

The Arrow of Faith (part 2)

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[0:00] Well, two things you must do to be saved is the study that we're on. And we've studied repentance, which was the first of the two, and now we're on faith.

And repentance was compared to the tree, the tree of repentance. And we had five lessons on the tree of repentance. Now Waldron has five lessons on the arrow of faith.

And last week we saw the object of faith. This was the arrowhead. Faith looks to Christ. And the million-dollar statement was this.

See if you can finish it. The saving thing about saving faith is not faith, but the object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, it's not faith that saves us. It's Christ that saves us. And faith looks to Christ and is saved through his work.

[1:03] So there's lots of people leaning on their faith to save them. That's faith in their faith. That's another form of self-salvation. No, it's not faith itself that saves, but Christ that saves through faith.

So the object of faith is critical. Then we looked at the nature of faith. Just what is saving faith? And we saw that there are two aspects of it portrayed in the scriptures.

Faith in the first place is the conviction of the truths of the gospel. That Jesus Christ really lived.

That he really died. He really rose again. And that that death and resurrection has salvation benefits for all who will trust him.

There are certain facts about the gospel. And faith believes those facts. But that's not all that saving faith is. Faith is also commitment to the Christ of the gospel.

We not only believe certain facts about him. Yes, that's important. That's part of faith. But faith puts its weight upon this Christ.

[2:10] Faith trusts in this Christ. It makes that life surrender of commitment to the Lord Jesus. We compared it to Blondin riding or walking across the tightrope, across the Niagara Falls.

And he gets to the other side and says, now who wants to get on my back and go back? They believed he could go across and even carry a man on his back. But who would actually do it? Who would commit their life to another?

Well, that's the commitment to the person that is part of saving faith. A lot of people have a faith. They believe the facts of the gospel.

But they have never put themselves into the hands of Jesus. Put themselves on his shoulders and let him save them by himself. Let him lead them.

So both are important because we see failure in presentations of the gospel when one or the other is missing. Some would agree to the basic facts of the gospel but lack the personal commitment to Christ.

[3:16] They must know that apart from entrusting yourself to Christ, there's no salvation. Others claim to have a personal relationship, a personal commitment to Christ.

But they reject critical teaching about Christ like the incarnation. That he's God. The eternal God. And that in the incarnation he became man.

He was born of a virgin. That he really did die in the place of others to atone for their sins. He really physically rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and is coming back to judge.

No, they don't believe those facts. But they'll tell you until they're blue in the face that, but I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is no more saving than the other, you see.

Because they're trusting their supposed commitment to Christ is a Christ not of the Bible but of their own making. There's only one Jesus that saves. And he's the Jesus revealed in scripture.

[4:18] And you must trust in that Jesus or there's no salvation for you. So salvation, saving faith is both accepting what the Bible tells us about Jesus and trusting ourselves.

Putting all of our trust in him to save us. Committing ourselves to him for life. So are there any questions or comments before we move on? That's all review.

All right, we're moving on then. The fourth thing about faith is the instrumentality of faith. And Waldron calls this the feathers of the arrow.

Feathers help the arrow flight straight and true to the intended target. And so the instrumentality of faith is our study this morning.

One of the main issues that split the Roman church in two during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was the doctrine of justification.

[5 : 22] How are men and women, how are sinners made right with God? So that on the books of heaven, there is righteousness as God looks at us instead of sin and guilt.

How does that happen? What is it that justifies you and reckons you righteous in God's sight? Well, the Roman church taught it was faith plus works.

It was faith plus works. Yes, again, they will preach that we're saved by faith in Jesus Christ. But they will not say that that is all you need.

They'll say, plus your own religious works. The Protestants taught that justification was by faith alone apart from works.

And the great Protestant confessions of faith are very clear on this. I want you to look in the back of the hymnal that's in front of you. And there's two kinds of hymnals. There's the old ones.

[6 : 23] They look kind of like this. And then there's the new Baptist edition. I think it even has it down the bottom. But look in the back and see if you can find in the back the statement of faith.

In mine, I have the Westminster Confession of Faith. This is the old one. But some of the new, the Baptist editions, you will find the 1689 Confession of Faith.

That's the confession that this church holds to. And they're very similar. And I simply want you to see what it says about justification.

So, for instance, 679, the little number on the bottom for the old Trinity hymnal. And I can't help you with the newer ones. But look at chapter 11 of the Confession of Faith.

Look for chapter 11. And it's on justification. And paragraph 2 says this.

