

Proper Response to Jesus: Faith

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- [0 : 00] In exploring Christianity then, we've come to the response. And I must say the handout is wrong. It's not lesson five, it's lesson six.
- So if you'd correct that right away, this is the last of the six lessons that we're coming to today. So we've come to the response to the gospel about Jesus.
- What is its response that is demanded of us all? If Christianity is about Christ and a fitting response to him, what is that appropriate response?
- Last week we said, well, it's twofold. It's faith and repentance or repentance and faith. And we looked at repentance last week as a change of mind, a change of direction, a change of allegiance.
- Repentance, indeed, it's turning away from self to God. Now, wherever we have true repentance, we also have this other half of the response, which is true faith.
- [1 : 08] So let's say that over here is me and my way. And over here is God and his way. So as I'm born into this world, I am born a sinner with my back to God going for me and my way.
- Now, I live like this and then one day I stop and I turn around. Was that repentance or faith?
- Repentance. Repentance. Why so? I turn from what? Sin. I turn from my way of sin and myself.
- Alright? So it was repentance to turn. Is that all it was? Where am I facing now? Toward God.
- Toward God. What do we call that? Faith. So instead of putting faith in myself and going my own way, I now stop going that way.
- [2 : 17] And now I turn from self to God. And it's turning to God that is the other side of the coin. Turning from sin and self is repentance.
- And turning to God and trusting in him. That's faith. And so wherever we find the one, we always find the other. This morning we're focusing on faith.
- Now, just to help us as we begin our study, faith has synonyms in the Bible. Like believe. Like trust.
- Like rely. And those are all synonyms of this response of faith. Well, let's dig in then. We're in the Gospel of Luke.
- And let's turn to chapter 8 and verses 5 and following. Luke 8, 5 and following.
- [3 : 16] Here we have a parable. Another story that Jesus told about a farmer with his four kinds of soil. And so he goes out with his bag of seed and he scatters it across all of his field.
- He fills the whole field with seed. Now, not all soil in his field is good soil. There's four different kinds of soil in his field.
- And in fact, only one kind of the four is productive and brings a harvest. Jesus says, that's like what happens whenever I preach.

He says, as I'm going about preaching the Word of God, I'm scattering it everywhere. And he says, it falls upon people. And as those people receive the Word of God from me, it has differing effects upon them.

And so he speaks of the four different kinds of hearers of the Word. Those people who have heard the Word about Jesus. So let's see the comparisons that he makes here.

[4 : 27] Lori Kelly, would you read verse 5 for us? A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path.

It was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. What kept the seed from producing a crop? It was trampled on.

Somebody else, say something. And the birds ate it. So the land was trampled on, which means it was hard-packed earth, so the soil didn't enfold it and cover it.

And before it could ever germinate, along came the birds, seeing it lying right on top and just plucked it away. And so that soil never produced a response to that seed.

All right? What does that mean? What is Jesus teaching by that? Let's jump down. We're only interested in this first kind of soil. Down to verses 11 and 12.

[5 : 23] Isabel, do you have that? 11 and 12, please. Now the parable with this, the seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear. Then the devil comes and takes away the words out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

Okay, so that hard-packed soil represents a certain group of people that received in the sense that they heard Jesus teaching.

They heard who he was and why he had come, just as we've been studying here. And why did it not bear fruit?

What is the spiritual explanation of this? Okay, so the devil. There is a real devil. We've studied that in our course when we saw that Jesus cast out demons.

And so Jesus is saying there's demonic activity wherever his word is taught. Wherever people learn about who Jesus is. There are these unseen spiritual beings that come and they want to snatch that word about Jesus out of their minds and hearts so they no longer think about it.

[6 : 40] So it can be as silly as a distraction out the window that draws people's minds away from the word of God. It can be planting other thoughts about what we're going to do later today. It can be all sorts of things.

But the aim of the devil is to do what? Keep them from believing. Because those who believe are saved.

In other words, his aim is to keep them from making the fitting response to who Jesus is. And this is where we see. What is the fitting response to make to Jesus as he's presented to us in the Bible, in the word of God?

Well, it's the very thing that Satan is doing his best to keep you from doing. It is to believe and be saved. So there we see that the fitting response, the appropriate, the only appropriate response, as it were, to the gospel is to believe.

It's all those and only those who make this fitting response of faith to the gospel are saved. Any questions on that parable?

[7 : 48] Just that one soil? You see the fitting response? Being faith. All right? When we look at the enemy and what he's trying to keep people from, it reveals to us just what is the fitting response.

