

Salvation Not Determined By Actions

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We Americans often have an admiration for self-made persons and disdain for those who rose to their position on the shirttails of friends or relatives. We tell our young people that there is no limit to what they can become. We admire inward strength that flows over into outward achievements.

But sometimes our pragmatic society carries its view too far. Many people think that their salvation is also determined by what they do.

Suppose that when a person dies he finds himself knocking on the door of heaven. St. Peter comes to the door and asks, "Why should I open the door and let you in?" What would most people say?

Surveys show that the most common answer goes something like this: "I'm basically a good person. I help those who are in need. I take good care of my family. I contribute to deserving causes. I try to do what is right. I pray when I need help."

Such an answer shows our pride of trying to be self-made persons. We want to think that we have the inward strength to be good enough to please God. But the Bible teaches that the gap between our goodness and God's goodness is so great that we cannot span it.

Suppose we all went to the Atlantic Ocean and decided to swim across to Europe. Some persons wouldn't even make it off the beach. Others would make it a mile or two depending on how rough the water was. The best swimmers might swim for several days. But no one would make it to Europe on their own. It's just too far.

The distance between our own goodness and heaven is just too far. Although the really good among us may make a giant leap toward God's standard of goodness, no one can compare to Him. All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

But there is good news! Jesus came to take away the sin of the world! Jesus came to span the gap between heaven and earth.

Jerome, who translated the Bible from Greek to Latin, lived in Bethlehem during the first part of the Fifth Century. One night he had a dream in which the Christ child appeared to him. Jerome was overwhelmed. He wanted to give something to the Child. He offered Him money, but the Child refused it. Then, like the Magi, of old, he offered his most treasured possessions. He was surprised that the Christ child again refused. "What else can I give you?" he cried. "I have offered you all that I have. Tell me, what do you want?" Jesus replied, "I want your sin. That is why I came. I came to take away the sin of the world."

Those who rely on Christ give up trying to save themselves. Instead, they give their lives to God and trust him for eternal things. For while the wages of sin is death, the gift Of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:23).

But what about good deeds? They are not our ticket to heaven but the result of truly giving ourselves to Christ (Ephesians 2:10).