

IS GOD ABLE AND WILLING TO SAVE ME?

Suffice it to say that, if you wish to be saved, God can save you, for the Lord Jesus Christ has offered himself a sacrifice to God, to expiate, atone for, and put away, by the sacrifice of himself, the sins of all who shall ever believe in him; so that the law, justice, or moral government of God can offer no opposition to the salvation of any sinner who seeks to be saved by him. Opposition! Why, the law, the justice, and the government of God all require that the soul shall be saved, which casts itself upon the merit of Christ, and seeks to be saved by him. --JAMES SMITH

THE BAPTIST CATECHISM

AS PRINTED BY THE CHARLESTON ASSOCIATION IN 1813

(Presented here as originally published – this does not constitute a full endorsement of the Riverside Baptist Church)

62. Q. What is the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment is, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy: six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8-11).

63. Q. What is required in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as He hath appointed in His word, expressly, one whole day in seven to be a holy sabbath to Himself (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-14).

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Sunday Morning 11:00 AM

Sunday Evening 6:00 PM

Prayer and Bible Study Wednesday Evening 6:30 PM

WCWV 92.9 FM – 8:00 AM Sunday Morning

THE RIVERSIDE BAPTIST REPORT

THE RIVERSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Pillar and ground of the Truth” -- 1 Timothy 3:15

Volume 8, No. 23

June 7, 2015

THE FAITH OF EZRA

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. Ezra 8:21

There is no prayer of which we may be so assured as that which addresses the will of God in the behalf of His people. An answer to the prayer of Ezra and the people here was not in question as to whether God would answer. It was only the “how” at this point that concerned Ezra, the Scribe. In fasting they would humble themselves. They had no thought of impressing God with their actions. It was rather that they would be in such a state as to be more sensitive to their dependence on the Lord and properly repentant concerning their sinful estate. Their petitions were founded in that which they believed God would have them to do and so they sought “a right way for us, and for our little ones and all our substance.” They were in the process of fulfilling that which had been prophesied many years before by the prophet Jeremiah.

In verse 23 of this chapter we read of the outcome of this fasting and prayer. *So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.* They were granted that for which they had prayed – a right way wherein their God-honoring mission would be accomplished. “And He let Himself be entreated for us. – This is at once manifest in the successful progress of the journey.” (J. P. Lange).

The actions of Ezra are inconsistent with many today. The fact that he embarked on a long and treacherous journey with women and children and materials of great value would seem to many to be foolhardy to say the least. It

would be like walking through a gang infested district, unarmed, and with a sack full of money and think to arrive at one’s destination unmolested. But, Ezra’s faith and testimony concerning his God had precluded any thought that he might secure any outside help. In other words, he had boasted so of the sovereignty and justice of God that to have asked for help would have negated his claims and belittled God in the presence of the King of Persia. His reasons for going without an escort are stated in v. 22. *For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.*

The faith of Ezra was neither blind nor empty. His focus was upon the promise of God to them that seek Him and the God who had promised. He had no doubt that God was stronger than the bandits and highwaymen that inhabited the desert region through which they would travel. He who could displace kings and move in the hearts of Persian kings to release the captives and facilitate their return to Jerusalem could certainly direct the attention of the enemy away from a helpless band of returnees. He had claimed, and most assuredly believed that the mercy of God would be to the preservation of those that seek Him and that the justice of God would invoke His power and His wrath against all that forsake Him. It was so

then that Ezra proceeded as seeing Him who is invisible as did Moses and his faith was vindicated. Moses had told the children of Israel at the Red Sea to “stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.” Ezra and his unseemly band went forward and experienced the salvation of the Lord.

It would seem that the pause at the river of Ahava was an exercise in prudence. No doubt, last minute checks of equipment, and an inventory of food and water for the journey were matters of concern. But, it was, also, important that a spiritual assessment be made. And, so they fasted. John Piper observed in his book on the subject that true fasting occurs when the focus on the Lord is so intent that thoughts of eating and physical appetite diminish. The proclamation of the fast would have included the reason as it was given in verse 22. They would have been reminded of things previously declared concerning the Lord God and would have had a redirection of attention to focus on Him alone. The seeking after God in that context was most effectual in that God would be glorified in what they were seeking.

