

Articles and Sermons :: Salvation by Faith and Not by Works Zac Poonen (Word for the Week)

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In Exodus 12, we read about the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. They were told to use a bunch of hyssop and to put the blood of an unblemished lamb on the lintel over their door and on their door-posts, to escape the angel of death. That is a picture of faith applying the blood of Christ to our hearts. Hyssop was a common plant that was easily found in Egypt. Faith too is very easy to find. The Israelites left Egypt on the 14th day of the first month of their new calendar – and the Lord Jesus was crucified on the same date about 1500 years later. God looked into the future and saw the day on which the Pharisees would crucify Jesus, and chose that date to deliver the Israelites from Egypt!

How were the Israelites delivered? Not by their good life or their good works. God did not go checking inside each house to see how each person there had lived during the previous 30 years. No. He only checked to see if they had faith to put the blood of an innocent lamb on their doors. When they dipped that hyssop into the blood and put it on their doors, they were saying, “I am not trusting in my good works or my religious activities to protect me. I am trusting in the blood of this innocent lamb. I believe therefore that the angel of death will not enter my house.” That’s the way of salvation.

No man can boast saying, “I was saved because I lived a good life.” No. The man who had lived a good life and the man who lived a bad life were both saved that night in Egypt, by the blood of the lamb. If somebody in Israel had thought, “I’ve lived a good life, so I don’t believe God will judge me,” and therefore didn’t put the blood of the lamb above his door, what do you think would have happened? The angel of death would have come in and killed his eldest son as with all the other homes in Egypt.

I know that many people have taken advantage of the truth of salvation by grace through faith in the blood of Christ, and lived carelessly saying, “It doesn’t matter how we live.” But that does not negate the truth that salvation is still not by works but by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:9 says, “Not as a result of works, lest any man should boast.” But then the very next verse says that after we are saved, God has created us “unto good works”. So the full truth is this:

We cannot be saved by any number of good works that we may do.

But if our “faith” does not produce good works after we are saved, that would prove that our faith was not genuine.

That’s what James says: “Faith without (good) works is dead” (Jas.2:26).

After putting the blood on the door, the Israelites were all commanded to eat unleavened bread that night. That is a picture of our feeding on Christ Himself, the Bread of Life. It’s not enough that we trust in His blood, we must feed on His life too. We are “reconciled to God by His death and saved by His life” (Rom.5:10).

They were also told to eat the bread in their travelling clothes – with a readiness to leave Egypt at a moment’s notice. That is how we are to live in this world too - always ready to go, as soon as Jesus calls us up to meet Him. This world is not our home. We must be ready to leave at any time.