

Believe. Lord. Saved.

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, for a short while I'd like us to turn back to Acts chapter 16. And in this chapter we find some incredibly important verses which we're going to look at together today.
- And the reason these verses are so important is because they contain what is possibly the most important question ever asked. And they also contain the most crucial answer ever given.
- Acts 16, 29 to 31, we read that the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas.
- Then he brought them out and said, Serge, what must I do to be saved? And they said, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.
- In terms of the biggest questions in life, there's none bigger than the question of our relationship with God and our eternal destiny.
- [1 : 0 7] This is the most important question that we can ask, the question that the jailer asked Paul and Silas, what must I do to be saved? And if that question is the most important question, that means that the answer is the answer that we desperately need, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.
- So this is a crucial verse for us to think about. And as we do so today, I want to just focus on three key words that we have in verse 31. I want us to look at the word believe, I want us to look at the word Lord, and I want us to look at the word saved.
- Believe, Lord, saved. We're going to look at each one in turn. So starting here with the word believe. In so many ways, this word lies at the heart of the Gospel.
- At the very start of our service, we read from John 3.16, which contains the same word, summing up the Gospel in one sentence, that God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- And so that word's crucial in terms of the response that God is looking for in regard to what he's done for us through Jesus. In other words, if you think about the question, the question revolves around this verb here, what must I do to be saved?
- [2 : 3 8] The answer to that do is that believe. That's the response that God is looking for. And so all of this is teaching us that at the heart of the Gospel lies one key thing, faith.
- And that's really the corresponding word to the word believe. To believe is to have faith. And this would be much more obvious for us if we were reading and speaking Greek, which is the language that Acts was originally written in because the word for faith and the word for believe are very similar.
- The same root word, pistis is the word for faith, pistio is the word for believe. Same word that links it together. And so that's absolutely crucial for us in terms of the Gospel.
- What does God want us to do? He wants us to believe. But what does that really mean? And when we say that, what are we really talking about?
- What do we mean when we say believe? Well at one level, at one level it's quite simple because believing can be understood in terms of a binary choice between accepting or rejecting something.

[3 : 56] So in other words, it becomes like a kind of yes, no question. So do you believe that God exists? Some people might say yes, some people might say no. And there's lots of other yes, no questions which really focus on whether or not you accept that certain claims are true or false.

So did Jesus exist? Yes or no? Did his miracles actually happen? Yes or no? Did the Romans destroy Jerusalem in 8070? Yes or no?

Does the earth revolve around the sun? Yes or no? They're all binary yes, no questions. And that's part of what we mean when we talk about believing.

But what we have to recognize and what I want us to think about is that verse 31 is speaking about more than just a yes, no about the facts.

So believing faith and believing is not just does God exist, yes or no? It's not just accepting that what the Bible says is true, it's not just recognizing that the narrative of acts and the rest of scripture corresponds to historical research.

[5 : 09] Faith involves all of that, but it involves more than that. And that's the key thing that we need to recognize. So what does believing involve?

It's more than just saying yes, I do believe in God. I'm pretty sure everybody in here believes in God in some form or another. But Acts 16 and the Gospel is talking about more than that.

So what does it involve? Well, to help us understand, there's a really helpful summary about what faith means in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Now the Westminster Confession of Faith is a short document written about 400 years ago that summarizes some of the key truths of the Bible. And it's got an excellent little chapter on faith and I'm going to read one of the paragraphs.

Now the language is quite old and it can sound a little bit complicated, but what it's saying is actually very simple. Let me read it out and then I'll focus, I'll highlight the thing I want you to see.

[6 : 10] So here we are, Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 14, paragraph 2, it's talking about what faith means. By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true what so ever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth, yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.

Now that's just basically saying we recognize that the Bible is true and we respond to the Bible appropriately. So when the Bible commands us to do something, we obey, when the Bible warns us about something, we listen, when the Bible promises us something, we embrace that promise.

So that's just summarizing how we approach the Bible when we believe it's true. But the key sentence is the last one where it says this, but the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life by virtue of the covenant of grace.

And it's these three words I want us to think about, that faith is about accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone.