[7 : 28] Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification.

Yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love. Okay?

So you have something similar to that in the Baptist 1689 Confession, if you have that. Very similar statements. What I want you to see is that faith that receives and rests on Christ and his righteousness is the alone instrument of justification.

It's the only instrument to make us right with God. Remember, the saving thing about saving faith is not faith, but the object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So if faith is not the saving thing about saving faith, what is faith? Well, it's the instrument that God uses in salvation.

[8 : 33] Now, what do we mean by instrument or instrumentality of faith? Justification is in Christ, and faith is the instrument, the channel by which we receive Christ and his righteousness.

Sam Waldron speaks of snorkeling. How many of you have gone snorkeling? Okay, so you know a little bit about breathing through that tube. In order to see the fish the best, you've got to stick your head under the water and breathe underwater.

Now, that's hard for us land dwellers. So a snorkel helps us, doesn't it? We stick the snorkel in our mouth, and we make sure the top's above the water, and we breathe.

What your body needs to live is oxygen. The snorkel is not the oxygen, but it is the instrument through which you get oxygen and therefore live.

Faith works like the snorkel. What you need to be justified, what you need to live eternally and be justified before God, is Christ and his righteousness. Not faith, not the snorkel.

[9 : 47] You need Christ and his righteousness. That's the oxygen by which you live. Faith has no merit to justify you. It's simply the instrument through which you breathe in oxygen, through which you receive Christ.

And all of his righteousness. So faith works like the snorkel. And notice how the Bible refers to faith as an instrument.

Romans 5.1. Let's look that passage up. Romans 5.1. Faith is the instrument. Would someone please read Romans 5.1 loudly so we can all hear it?

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been justified through faith.

You see the word through? That's the word of instrumentality. So the snorkeler lives through the snorkel. He gets oxygen through the snorkel.

[10 : 55] How do you get justified before God? Through Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ. It's through faith. And that phrase, through faith, shows us that faith is not the salvation, the thing that saves.

It's the instrument through which we're saved. You see the same in Romans 3. In verse 28. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith.

Again, it's by faith. Through faith. Apart from observing the law. Faith is the only instrumentation. The only instrument for justification.

It's through faith. By faith. Without. Apart from. Observing the law. And you have the same thing in Romans chapter 4.1-6.

What shall we say then that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about. But not before God.

[11 : 56] What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.

However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. So it's through faith in Christ that we receive salvation before God. But now why does the Bible teach that we're justified by faith alone? What is it about faith that makes it particularly uniquely suited to be the one instrument that justifies us?

That's the question. And verse 16 of Romans 4 gives us the answer. What's the unique thing about faith that makes it alone the instrument of justification?

[13 : 12] Verse 16. Therefore the promise, promise of salvation, eternal life, justification. The promise comes by faith so that it might be by grace.

It may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. I want you to notice the phrase, Therefore the promise comes by faith for this particular reason, so that it may be by grace.

It's by faith that it might be by grace. So let's be clear on the question that this text is answering. The question is, why is justification by faith alone?

Why is Abraham and all of his spiritual seed, whether they are Jewish or Gentiles, they all have the faith of Abraham. Why are all of us justified by faith and not by something else?

Why didn't God make repentance the instrument of justification? Why didn't he make praying or something else the object?

[14 : 21] Why faith? Now, the first thing Waldron says is it's not just because faith is a gift of God. We might think, well, God chose faith because it's a gift of God.

True enough, but there's a lot of other things that are gifts of God that were not chosen to be the instrument of justification. Repentance is a gift of God.

We saw that, didn't we? It's as much a gift of God as faith is, but God didn't choose repentance as an instrument of justification. We're not justified by repenting, but by faith, by believing.

Love is a gift of God, but God does not justify us through love. It's not that because we love God, we're therefore made right with God.

The fear of God is a gift of God. It's something he gives us, and it's a precious gift, but we're not justified by our fear of God. So though there are many gifts of God, faith is the only gift that's singled out as the instrument of our justification.

[15 : 27] So there's got to be some other reason alongside of the fact that it's because it's a gift of God. The answer's given in our text, Romans 4.16. And it's this, because faith underscores the fact that salvation is by free and sovereign grace.

Faith underscores, highlights the fact that justification is by free and sovereign grace. Verse 16, Therefore the promise comes by faith so that it may be by grace.

And this whole chapter has been emphasizing that justification before God is not by the law, but by grace. And nothing shows that more clearly than the instrument by which we're justified.