It's trusting. It's believing in Jesus. Now, faith then is believing all that Jesus said to be true.

So what he said about who he is, where he's come from, why he's here, that he's come to save sinners by taking their place on the cross and dying to suffer the punishment they deserve, and then rising from the dead.

We believe that. We take that on board as truth. We believe that he's coming back, just as he said, to judge all mankind and to assign them to their eternal destinies.

Faith is believing all that Jesus says. All his claims. We believe. But saving faith is more than just believing these certain facts to be true.

[8 : 57] It is that. And that's why it's number one on your handout. It is believing all that Jesus says to be true. But it's more than that. It's much more than that.

In the second place, it is entrusting yourself to this Jesus. Entrusting yourself into his hands to have him save you. So he says he will save all who come and believe on him.

Faith trusts Jesus to actually save me from my sin. My deserved judgment. You see the difference?

What is the difference between believing everything that Jesus said and entrusting yourself to have Jesus savior? Entrusting yourself to Jesus.

All right. The James tells us that even the devils have that kind of belief. They know who Jesus is. They know every one of his claims to be true. But are they saved?

[9 : 58] No. They don't entrust themselves to him. So there's a huge difference. Charles Blondin was a tightrope walker back in the 1850s.

And in 1859, he walked across the Niagara Falls on a tight wire. And when he got to the other side, the crowd was all applauding.

And Blondin said to them, Do you believe that I can take a man on my shoulders and walk back across this wire carrying that man on my shoulders?

They all said, Yes, yes, yes, you're great. You're the great Blondin. We believe you can. And then he says, Well, which one of you will get it on my shoulders?

And let me carry you across the tight wire. Nobody was a taker. What's the difference? They all believed he could do it.

[10 : 58] They had seen him come across by himself and they knew something of his greatness. And yes, we believe you can do that. But what's the difference between that and getting on his back?

They weren't going to trust their life entirely into his hands. You see, once you're on his back, you don't have any contact with the earth, with the wire.

You are entirely in his hands, aren't you? And that's what faith is. It's not only believing that Jesus can and will save people, everyone who comes to him in faith.

It is actually putting ourselves into his hands entirely to have him save us. So that's the second part of faith.

In fact, it was Blondin's manager, Harry Colcord, that was the only one who agreed to climb up on his back. And indeed, he did carry him across Niagara Falls.

[12 : 03] But he put his life entirely into the hands of Blondin and let him carry him across. You see, there's an entrusting of oneself to this Jesus that's involved in faith.

It's a surrender of my life to him. And I trust him to save me. So it's not trying to save yourself.

Colcord was not somehow putting a foot down and trying to balance on. No, he was entrusting himself to Blondin.

And in the same way, salvation and saving faith is not trying to save your faith or save yourself by your own religious works and good efforts.

Faith is looking away from self, from any trust in self and looking to everything in Jesus to save us from our sin.

[12 : 59] So turn over to chapter 18 of Luke. Chapter 18. Jesus loved to teach with parables.

And we have another one here in chapter 18. This is a parable about two men who went into the temple to praise. So let's have verses 9 and 10 read.

Sam Hawes, do you have that? Verses 9 and 10? I'm sorry. That's exactly what I meant. Sure. Sure.

In spite of the parables, the servants who trusted themselves, they were righteous in spite of us. Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee to the other a Pharisee.

All right. We've met these two characters before in Luke's Gospel, haven't we? The Pharisee. He's the holier-than-thou man.

[14 : 06] He's the one who is respected as the most religious man in Israel at the time, belonging to that religious sect of the Pharisees. And he's very confident in his own goodness, his own rightness with God.

He was proud of his accomplishments spiritually such that he looked down his nose at everyone else. So Jesus works him into the story.

That's one guy. And the other guy is a publican or a tax collector. And we've met them before, haven't we, in Luke's Gospel. They're the double-crossing thieves in Judea.

So he's a wicked man. And so we have these two men who go into the temple, and they each have a go at prayer. And verses 11 and 12.

Josh, would you read that? We see the Pharisee, first of all, praying. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself. God, I thank you that I am not like the other men.

[15 : 05] Robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I pass twice a week and give a tenth of all I give. This tax collector.

Do you see anything condescending in that attitude? You see why Jesus has the Pharisee in his story? Because that's the whole reason he's telling this parable. Because some were very confident in their righteousness and looked down on others.

And so that's what he has happening in this parable. It's a Pharisee, a very religious man. And in his prayer, he's looking down at this tax collector. Now, where is this man's faith?