Accepting is just what we've been talking about, it's that yes, no, do we accept the truth claims that are made in the Bible? And so faith involves saying yes, I do accept them.

[7 : 46] But from there, there's two more steps, there's receiving. So you might accept the truth of what the Bible says, but you don't necessarily receive that as the truth that you will live by.

In other words, you might know something is true, but you don't really assent to it yourself and it doesn't really impact your life. And we actually do this all the time.

We particularly do it in regard to our health and particularly in relation to what we eat. So if you look up any health food book, you will discover that eating seeds is better than eating a tonnage caramel wafer.

So better for you, healthier, wiser, more sensible. Anybody who goes home to snout, makes a cup of tea, opens the cupboard and takes a spoonful of seeds and leaves the caramel wafer, you're bonkers.

We don't do that. We don't do it, do we? We know it, we don't do it. I know that water is the healthy thing to drink. I absolutely love fizzy juice.

[8 : 57] So if I'm thirsty, I'm not going to the tab, I'm going to the fridge. And even though I know that water is better for me. Same with carrot sticks and chocolates.

Which one's better for you? Which one do you want to eat during a movie? And so you can accept something as true, but not necessarily receive it.

With foods, I don't think it matters too much. With faith, it does matter. Faith is not just accepting the truth of the Bible. It's receiving that as something that you will live by.

In other words, it needs to make a massive difference to you. But that's only step two out of three. The third step is my favorite one, resting.

And resting is such a brilliant description of what the Bible means when it talks about believing in Jesus. We rest on him.

[9 : 57] In other words, we just rely on him. We depend on him. We throw ourselves into his hands. And the key reason we do that is because we are recognizing that he has done something for us.

This is what lies at the heart of the Gospel, the fact that Jesus has done something for us. And our response is just to rest in him.

And it really is the difference between doing a plank and lying on cushions. When you're doing the plank, you're relying entirely on your own strength and nobody can sustain that forever.

But when it comes to the cushions, you can just throw yourself on them and rest and they will hold you up. And that's exactly what resting in Jesus means.

In fact, the Hebrew word for faith, the Oteshi was written in Hebrew and the word for faith there literally means to lean on something, to put your weight onto it, to rest yourself upon it.

[11 : 00] And that's what lies at the heart of faith, these three things, accepting the truth of what the Gospel claims, receiving that as what we ourselves will believe and live by.

And because we're recognizing what it says, we are resting on Jesus, leaning on him and on everything that he has done for us on the cross.

Now, all of that sounds reasonably straightforward, I hope, but we frequently hit stumbling blocks. One of the stumbling blocks is to think, well, I don't know enough.

I don't know enough in order to be able to do this. And that can actually come in two forms. Sometimes there's a sense of I don't know enough and it's based on a feeling of inadequacy.

We think there's just so much I just don't know. There's so much I haven't learned. There's so much in the Bible I'm not aware of. There's so much I still have to understand. And so we feel inadequate, we think, I don't know enough.

[12 : 01] Sometimes though, a feeling of not knowing can be not so much that we feel inadequate, but that we feel unpersuaded. And so we think, well, I don't see enough evidence.

I don't have all the facts in front of me that I need. And so I'm not going to have faith until I have proof, until I know enough to know that this is something I can be sure of.

So we can be confronted by the stumbling block that says, I don't know enough, whether that's we feel inadequate or we feel unpersuaded. It's the same solution that we need for both of these.

And the key thing we have to recognize is that faith does not mean knowing everything. In fact, faith presumes the opposite.

Faith presumes that we don't know everything and that we're not going to know everything. In fact, faith relies on the fact that Jesus has something that we don't have.

[13 : 07] And we trust Him because He has done something. He is able to do something that we cannot do. It's exactly the same as trusting a surgeon who is able to do something that you are not able to do.

We don't know everything about what surgery involves. We don't know every aspect of the training that's needed. We just trust the fact that they're able to do it.

It's exactly the same with Jesus. And the key thing we have to recognize is that faith frequently precedes knowledge.

In fact, it's arguable that faith always precedes knowledge. So you think of this kind of argument between faith and knowledge.

You think, I need this first if I'm going to have faith. What I want us to see is that it's actually the other way around.

