it's implied because this psalm is addressed to God's people. But there's another aspect of faith which is involved here, which is the main aspect here.

And that is that we trust our circumstances to God. What the believer must do day by day. Now the context here, as we read the psalm, you could see that.

The context is that the psalmist sees wicked people around him doing well. Doing well in life. He sees the wicked prospering.

And he's concerned at this. He's saying to himself, why am I not prospering when I seek to follow God's law, when I seek to follow God's requirements, and yet there are those around me who are not bothering themselves to seek to follow God's requirements, and yet they are doing very well, thank you very much.

How? Is that not a situation with which we can identify here? And yet it is not right for us to fret over this. Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb.

[9 : 37] You see, even these wicked people who are doing well in life, it's only for a few years, and then that's them cut off, whereas the believer has everlasting life.

He says, rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

Here, the aspect of trusting in the Lord is that we trust our circumstances to him, that we put our hope in him for our circumstances, that we rely on him for our lives, that we commit our way to him, that we leave our lives in his hands, knowing that he will not let his people down.

Look at what the psalmist confidently says, verse 25, I have been young and now I'm old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

They'll not be forsaken. They may not be as rich as the wicked around them, but they will not be forsaken, they will be provided for with what they need.

[10 : 53] And remember that echoes, we see echoes to that in Jesus teaching, remember what he says, therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body what you shall put on, is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?

He says then, but seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. We are to entrust our circumstances to God, to our God.

So there's these two aspects of faith. One is implied, this idea that we have to entrust our souls to him, our eternal destiny to him, by trusting for forgiveness of sins.

And we trust in Jesus Christ, as the New Testament would put it, for the salvation from sin. But the particular context speaks of entrusting our circumstances to God.

Now before we leave this aspect of faith, let me remind you that this is a command, and it's not something that we can ignore.

[12 : 04] Because every time we reject the gospel offer, we sin. When the opportunity of salvation is offered to people through the preaching of the word, through the reading of God's word, every time that person says, well, no, not just now, thank you.

That's sin in the eyes of God. And even when we read God's word and we fail to believe it, we fail to put it into practice, that is also sin.

sin. And so we have to remember that this is a command, we have to trust in God. If we do not do that, if we don't trust in him for salvation, if we don't trust in him for the provision of our everyday needs, then we are sinning.

And another aspect of it too is that there's got to be a decided trust in God. There's got to be a conscious effort made on our part to trust in God.

it's not something that we can just ignore and hope it will happen. We can't just go on in our lives, perhaps coming to church and reading the Bible for ourselves and saying, well, I hope one day I'll believe.

[13 : 23] We have to face up to ourselves. Now, faith is the gift of God. But it's we who exercise it. The metrical verse of the psalm says, set thou thy trust upon the Lord.

That gets across the idea that we have to exercise faith. God doesn't exercise faith for us. God doesn't believe for us. We have to believe for ourselves.

We have to trust. We have to determine to follow Jesus Christ. We cannot do it unless God enables us, but it's still the case that we have to do it.

And it's not just once either. It's not just a matter of trusting God to have our sins forgiven and becoming a Christian.

It is a continual trust. A trust in the midst of sin, for example, because that's one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. A person who genuinely believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and genuinely seeks to carry out his will and then finds himself sinning.

[14 : 27] Yet we're still to trust in the midst of that. We're still to follow Jesus Christ. We are still to seek that forgiveness which comes through him.

We have to trust in him in the midst of trials, in the midst of difficulties, in the midst of times when evil seems to have the upper hand, in the midst of times when people seem to have gone far better as it was in the psalmist's through not serving God than they seem to do through serving him.

But that's not to see things in the right perspective. The proper perspective is as the psalmist puts in Psalm 27, I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord. For Christian people today it's very distressing to see what's happening in our land.

It's very distressing to see so few people in this country which is such a great Christian heritage acknowledging God. It's distressing to see the immorality and the sin and all the different wrongdoing that there is round about us.

[15 : 45] It's distressing to a Christian who loves God and loves his word. But yet the Christian must still continue to believe and entrust his circumstances to God, to wait to the Lord and to be of good courage.