What is he trusting in to be right with God? In good standing with God. What's he trusting in? His own works. Both what he has done and...

It's the opposite of that. What he hasn't done. Isn't that what we find men trusting in? Well, I haven't stolen. I haven't robbed banks. I haven't killed by name.

[16 : 13] And so we trust in what we haven't done and in what we have done. We fast and pray and do all these things. So that's where his faith is.

All right, let's go on to the tax collector. Tom Heaney, would you read that for us? Verse 13, his prayer. 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, sinner. Where's his faith? What's he trusting in? God's work?

God's mercy? Anything of himself? We don't hear one good thing from his mouth, do we? About himself. As he comes before God, he doesn't have one thing good to say for himself.

Now that is quite different from the other prayer. He had a lot of things to say about himself. But this is different. He doesn't have one good thing to say. He just throws himself entirely on God's mercy.

[17 : 15] Like Colcord did upon Blondin when he got up on his back. He's trusting entirely in something outside of himself. Nothing I've done.

Your mercy. Have mercy on me. You know what I am? I'm the sinner. But you have mercy. Have mercy on me. All right? So, he's not seeking something he deserves.

He's rather seeking mercy what he doesn't deserve. Now, Jesus then shocks his hearers out of their pants, as we say, in verse 14.

Roger, Michaud, do you have that, verse 14? Yes. 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. All right. He shocks them because of who he says went home justified out of these two.

[18 : 27] Now, first let's just remember what justified means. It's the work of a judge who's heard the case, examined the witnesses, the evidence, and he brings down the gavel and he declares that man innocent.

He is right with the law. Well, God is judging all men. And he brings down the gavel. He sees everything there is to be seen.

All the evidence. It's all open to him. And he actually can say and declare certain men to be innocent in his court. Now, which one of these two men was it?

Well, all the people thought it was the Pharisee. They hated these tax collectors. They knew what rascals they were. But this Pharisee, oh, he's so righteous.

Look at his robes. Look how he prays. We see him on the street corners praying all the time. And if anybody gets into heaven, if only two men get into heaven, we know that one will be a Pharisee.

[19 : 29] That was how high they held them. And Jesus just turns their world upside down. And he says, I tell you, this man, the tax collector, not the other, went home justified.

Right with God. Why? Did it have anything to do with their good works? No.

It had everything to do with where their faith was. The tax collector's faith was in God's mercy alone. The Pharisee's faith was in his own works.

What he was doing to try to save himself. So how did the Pharisee go home that day? He just dressed up and went into the temple and had a good worship.

Time with God. How did he go home that day? Lost. Guilty. The opposite of justified. He was not declared righteous.

[20 : 26] He's declared guilty. He's under condemnation. He's still under the wrath and judgment of God for sin. Like we saw, we all are. But this other man, he goes home justified.

Again, not because of anything he did in terms of earning his salvation, but because his faith was in God's mercy alone.

And then Jesus makes a word of application from his parable to all men. In other words, he's wanting us to know that this isn't just a singular situation that applies to these two men.

But he's rather wanting us to know that this applies to you and me, to all people. Indeed, everyone. And his word of application is, For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

So this is not just a truth for these two characters, but for us all. Now, he's emphasizing the humility of faith. What is there of humility in faith?

[21 : 40] What is there about faith that is humble? We have to all know what we really are. Okay. That can be humbling, can't it?

This man says, I am the sinner. I own it. That's what I am. These people are right to hate me. You would be right to hate me, God.

I am a thief. I am a sinner. That's humbling. But everyone who has that humble faith will be exalted.

And that's what God did for him. He exalted him. He gave him the status of being right with God. What is there about unbelief that is proud?

Where is the pride in unbelief? I don't need Christ. I can do it myself. Okay. We're saying, I don't need this Christ.

[22 : 40] Who is he? He's God's eternal son that he sent to suffer punishment and damnation on the cross for sinners. And we say, I don't need him.

I'm good enough myself. Can you see the pride in that? That would exalt ourselves above God and his son, Jesus. So, the humility of faith, the pride of unbelief.

What is the fitting response to this Jesus? It is this humble faith. That's what makes us right with God. That's what brings salvation to us. And all who have it are justified.

And only those who make this response are justified. So, the issue you see is, is your faith in yourself? Or is it in Christ? Is it in something that you have done to make yourself fitting for God?

Or is it entirely on what Jesus has done to please the Father? Well, nothing is more common than people hearing and exploring Christianity.

[23 : 47] And when they come away with a bit of the facts of Christianity. To think that they will be saved from hell by trying harder to be good. That is the most common response that people have to Christianity.