[14 : 06] If you want to have knowledge, you have to start with faith. This takes us into a really interesting area of philosophy where you find yourself thinking about even a basic question and you tie yourself up in knots very quickly.

But let's just do it for a couple of minutes because it's quite fun. So I'm going to ask you a very basic question. How do you know your name?

How do you know your name? Well, various ways. Okay, well, you've been told it by your parents. You have seen it written down in documents.

Maybe you're on a diver's license or whatever. You've heard it said by others. And that's straightforward. That's all. That's how you know your name. You know your name as a result of these things.

Every single one of them involves faith. You have to trust that your parents are telling the truth. Maybe they said, let's actually call them sausages.

[15 : 10] But we'll just say this name is famous. It's not going to happen. But it could. You have to trust them. You have to trust them, whether it's the spelling of your name or the name.

Even then, you see it written down in documents. You have to have faith that those documents are reliable. You hear it said by others. You have to have faith that what they're saying is true. But even more so, you see your name written on a piece of paper.

What do you have to trust? You have to trust this, your eyes. You have to trust your ability to perceive, to understand. Can you be sure?

This is very interesting. I'm going to get sidetracked for too long if I do this. But can you be sure that if you take a line that's vertical and a line that's horizontal, and then another vertical horizontal line and a quarter circle, then a complete circle, then two half circles connected together with the line at the end, a semicircle and a line, and a squiggle.

That's just lines, shapes. But you have to trust the fact that you're looking at that and you can recognize these shapes, these visual shapes represent something.

[16 : 21] And I can trust my eyes and I can trust my mind to interpret these and know that that's my name. The same applies to your ears, whatever sense.

We could go down this road a long way. And it's very interesting. The point is the same. It all starts with faith. The reason you know your name is because you have faith.

Faith preceded knowledge. And it's actually the same for everything. And so never think that you need to know everything in order to have faith.

Never think I need to know everything in order to have faith. The truth is the other way around. If you're going to know anything, you need to have faith.

So don't ever let the knowledge question be a stumbling block. I can tell you for anybody here who's maybe not yet a Christian or not sure if you're a Christian, every single other Christian in the world feels like they do not know enough.

[17 : 30] That is true of me. That is true of every single Christian I know. That is true of some of the people who I think are the most knowledgeable people I've ever met. They will all say, there's so much I don't know.

So never let that be a stumbling block. The other stumbling block though that we can face is the fact that sometimes our faith can feel strong, but very often our faith will feel weak.

And that can be a huge problem as well because I'm sure that there are many people who think, well, I do think I have some faith, but it's so weak.

And I'm so full of doubts and questions. And if you feel like that, what you've got to recognize, what's so crucial to recognize is that the quality, the value, the worth, and the actual strength of faith is not determined by the person who has the faith.

It's determined by the object of the faith. And let me give you an example. I want you to imagine two people and they're standing in front of a bridge.

[18 : 43] And so there's this massive bridge. We can make it the Kessek Bridge or whatever bridge comes to mind. It's a huge bridge in front of you. There's two people. One person is terrified of going on bridges.

And one person is perfectly confident going on bridges. And the person who is terrified thinks, I am really, really, really not sure if I should go on this bridge.

I hate bridges. I am so nervous. I am not confident. I'm not confident on this bridge at all. But I know that I need to get to the other side.

And the other person says, I feel perfectly fine. I'm going. For which one is the bridge stronger?

It's both of them. Because their faith, no matter how strong or weak it is, makes absolutely no difference whatsoever to how strong that bridge is.

[19 : 37] And so if you're about to go over a bridge, you don't need to stop beforehand and think, right, I need to stir up my faith because the more I stir up my faith, the stronger the concrete will get. It doesn't work like that.

And it's exactly the same in the gospel. Our faith might feel very weak. It might feel like it's wobbling all the time. That actually doesn't matter because the key question is not how strong your faith is.

The key question is how strong Jesus is. That is the key question. And whether your faith feels strong or whether your faith feels weak, it actually doesn't matter because everything depends on him, not on you.

We are believing in Jesus and we completely rely on him. So never be discouraged if your faith is wobbling or if you feel like you have doubts or if you're unsure.