It is to be observed that many are quick to acknowledge the power of God. In a very legalistic manner they declare the justice of God. They lay great claims to faith and a life so

characterized. But, much in their lives (perhaps our lives) betrays the genuineness of the profession. While claiming a complete confidence in God men tend to “hedge their bets.” In other words, “my confidence is in the Lord but just in case it doesn’t work out...” There is great concern that a lack of devotion in the form of attendance to worship, giving and personal sacrifice will be the downfall of many churches and even of evangelicalism in America. The faith of Ezra would assure that none of these would be an issue. The tendency in much of contemporary religion is to preach a form of Godliness and pay lip service to the sovereignty of God in salvation but devote financial and time resources to the implementation of methodologies that have no root in the scriptures.

Many successful men have been characterized as risk-takers. Ezra might have been thought to have been one. He saw no risk in trusting to his God who was the subject of his praise. There is no risk with the traveler whose outcome is rested in a risen and ascended Savior. (He has no need to save for a rainy day). Neither our God nor His purpose can fail and our joy will be found in serving such a One with complete confidence and devotion. *bhs*

Alexander MacLaren on Ezra and His Faith

So his faith not only impels him to the renunciation of the Babylonian guard, but to earnest supplication for the defence in which he is so confident. He is sure it will be given-so sure, that he will have no other shield; and yet he fasts and prays that he and his company may receive it. He prays because he is sure that he will receive it, and does receive it because he prays and is sure.

So for us, the condition and preparation on and by which we are sheltered by that great Hand, is the faith that asks, and the asking of faith. We must forsake the earthly props, but we must also believingly desire to be upheld by the heavenly arms. We make God responsible for our safety when we abandon other defence, and commit ourselves to Him. With eyes open to our dangers, and full consciousness of our own unarmed and unwarlike weakness, let us solemnly commend ourselves to Him, rolling all our burden on His strong arms, knowing that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him. He will accept the trust, and set His guards about us. As the song of the returning exiles, which may have been sung by the river Ahava, has it: ‘My help cometh from the Lord. The Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.’

The Confident Cry of a Child

I have already spoken of God's adopting love and the joy of knowing we are His children. But look again at what the apostle says of this in Romans 8:15–16. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. I doubt that anything can rival the delight that erupts in our hearts when we finally realize we are God's children. Here Paul talks about knowing, deep down inside, that God is our Father. It isn't something we crank up or work out or pull down. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our spirit. God tells us that whoever believes in Christ Jesus is saved. We believe. And then, as if to ratify, strengthen, and intensify that certainty, the Holy Spirit says to our spirit: "Yes! Yes! You are indeed God's child. He is indeed your Father!" It isn't via the text of Scripture that He does this, but directly and subjectively, in and to and on and through our hearts. This unshakable assurance that we are sons and daughters of God is not a conclusion we draw from the fact that we cry "Abba! Father!" Rather, our childlike cry of "Abba!" is the fruit of that conviction. And it's a confident cry indeed.

Sam Storms *The Singing God*



Yielding to the Sculptor's Chisel

Like a master sculptor making a marble block into something magnificent, God has called us to yield ourselves to His chisel. To produce his masterpiece, the David statue, Michelangelo chose a stone all other artists had rejected. Seeing that marble block's hidden potential, he chipped away everything that wasn't David. Now, if marble had feelings, it might have resented its sculptor. While Michelangelo may not have called upon the stone to cooperate with him, God has called us to yield ourselves by submitting to His chisel. Jesus said in Matthew 13:43, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." This transformation does not simply happen after we die. It starts here and now in this world. And suffering is the instrument. God isn't just preparing a place for us. He is preparing us for that place. If God brought eternal joy through the suffering of Jesus, can He bring eternal joy through my present suffering, and yours? If Jesus endured his suffering through anticipating the reward of unending joy, can He empower you and me to do the same? Perspectives from God's Word "[Jesus] who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Perspectives from God's People "Being satisfied in God (or anything) always seems easier when all is going well. But when things you love are being stripped out of your hands, then the test is real. If God remains precious in those moments, then his supreme worth shines more brightly. He is most glorified." —John Piper "That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, 'No future bliss can make up for it,' not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory." —C. S. Lewis

Randy Alcorn *Seeing the Unseen*