And that's why I say that Christianity or religion damns more people than it saves. People get the idea that since God is holy and I'm unholy and God judges men.

That I need to try harder just to be good and try to be better. Try to be good enough to escape God's judgment. But that's not Christianity at all.

That's self-help salvation. That's faith in self. And remember, that's what we must repent of. We must turn away from self. And we must trust entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, what do you remember about Passover in Egypt? Remember, Jesus claims to be the Passover lamb.

[24 : 55] And remember, we studied about why Jesus had to die. Why does the wrath of God pass over people like this tax collector?

Not because of anything he did. It was because of the blood of the Passover lamb that was slain and put over the doorposts. That was the lesson we saw from Passover.

You see, there's nothing that you can do to cause God's wrath to pass over you. There's only one thing. He says, when I see the blood, I will pass over you. Are you trusting in Jesus' blood such that God will pass over you?

Because he sees that your faith is in what Jesus has done. And since Jesus was damned on the cross, your faith is in that work. And that becomes good for you.

And so he sees the blood, your faith in the blood. And he passes over you. Earlier in our nation, the American Indians taught the early settlers how to survive a prairie fire.

[26 : 00] And when they saw the smoke arising on the distance, they would do something that might sound strange. They would light a fire. But it was what some of you farmers do when you burn off your fence row.

It was a controlled fire. And they would burn off a spot of land. And the fire would consume everything combustible in that area. Then they'd put the fire out quickly.

And then they would take all their belongings, all their family and themselves, into the center of that burnt out area. And here would come the flames rushing right toward them.

Well, as soon as it hit that spot, the flames just went around. They passed around them and went on. And they were spared. That's what faith in Jesus does.

We trust in him on the cross having received God's wrath that we deserve. In other words, the fire of God's wrath already fell on Jesus on the cross.

[27 : 02] And when I trust in Jesus, I'm taking my stand. I get into Jesus. I'm standing where the fires of judgment have already fallen. And so there's no more fire for me.

There's no wrath for me. It passes around me, over me. But it doesn't touch me. You see, it's faith in Jesus and what he's done on the cross for sinners.

I told you last week that Luke wrote a sequel to his gospel. Another letter to Theophilus. That most excellent man, whoever he was. It's called the Book of Acts.

And in that Book of Acts, he records in chapter 16. An event where the apostle Paul and his co-worker Silas were in prison for preaching about Jesus.

And in the middle of the night, an earthquake happened. And all the prisoners were free. And the Philippian jailer came out of his house and was about to kill himself, thinking all the prisoners were gone.

[28 : 05] And that he would therefore be treated with capital punishment for not keeping his prisoners in his prison. And Paul says, do not harm yourself.

We're all here. And then that man asked the million dollar question. What must I do to be saved? And in those words, we have crystallized the question that we're after.

What is the fitting response to Jesus Christ and who he is? What must I do to be saved? And Paul's answer to him was not, well, you need to start attending the synagogue.

You need to stop lying and being so mean here in the prison. And try to do a little bit more good and hope that you're good outweighs the bad. No, he just said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Get into Christ. Because that's the only place where God's wrath will pass over. Isn't it a beautiful message? It's why the apostles went into all the world to preach this good news.

[29 : 12] That's the response. The response of faith. So, as we come to the conclusion of our study on the fitting response to the gospel of Jesus Christ, I think one of the clearest examples we have of the two-fold response of repentance and faith is found in chapter 23 of our gospel of Luke.

Chapter 23 and verses 32 and following. It's the example we have of one of the thieves that was dying with Jesus that day.

So far, his response to God up to this point had been, turn his back on God and his ways and live for self and follow my ways.

That's how he had lived his life. And living that way, it actually got him in trouble with the law. He's a criminal. He's a robber. He's a thief. And now he must pay with the death penalty. And the death penalty in Rome was the cross.

It was crucifixion, the tortuous death of the cross. And so, here he is. It's one of those thieves that we want to see the fitting response in. Listen as I read verses 32 and following.

[30 : 31] Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him, that's with Jesus, to be executed. When they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified him along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left.

Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood there watching, and the rulers even sneered at him.

They said, He saved others? Let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, the chosen one. The soldiers also came up and mocked him.

They offered him wine vinegar and said, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. Now, there was a written notice above him which read, This is the king of the Jews.

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.

[31 : 39] Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.

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. Here's a man who made the right response to who Jesus is and why he had come.

How do we know he made the right response? Not a trick question. He heard the most encouraging words a dying man has ever heard.