Because the instrument is nothing more than faith. God has designed and carried out the way of salvation with a distinct aim and view.

God wants to save people in a way that humbles man and exalts him. And so, brings glory to his grace.

[16 : 38] You see that in Ephesians 1. Three times he mentions the high purpose that God pursued in salvation. He says twice, To the praise of his glory and once, To the praise of his glorious grace.

That's the designing thought, if you will, in God as to why he made justification by faith alone. Because he's pursuing something in the way he saves men.

He's pursuing that man might be humbled and his grace exalted. Ephesians 2.8 and 9. Why did God design a way of salvation that is by grace through faith?

So that no one can boast. We saw that a couple weeks ago in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. He designed salvation so that no man may boast before the Lord.

So here's the statement that I think makes it clear. Everything about salvation is calculated and planned and carried out to humble man and to honor God for his amazing grace.

[17 : 42] And nothing does that so clearly as faith. That's why justification is by faith alone. That's the unique thing about faith.

Faith makes clear the gracious character of salvation. It strips man of any reason to boast and lays all the praise at the feet of God's grace. As one Puritan wrote, what is it about faith?

We're looking now, what is it that's unique about faith that does that? And one Puritan said, well, faith is a self-emptying grace.

Faith, by very definition, looks away from self. Remember, Jesus says that whoever believes on him when he's lifted up, whoever believes on him will not perish but have everlasting life.

And he pointed Nicodemus back to something that happened in the Old Testament when Israel was grumbling and God sent fiery serpents that bit them.

[18 : 43] And were poisonous vipers and they were dying. They're dying. And Moses, as the mediating intercessor, runs before God to intercede for them. And God says, make a bronze snake and put it on a pole.

Lift it up in the middle of the camp so that whoever looks will live. What is faith? Faith is looking to Christ, lifted up on Calvary, trusting in what he does for sinners.

And by very virtue of what faith is, you see, it's a self-emptying grace. If men were trying to create healing potions, they would have died.

No, it's not by focusing on something they did. It's actually looking completely away from anything in self, looking to that object, expecting salvation from Christ.

So faith is a self-emptying grace. You see how that exalts and lifts up Christ and puts man down. It's not only a self-emptying grace.

[19 : 49] It's a receptive grace. It's a receiving grace. The first act of faith is not a performing grace.

We're seeing that in Sunday mornings. We'll see that faith does perform wonderful feats. But the first act of faith, the first act is not a performing act, but it's a receiving grace.

The very first act of faith is to hold out empty hands. Nothing in my hands I bring. I just hold out empty hands. That's what faith is. Is there anything to boast about empty hands?

No. All the salvation is found in the one that the empty hands receive. So you see how faith is a self-emptying grace that looks away from bankrupt self entirely to another.

It's a receptive grace. And then it's a reliant grace. It leans all its weight on Christ. It puts no weight on itself.

[20 : 52] So there's nothing about self to boast in. And all and everything about Christ to boast in. Spurgeon, in his little book, All of Grace, says this.

Faith, again, is doubtless selected. Why is it the unique instrument of justification? It's doubtless selected because it gives all the glory to God.

It is of faith that it might be by grace. Same text. And it is of grace that there might be no boasting, for God cannot endure pride. The proud he knows far off. And he has no wish to come nearer to them.

He will not give salvation in a way which will suggest or foster pride. Paul says, not of works lest any man should boast. Now faith excludes all boasting.

The hand which receives charity does not say, I am to be thanked for accepting the gift. That would be absurd. When the hand conveys bread to the mouth, it does not say to the body, thank me for I feed you.

[21 : 56] It's a very simple thing that the hand does, though a very necessary thing. And it never arrogates glory to itself for what it does. So God has selected faith to receive the unspeakable gift of his grace, because it cannot take to itself any credit, but must adore the gracious God who is the giver of all good.

Faith sets the crown upon the right head. And therefore the Lord Jesus was known to put the crown upon the head of faith, saying, thy faith has saved thee. Go in peace.

So that's why faith is the alone instrument of justification. It's for the same reason that Gideon's army was reduced to 300 when fighting the Midianite hordes.

Gideon has his whole band there, thousands and thousands, and he sends home 22,000 soldiers. And then he sends home another 10,000 until there's only 300 soldiers left.

You remember that story. And now God says, now we're talking. Now I'm ready to work against the Midianites. Now you may know that the 22,000 were indeed fearful, and the 10,000 drank the wrong way.