Just remember that it all depends on Jesus and everything that he has done. And so the gospel is calling us to believe that faith, however, must be in the Lord Jesus.

[20 : 49] And that's the second word I want to think about. And we'll be quicker for the last two words. So that's a very familiar word, Lord. But it's an absolutely crucial word. It's one that we must think about.

We're very familiar with it. We hear it mentioned all the time. We'll call Jesus the Lord. But we need to think about what it means. Because when we say that Jesus is the Lord, that means that he has a unique and an exclusive status.

To be Lord means that you reign over everything in a way that no one else does. And so Jesus has this unique status.

And that's just logical. Some people find that offensive. It's just logical. That word Lord carries a logical exclusivity within it.

And so the Bible is claiming that Jesus has this unique statement that he alone is Lord over all.

[21 : 55] But that claim isn't made in a vacuum. We're not just saying, you know, you have to believe in Jesus or else because he's the Lord. There is actually a body of information and evidence underneath that term.

And this is highlighted by a crucial statement in verse 32 that Jair is told to believe in the Lord Jesus, but then in verse 32 we're told that the word of the Lord was spoken to him.

And the key thing I want us to recognize there is that behind the claim that Jesus is Lord, there lies a word, a body of information.

In other words, the Lordship of Jesus is part of a bigger story. The bigger story of the Bible, the fact that God created us for him, the fact that we rebelled against him and sinned, the fact that God initiated the plan of restoration, that he sent his son to become one of us, that Jesus died instead of us on the cross, that he rose again.

He's now risen at God's right hand and one day he's going to return. And all of that is what constitutes the body of information that evidences and proves the fact that Jesus is the Lord.

[23 : 09] And it's so crucial to recognize this because it's telling us that when you believe in Jesus, we're not asking you to do some kind of mystical vague thing to believe in Jesus like we believe in fairies or believe in whatever else people might believe in or not believe in.

No, the word that backs up this claim is full of propositions, full of truth statements from the beginning of the Bible to the very end.

It's full of promises that God makes to us and that he wants us to embrace. And at the heart of it lies a personal relationship whereby we as individuals recognize, yes, Jesus, you are the Lord.

And this raises a couple of crucial questions, times marching on, so I might just ask one of them. It's really emphasizing the fact that our faith cannot just be a wee sideline in our lives.

It's so easy to do that to kind of just put what we think of Jesus alongside a pile of other things that we think. So we might have lots of opinions on stuff. So I think that Toebloodone is the best chocolate that you can buy.

[24 : 21] I think that snow is wonderful. I wish we had so much more of it. I wish that the music on Radio 1 is absolutely dire. These are all my opinions and then you could put my opinion on Jesus in the same category.

No, you can't. You can't do that. You can't just make what you think of Jesus just the same as what you think about all sorts of other stuff.

And the reason you can't do that is because this is the Lord that we're talking about. This is the one who reigns over everything.

We have to treat this in a different category altogether. And it's so important for us to think about that because when we talk about what we believe, we have to recognize that this isn't really a do you don't you question.

We can often think that it is that do you don't you believe? Have you got faith or do you not have faith? We can easily think that it's framed in those terms.

[25 : 27] Do you believe, don't you believe? It's not actually really, that's not really the question that we need to ask. Well the question that we have to ask is not really a do you don't you question, but the question we have to ask is what do you believe?

What do you actually believe? Because everybody believes certain things. At a broad level to have faith is simply to have convictions.

I have never in my life met a convictionless person. Everybody has got convictions. Everybody believes certain things.

And we've all got to think about that. What do you believe? What is your explanation for ultimate reality?

What is life all about? What are the things that really, really matter? And as you think about what you believe, you have to ask yourself two questions.

[26 : 31] Do your convictions make sense? So you think about the stuff that you really believe. Do they make sense? Do your convictions make sense?

And are your convictions worth it? So do your convictions make sense? And are they worth it? In other words, if you think about your convictions as a bridge, if you use that illustration again, is that bridge strong enough?

The bridge that you believe in? Is it strong enough? And does it take you where you want to go? And it's so, so important that people think about this because what we often find is that people don't think these things through and they'll hold a pile of beliefs that ultimately don't actually make sense.