And so we have faith mentioned here as a requirement of God. But then there's the other side of the coin.

Trust in the Lord and do good. There are good works as well. Now, that doesn't mean simply the absence of evil.

It means positive good as well. Now, we see the situation of the psalmist. He is seeking to follow God and yet in the midst of all this he sees all the evil around him and you can imagine how he's tempted.

You can imagine how he's tempted to follow their schemes and to give in to them. But we are not to do that. We are to avoid that. But it's not merely a case of refraining from the evil around us.

[16 : 58] That's important. Of course it is. That's a vitally important aspect of Christian living to refrain from evil around us. There's negative commands.

Most of the commandments are in the form thou shalt not do this or that. But that is not enough. And it's a misconception of Christianity to say that it is something that is purely negative.

And that is the way some people perceive it. Perhaps not without reason. Perhaps the Christian church gives a false impression of Christianity. It's always a case of you can't do this and you can't do that and you can't do the next thing.

That is not Christianity or at least it's only a caricature of Christianity. There are these aspects there are these things that we must avoid but the main aspect of it is that we do good.

That we do positive good. Think of the summary that Jesus gave of the commandments. It wasn't thou shalt not do this and thou shalt not do that. The summary of the commandments was love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength and love thy neighbour as thyself.

[18 : 09] A positive command. Even some of the commandments themselves are positive. Honour your parents and remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Positive commands. And even we find in the negative commandments take a commandment like the sixth commandment thou shalt not kill.

Not only do we look on that as avoiding murder and everything leading up to that but there's also the positive side to it. not just the negative side there's the positive side as well which means that we must use all lawful means to preserve life and to prevent life from being ended in an improper way.

So there's positive commands. We are to carry out the commands of scripture. We have to carry them out to God's glory. We have to carry them out in sincerity of heart and we have to carry them out continuously.

we are to do good. So there's these two things that we find must be in the Christian's life. There must be faith, a very basic faith that trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation but also the faith that entrusts the believer's circumstances to God.

[19 : 28] And there must be doing good, good works as well. Now we've looked at each of these separately but now let's try and bring them together together and see how they relate to one another because both are required.

True faith will produce good works. That seems to be the teaching of scripture. And good works are in turn the evidence of true faith.

Now let's think of the combination, well in actual fact at first we're going to think of it in terms of one being missing. Think of works without faith for example.

The typical situation of the person outside the church who says well I'm going to go to heaven because I'm a good person and God will not punish me and I can look forward to going to heaven when I die.

That sort of situation. A person who has no faith in Jesus Christ, no interest in the gospel whatsoever but still is trusting in their own righteousness. And it may well be that that person is what we would call a good person.

[20 : 37] That's the sad thing about it, that person may be the sort of person who is a very good neighbour, a very loving person, a person who is full of compassion for those in need and does a great deal of work perhaps for charity and so on.

But the sad thing about it is that is not God's way of doing things. And sadly there are those even within the church who are confident in their own righteousness.

I think there are a few things more depressing to a minister of the gospel than to find people who have, whether they're within church or not, still saying I am trusting in my own righteousness, I'm good enough, I'm doing my best to be a good person and that is what I'm trusting in for salvation.

because that is completely against God's word. God's word says by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.

We have to remember that our good works are always sinful if we do not have faith in Jesus Christ. Our good works are always at the very least tainted with sin.

[21 : 58] Now the best way I can think of to describe this, the best thing that there is, is the way the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it. And it puts it so clearly.

Works done by unregenerate men, that's people who are unconverted, who are not Christians, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, things like helping those in need, things like looking after your family and so on.

Though for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others, that they're good for society, they are good things, yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the word, nor to a right end the glory of God, they are therefore sinful and cannot please God and make a man meet to receive grace from God.

These are words that are worth getting hold of and studying and thinking through. And it finishes off and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God.

They still have to be done and yet they cannot save. It's a masterly explanation of the situation. I'm saying this because I hope that this truth will burn itself into our minds.

[23 : 34] That none of us will ever again, if we have been guilty of this, think in terms of our own goodness as being the means of being saved.