[23 : 15] But don't let those minor points keep you from seeing the main point. And God himself speaks and makes the main point.

Judges 7-2, he says to Gideon, You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands, in order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her.

So God whittled down Gideon's band until they were outnumbered 450 to 1. How would you like to fight against those odds?

450 men. Each of you, you've got to handle 450. The next one, you've got to handle. Those were the odds that day. No one who heard how badly Gideon was outnumbered would ever think that his deliverance was due to his own strength, would they?

No one would say, wow, those must have been some fierce fighters. No, there had to be something else to account for the victory that day. And that's the reason that God chooses faith.

[24 : 26] Because anyone who knows anything about what faith is will say the victory, the reason that person is justified before God, is not because of some value and some merit in their own faith that makes them right from God.

Faith is only the instrument that receives the whole of justification from God as a gift. No one who understands what faith is would ever think that faith merits or that believers deserve any of the credit for salvation.

So it's the insignificance of faith for which God chose it to be the instrument of justification. Faith uniquely gives all the glory to God.

So we're not to think that, well, faith is something that we contribute to salvation. That's our contribution to salvation, of which most of it is contributed by Christ.

That Christ contributes 99%, and then we contribute the last 100%. No, not at all. Faith makes no contribution to making us right with God.

[25 : 45] Faith receives 100% of all that Jesus has done to make us right with God. Faith is the gift of God's grace given to be the instrumental means of receiving God's grace so that salvation by God's grace alone might shine out in all its undisguised glory.

So faith comes from grace. Faith looks to grace. Faith places the spotlight on God's grace. And by simply receiving and resting on grace, faith glorifies grace.

That's why it's the only instrument of justification. Justification, it's least likely to obscure the fact that justification is all of grace.

Any comments or questions then on the instrument of faith? It's like the snorkel that brings to us all the merit of Christ.

Okay? The last point, and we're only going to get to introduce it this morning and then we'll have to finish it later, but it's on the assurance of faith.

[27 : 05] Now, you've had half an hour or so to get your minds woken up. You're going to need them really fine-tuned now, okay? So I warned you, fine-tune it.

Gird up the loins of your minds. The assurance of faith. This is the target for the arrow. The target that faith is aiming at.

God has designed the gospel of justification by faith alone in order that it might accomplish two purposes now. We just saw the one purpose was to give all the glory to God and his grace.

But there was another reason why God designed salvation, justification by faith alone. And it was to give believers assurance of their salvation.

God wants not only to save sinners, but he wants that they might know that they are saved right now. Not at the end of their lives, but right now.

[28:07] What can give assurance of salvation? Nothing like justification by faith alone. It's the glory of the gospel that it offers assurance of salvation to sinners.

That's something that all other forms of salvation by works cannot give. You ask the Roman Catholic, do you have assurance that if you died today, you would be in heaven?

They cannot answer yes. Not according to their doctrine. The doctrine of their church. Because they never know if they've done enough until the last things are done for them. Or that they have done for their own salvation.

Or that others will do for them. The priest, the family. Only a justification based on the finished work of Christ at Calvary can give assurance of salvation.

That all the work needed to make me right with God was done 2,000 years ago. Not by me, but by Christ. His perfect obedience has been put to my account through faith.

[29:13] So that's a pillow that faith can rest her head on and that I have assurance then that I'm right with God. Because I'm justified through faith in what Jesus has done.

Now, here's where you'll need to screw on your thinking cap. The arrow of saving faith is meant then to bring assurance. That's the target that God wants to be hit.

He wants us to have assurance of salvation. Now, there's been something of a debate in history over whether true saving faith always carries with it the assurance of salvation.

Okay? Some have said faith is faith equals assurance of salvation. That if you have saving faith you will for sure have assurance of salvation.

Now, you know what that means then. That if you doubt your salvation it would mean you had no real faith and therefore were not really saved. This makes assurance of salvation of the same essence of saving faith.

[30:21] Assurance equals faith. And Waldron strongly disagrees and I do too. First of all here's the first thing. There is a kind of assurance that is the essence of faith.

But it's not the assurance of salvation. Now, here we go to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 1. This is why the debate has raged. Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1 says that faith is being sure of what we hope for.

Being certain of what we do not see. In fact, some translations say faith is the assurance of things hoped for. And so that's caused some people to say well, you see the Bible teaches that faith is assurance.

So if you have saving faith you will have assurance of salvation. What does faith do?