Today you will be with me in paradise. So we know he made the right response to who Jesus was. Now remember, all of his life he'd been making the wrong response.

[32 : 46] But he had the good fortune, indeed the good providence of God, to be suffering execution alongside of the only one who could save him, Jesus Christ.

And while he was on his cross, he went from mocking Jesus, because Matthew and Mark tell us that both of these thieves were mocking and insulting Jesus.

But while he was hanging there, this thief repented and believed on Jesus. He had repentance and faith on the spot, as it were, on his deathbed, we would say.

And that shows us the nature of salvation. It's by repenting and believing, not by a man's works. This man, he didn't have any works.

And he didn't have time to come down from the cross and do religious works. He's going to die on that cross. And yet in his last moments, he puts faith in Jesus.

[33 : 47] He repents of his way and trusts in the Savior. Now, if repentance is a change of mind, how do we see a change of mind in this man?

Well, we see a change of mind with regard to sin, to self, and to salvation. He gets a new attitude towards sin, doesn't he? He was making fun of Jesus.

That's a sin. That's a proud sin. But now he's actually rebuking the other for this sin.

Don't you fear God? We're not coming down alive. Haven't you thought that we're going from this cross to answer before our Maker? Surely we ought to fear God. Stop mocking this man.

A different attitude towards sin. He changed his mind towards sin. What about self? He had a high view of himself. All mockers have a high view of themselves. If they can look down their nose at others and scoff at them, that's a proud view of self.

[34 : 52] And he goes from that to a humble view of self. We're getting what we deserve. How many criminals have you heard say that recently? This man has a humble view of self.

And a different view of Christ. He's got a changed mind about Jesus. He goes from seeing him as somebody to be kicked around with as the butt of his jokes to being innocent.

He's done nothing wrong. So we see this repentance. He's repudiating his whole past life. The way he's lived. All of his years. He's repudiating it all.

It's a change of mind. A change of allegiance. And now what about faith? What do we see about his faith in Jesus? You see anything of his faith?

We don't know what all he had heard about Jesus. But just being on the cross, he had gotten plenty about Jesus. He heard these men mocking him. And in their mockery, there was plenty of the gospel.

[35 : 55] He saved others. Let him save himself. If he is the Christ, the anointed of God, the chosen one. You see, there was the truth of Jesus as a savior.

He's God's anointed one. And then if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. He's the king of the Jews. So what others mocked, he believed. He took on board the truth about Jesus.

And we hear his faith and his cry for mercy. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Now it's a king that has a kingdom. And this man, in the middle cross, looks anything but like a king.

Yes, the sign above him says, king of the Jews. But that was a mockery against the Jews. Jews, here's a king that fits you. This guy here. Dying in weakness.

Blood streaked body. Face beaten beyond recognition. Kings have crowns. This man has a crown of thorns. Kings have thrones. This man's throne is a cross.

[37 : 02] And there he is. Nothing visibly to think that this man was a king. But he believes he's a king. How do we know that?

He says, when you come into your kingdom. I believe you have a kingdom. He believes that death will not be the end of the Messiah. When you come into your kingdom.

Yes, you're going to die here. But when you come into your kingdom. Remember me. And he casts all the weight of his soul upon this Jesus. Counting a place in his kingdom is more valuable than life itself.

Jesus, remember me. When you come into your kingdom. You see, there's faith running out. Upon Jesus Christ. And the answer today.

You will be with me in paradise. Well, again, these accounts from the gospel of Luke just reveal to us the response that is required.

[37 : 58] Is that of repentance and faith. What a scene. Two crosses side by side. On one, you have the wicked sinner deserving hell begging for mercy.

And on the other, a gracious savior and king promising heaven. But just as in Jesus' story about the two men who went into the temple.

There were two thieves, weren't there? Only one repented and believed. And was saved. The other was not saved. And so the issue comes back to you.

You've been a part of this Bible study that we've been having these six evenings. And we've studied who Jesus is. And why he came. And his death and resurrection. What will be your response?

So that's a decision that you must now make. Will you turn from your own way and go his way? Will you turn from trusting in anything in yourself.

[38 : 52] And put all your weight on Jesus to have him save you? That's my desire for you. And salvation is God's free gift. That he willingly gives.

To all who come to him. Asking in Jesus' name. Well, that's the end of our Exploring Christianity study. We're going to have one more Bible study.

Or one more Sunday school class next week. Just to talk more about how do we use this material. How can it be used. How we can profit the most from it.

So let's be dismissed. And we'll take that up for our last session next week.