If we take that approach, we shall be lost forever. our best works, our righteousnesses are like filthy rags to be cast away.

Our best works, if we are unsaved, are sinful and deserving of God's punishment. Now that is the teaching of God's word on this matter, that without faith it is impossible to please them.

So works without faith do not please God. I hope and pray that all of us are sure about this fact. I'm going to emphasize it and overemphasize it perhaps in order to make sure that none of us ever have the idea that anything we can do can of itself please God.

we must have faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Without that faith all our works are sinful and even as a Christian, a Christian is in a different position.

[24 : 54] A person who has faith, they can then start to serve God and to do good works but even then their works are tainted by sin. There's always the taint of sin there. There's always the shadow of sin over them and day by day they need to be trusting in Christ.

The believer has to constantly trust in Christ. Even a believer who has been a believer and has been growing in the faith for 50 years or more still needs to trust in Jesus for acceptance with God.

Now that's the first wrong combination of works without faith. But there's another false attitude as well that can be had.

And that is faith without works. And that's something that has been a problem in the Christian church down through the ages. The problem is this, a person says, I believe in Jesus as my saviour.

So therefore I don't need to worry about the way I live my life. I don't need to bother too much. I'm saved. I'll not be lost. I'll have eternal life and nothing can take that away from me.

[26 : 05] And I can just live more or less as I please. I'll avoid gross sins but I'm not going to put too much effort into things. Paul faced that.

He said, what shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? He's imagining the situation where somebody would say to him, this is wonderful Paul, this grace of God.

So if it's the case that grace of God is magnified and my forgiveness, then why don't I just go on and sin? And then God's grace will be magnified all the more. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

And Paul's answer to that is God forbid. May it never be the case. James faced the same thing. That's what his letter is largely about.

summarized in a few verses in chapter 2. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, thou is faith, and I have works.

[27 : 07] Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble.

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works, is dead. If we have faith in Jesus Christ, or claim to have that faith in Jesus Christ, and we do not have the works to prove it, then that faith is not real.

It's as simple as that. There's the old question that's been asked many times in the past. If someone accused you of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence?

to convict you? It's a very probing question, that. Faith, if it is real, will lead to good works. Trust in the Lord and do good.

That must be what we do. It will result in good works, it will result in the best works of all. work of all. The best work of God is the service for God.

[28 : 21] That will involve help for our fellow human beings and compassion in this world. That's been proven time and time again down through the history of this world.

See what's happened in the advance of medicine and education and things like that. So often it has been the church that is a leading part to play. That's true in our own land, in Scotland here, in its history.

Think of the way how science has advanced for the benefit of mankind. Yes, there are some things that are not good as well, but it has advanced for the benefit of mankind and yet when you look at most of the scientific disciplines there are, the pioneers of thinking of these disciplines were almost always a person who believed in the Bible and tried to live by God's word.

So much has been done by the church of Christ because faith leads to works. Now that's true of the church as a whole, it's also true of individuals.

Works show the reality of faith. And if we are not increasingly carrying out God's commands in our lives, then we must seriously ask the question, am I a Christian at all?

[29 : 43] I might profess to be a Christian, I might think in my heart that I'm a Christian, but if there's no evidence of it in my life, if there's no evidence of holiness or godliness or a desire thirst after God, a desire to worship him and serve him, and a desire for others to do the same, then we have to honestly ask ourselves, do I really have faith at all?

It's necessary for the good of the individual, we have to make our calling and election sure, there's always going to be some doubt in our minds as to whether we're truly saved or not, and so what we have to do is make our calling and election sure, we have to make sure we're obeying God's word for our own peace of mind.

it's necessary for other people that we grow in grace and that we grow in good works, service for God, because then they are encouraged to do the same, and it's also so important to stop the mouths of the church's enemies.

Remember what Jesus taught, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven, so that instead of criticising God's people, these people will glorify God because they have seen the evidence of these people's faith in their works.

Peter says a similar thing in his first letter, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, that's what they'll do, yet they may be by your good works which they shall behold glorify God on the day of visitation.

[31 : 39] That eventually they'll see the reality of these good works and they'll want to know what's behind it, they'll want to explore the faith that lies behind it, they'll want that faith for themselves.