And so if you think about it, whatever your convictions are, you need to think about whether those convictions have a logical coherence and you need to think about the logical conclusion that they're leading to.

So if you think about logical coherence, a very, very, very, very common one to highlight and you may have seen this before is the great truth of postmodern philosophy that has shaped Western thinking for the last 70 or 80 years.

[27 : 47] It's all grounded on the idea that everybody can have their own views and there is this statement, there's no such thing as absolute truth.

Okay? That's a statement that you'll see variations of in lots of different places, whether it's a philosopher's claiming that nobody can claim exclusive truth, whether it's people saying that all religions will lead to the same place, or whether it's a Disney movie saying everybody can just be whatever they want to be.

It's all based on the same idea that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Now, that is a logically incoherent statement because that right there is a claim of absolute truth.

You're trying to make a claim that this is an absolute truth, that there's no such thing as absolute truth. That makes no sense.

That's logically incoherent. And you'll see that in many different philosophies that dominate the world today. There is a logical incoherence at the root of them.

[28 : 57] You also have to think about the logical conclusion of what you believe. So whatever it is that you believe, what is the logical conclusion? So a good example to think about there is, again, a dominant philosophy in the last couple of hundred years, although not so popular now, is a naturalistic philosophy.

Basically, the idea that science explains everything, the world is nothing more than a mechanical machine. It came from nothing. It will end up in nothing.

And we are all just part of that closed box machine. There is no supernatural. There's no spiritual. Everything is just natural.

And there's perhaps a logical conclusion, a coherence to that in certain ways. But the logical conclusion is something that nobody can live with.

Because the logical conclusion of a naturalistic position takes you to places whereby you end up saying that love is just an illusion. And it takes you to places where you say, well, the death of a child is no different to the death of a fly.

[30 : 08] And ultimately, ethical priorities and awareness of right and wrong is just a social construct.

And the logical conclusion is something that nobody, not even naturalists, can live with. So we need to think through logical coherence. We need to think through the logical conclusion.

And the amazing thing about the Gospel is that it answers both of these. It gives us a logically coherent understanding of reality, the fact that we've been made by God, for God.

That is why people matter so much. And the logical conclusion is an amazing promise that all who believe in Jesus will enjoy eternity with him in the new creation.

And so we need to think through about what we believe. We need to think through our convictions. The last thing we need to think about is the word saved.

[31 : 10] Time has run out, so I'm going to have to just skip a bit of what I'm going to say. What I want to highlight is this, though. The jailer believed in the Lord Jesus, and he was saved.

But then we see that that salvation had an amazing effect on him. And you see that in verses 33 and 34. He took Paul and Silas, he washed their wounds, and then he brought them into his house, and he set food before them.

And the key thing I want us to emphasize here is that in the Gospel we are saved in two ways. We are saved from, and we are saved for.

We're saved from sin. We're saved from death through the power of Jesus. But we're also saved for something brilliant.

We're saved so that we can live for Jesus, that we can follow him in our lives, that we can be transformed by his spirit, and that we can make a massive, massive difference to the world.

[32 : 17] And this is so incredibly important because sometimes people choose one or the other. Sometimes people will say, yes, I believe in the Lord Jesus, and I'm saved, but it's going to have no effect on my life.

And so we think, I've got my ticket for heaven, that's fine, and I'm just going to go through life as I ever did before. Other people make the other mistake, and they think, I want to change, I want to help others, I want to wash their wounds, I want to be hospitable, I want to be kind.

But I don't think I really need to believe, do I? And we make a choice between the two. So there are some people who will say, yes, I believe, but it has no effect on their life.

There's some people who will live the life that in so many ways corresponds to scripture, and yet they don't actually put their faith in Jesus.

The crucial thing is that the Gospel is calling us to both. The Gospel is calling us to put our faith in Jesus, and from that point we live a new life transformed by the Holy Spirit, showing God's love and goodness to the people that we meet.

[33 : 34] Time has disappeared, which is very frustrating, but that's what always happens to me. These are three of the most important words we can ever think about.

If we're asking the most important question of all, what must I do to be saved? You need to remember these three things. We're called to believe in the Lord Jesus, and if you do that, you will be saved.

Amen. Let's go. It's...

Yeah.