Well, remember faith, the nature of faith it is the conviction of the truth of the gospel. Now in this aspect faith equals assurance.

[31:41] Faith is sure that the gospel is true. Faith doesn't look to the virgin birth of Jesus or the atonement of Christ the resurrection of Christ and say well, I'm really not sure about those things.

No. All saving faith is sure about the truths of the gospel. That's the certainty the assurance that faith is.

It's sure that Jesus is the only mediator between God and man and that his blood did atone for the sins of all who trust him. And it's remember faith is commitment to this Christ.

And here too there's a kind of assurance. Well, what is the assurance? That if I go to Christ he will receive me and save me. And I'm sure of that and I'm at least sure enough of that that I go to him and hold out my hands and say save me Jesus or I die.

So there is an assurance. It's an assurance that the gospel is true and that Jesus really will save us if we come to him. And so in that sense there is an assurance that faith is.

[32:47] Faith is being assured of these things. But that assurance is not the assurance that I am a Christian. That's something completely different.

It's rather the reason I come to Christ is that I'm convinced I'm not a Christian. I'm lost and I need him. Alright? Have I lost you yet?

Is faith assurance? It's assurance of the truth of the gospel and of Christ's faithfulness to save if I come to him. But faith is not the assurance that I am saved.

And that's his second point. Though there is a kind of assurance that is the essence of faith it's not the assurance of salvation. The second point is just that. Assurance of salvation is not the essence of saving faith.

What is assurance of salvation? It's knowing that you have eternal life and that you will be saved. That you are saved now and you will be saved in the day of judgment and forever and ever. You have the assurance that you're saved.

[33 : 52] The book of 1 John speaks often of that. We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren. We know that when Christ appears we will be made like him.

We know over and over you find that language. We know we're saved. We know that we'll be in heaven. We know that we belong to Christ. And that assurance is not the same thing as saving faith.

It's one thing to have saving faith and it's another thing to know it. That's the point the distinction that is important to me. The biblical basis for faith is always and only the word of God.

Faith always rests upon some word from God. But do you know that there is no word from God that says John Christian Heaney possesses eternal life.

If there was this then faith would be assurance because I would believe that with all my heart. God has spoken. God hasn't said that about my name or about any of your names.

[35 : 05] And that's why faith is not the same thing as assurance. We don't have a word from God that says you have eternal life and our name written on it.

If it did it would be an act of faith to believe and it would be assurance. So faith and assurance are two different things. Faith is the way to be saved.

Convinced of the truth and commitment to Christ. Assurance of salvation is knowing that I am saved that I have trusted in Christ and he has saved me. So if all saving faith is assurance of salvation then that would mean that I must believe I am saved in order to be saved.

And now you can see how difficult that position is. But if I did not believe I was saved but I did not believe that I was saved in order to be saved.

That's the reason I came to Christ. I knew I wasn't saved. And so faith is not assurance. We must distinguish between the two. Saving faith one thing, assurance of salvation another.

[36 : 17] If the two were the same then whenever we challenge someone about their assurance we would be undermining their faith. Now this is where it's getting practical. This is why it's important.

If faith equals assurance then to challenge someone about their assurance of salvation would be to undermine their faith. No we must not do that and that's what we're told by some today.

But the Bible clearly warns men about false assurance of salvation. Doesn't it? Over and over. Look at Ephesians 5.

We've got to quit. We're going to just have to draw a line there. Let's read the text and we'll see this warning.

One of dozens of warnings in the scriptures about a false assurance. Ephesians 5 and verses 5 and 6.

[37 : 16] For this you can be sure. Now here's something you can be assured of. No immoral, impure, greedy person, such a man is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no one deceive you. He's talking to the church at Ephesus. Let no one deceive you with empty words for because of these such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

You see the warning not to be deceived about our salvation. That's a challenge to our assurance to read a text like that and there are dozens more in scripture.

So if faith equals assurance that would be to undermine our faith. The Bible does not undermine our faith but it does challenge our assurance of salvation.

It questions it. It tells us there's such a thing as saving faith and false faith. It says there is a true assurance of salvation and there's a groundless assurance of salvation.

[38 : 25] Be sure that you're saved. Examine yourself to see that you really are in the faith and such as that. You see, well, all of that would be no-no if faith equals assurance.

So with that we're going to need to draw to a conclusion. If you've got questions from this we'll seek to take up our lesson there next time. We're dismissed.

Thank you.