And so these two things must both be there, there must be faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, trust in the Lord, and there must be good works, obedience to God in all his commands, in all areas of life, we are to do good.

Now we know from the teaching of the Bible as a whole that faith must come first, faith is the most basic thing, that's our most basic need, we need a saviour, we need someone to take away our sin, we need someone who will enable us to be right in the sight of God, so our first priority is to have faith in Jesus Christ, but if that faith is true and real, then it will show itself in good works, it will show itself in the quality of life that we live.

And notice if we have these things, there's a great blessing, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

This is a promise regarding the promised land that the people would be provided for in their land, in that country, and remember David, the psalmist, was involved at the time when the people of Israel were reaching their peak, sadly they fell away from it.

[33 : 21] There is reward, we were singing in Psalm 19, a great reward provided is for them that keep the same, for those that keep God's word.

Covenant promises, they're given there in material terms, that's the way things work in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it's more in a spiritual sense, and it's symbolic of the new heavens and the new earth.

It's symbolic of the future inheritance that awaits God's people. a great reward is provided. So shalt thou dwell in the land, in the new earth, and verily thou shalt be fed, provided for, a glorious future that awaits.

That's what's there for God's people. So let me ask you as we come to an end this morning, first of all, do you have faith in Jesus Christ?

That is the most basic thing, you must do it. It's a command here, trust in the Lord. This is God's command from God's word, it's not me that's saying it, it's God that's saying it from his word, through his inspired follower David the psalmist.

[34 : 36] Trust in the Lord, it is his command. Are you obeying that command? Are you trusting in him for salvation? Are you trusting in Jesus Christ as the only one to take away your sins?

Because if you don't, then your prospects are no better than the prospects of these wicked people who are around about the psalmist. And read through the psalm again and you'll find what these prospects are.

Prospect of destruction, of everlasting destruction. So believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. For some of us today that may be the most important thing in our lives that we trust in Jesus.

But do we have faith in Christ? Is the answer to this question yes? Well let me ask you this, as I ask myself. Are you backing it up with works?

Is there proof? Or is it the case that you're living a very sloppy Christian life? You have faith but you're not really interested in the things of God.

[35 : 47] You've got no desire to please God and to worship and praise him. Think of a situation where you came across someone who was very sloppy in their everyday lives.

Perhaps they paid very little attention to their appearance and perhaps they weren't bothered about such things as punctuality and getting their work done properly.

What would you say to a person like that? You'd say to them, waking up. Waking up to your responsibilities. and get on with these responsibilities. That's what we would say, isn't it? Maybe that's what God is saying to us today.

Waking up. Stir yourself up. Follow your responsibilities. You say you have faith in me, maybe God is saying to us today, you say you have faith in me but where's the evidence of it?

Where is the hunger and thirst after righteousness? Where is the hunger and thirst after fellowship with God? God. That is what the Lord may be saying to us through these words today.

[36 : 48] So let us make sure that we carry them out. Trust in the Lord and do good. Let us pray. Let us pray. O Lord, we pray that we may follow the words that we have just been considering.

grant us faith in Jesus Christ and may we exercise that faith in a determined and conscious way realizing that there is no other way of salvation, that there is no other name given among men by whom we must be saved.

O Lord, help us, each one, to believe in the Lord Jesus that we may be saved. And having believed, O Lord, that we may seek to show the reality of our faith by doing good, by doing what is right and proper, by serving thee and loving thee and worshipping thee above all, and by seeking the benefit of our fellow human beings.

We pray that thou pardon us for misrepresenting thy gospel. We pray for thy pardon to be shown to anyone who may have works without faith.

May they see the utter uselessness of that situation. salvation. And we pray for thy forgiveness to be given to those of us who may have faith without works, who may be living an undisciplined Christian life.

[38 : 43] We ask for thy forgiveness. We ask that thou stir us up to greater service for thee. We pray that we may have a right attitude to these things, that we would understand how these things relate, faith in Jesus Christ and service for thee.

And we pray that thou would continue to guide us in thy truth. We ask all this in Jesus name. Amen.