

# Discipleship Moment

**Text: 1 Peter 3:18-22**

I grew up in a very secular community. All around me was warning after warning about the dangers of religion. There was some softness toward “spirituality,” but religion was a bad word. This vague “spirituality” usually included trying to be kind, do good works, have the right political opinions, and, whatever you do, make sure everyone knows what you believe, because having the right ideas is way more important than actually doing anything.

As I grew into my faith, and was called into ministry, I dove headfirst into the popular Christian approach to spirituality and religion. Looking back, I see now that this popular Christian spirituality really wasn't all that different from my secular neighbors' growing up. There were still political opinions I had to hold, it emphasized being kind, doing good works, and, no matter what, make sure everyone knows what you believe, because having the right ideas is way more important than actually doing anything.

Unfortunately, most Christians approach spirituality much like our secular neighbors. The problem with our culture's way of talking about religion and spirituality is that we ask, “What must I do to be saved?” like the rich young ruler in Mark 10. We make ourselves the subject. We are the ones who do the saving, “what must *I* do to be saved?” Our spirituality is centered around us saving ourselves. Doing good works, having the right ideas, or making sure you broadcast what you believe, is all about *you doing something* to get yourself saved. This kind of Christian spirituality is especially dangerous, because it uses Jesus' name to sell this kind of self-help, self-improvement religion.

In fact, most of American Christianity falls under this kind of spirituality. If you ask most American Christians how they are saved, they'll say something like, “I accepted Jesus into my heart when I was eight years old,” or “I heard a preacher and I came forward and said the sinner's prayer,” or “when I believed in God, and Jesus' saving work, that's when I was saved.”

Notice what these statements have in common, it is the individual who does the work. In this kind of spirituality, the person has faith not in Jesus himself, but in their belief in what Jesus did. Their faith is in *their belief*—“when I responded to the altar call,” “when I believed in Jesus,”—when I...when I...when I... etc. Yes, Jesus had to die for their sins, but ultimately it is *they* who believed, and it is because of *their* belief that God saved them.

I don't know about you, but I don't always have strong belief. I have doubts, I have questions. And the kind of spirituality that we see above is my worst nightmare. If my salvation is based on my belief, I am in big trouble. And so are you. We are weak, we are easily shakable: we are one bad event, one trauma, one emergency away from questioning everything we think is true. We humans are fickle, unable to really put our belief or attention on one thing. It reminds me of a scene from the book *Hammer of God*, when a young pastor has a great spiritual experience and, for the first time, feels like he really believes in Jesus. He goes to an older pastor the next day and says, “I was converted last night! I feel like I really believe in Jesus!” and the old, snarky pastor said, “Yeah right, I bet he's really impressed by that.” I am fickle. And putting faith in my faith is my worst nightmare.

On Sunday, we heard a challenging passage that said this: “Baptism now saves you.” Do you hear the difference between this Scripture and the popular spirituality we looked at above? You are not the subject in this sentence, you are the object in this sentence. You are not the one doing the action, the action is being done to you. You are not the one doing the saving, you are the one being saved. We see in the Gospels that, by a wide margin, Jesus is the subject of the sentence. He says things like, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” “I am sending you,” etc. In the Gospels it is Jesus doing the healing, the preaching, the resurrecting, etc. We make ourselves the subject by asking, “what must I do to be saved.” But Jesus will have none of that, he says, “I am the one who does, you are the one who receives.”

We want to make ourselves the subject of the sentence, we want to have autonomy, we want to have control. But, when it comes to seeking God, we can do nothing. Paul, in Ephesians, says that we are dead in our trespasses—dead people can't do anything. We simply cannot be the ones who do the saving. God made a promise through Scripture, through his Word, “baptism now saves you.” You don't save yourself, God saves you, and he uses water to do it. You don't get the option of saving yourself. You don't get to put your faith in yourself, you don't get to put your faith in your decision, or your prayer, you get to put your faith in God's promise to you. This is the difference between having faith in your faith and having faith in Jesus.

You are saved. God holds you, he promised salvation through water, through baptism. You can say no—you can reject the promise, and God will give you what you want. But you can't make the promise null by your shaky faith, or your feebleness, or your sin, you can't do anything that will make God take the promise away. God always keeps his promises. Put your faith in God's promises, not in your decision or your good works, let God be God, and receive his love for you.

## Going Deeper

*Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.*

1. What do you think it means to be saved? How are we saved? Read Romans 11:6 and Ephesians 2:8-9, what do these passages tell us about salvation?
2. Why do you think we make spirituality about us saving ourselves? Where do you see that in our culture and even in our churches?
3. Why do you think that God makes promises to us? Do you trust God to keep his promises? Why or why not?
4. Are you baptized? What does your baptism mean to you? Does this passage (1 Peter 3:18-22) change how you think about baptism? Why or why not?
5. What does it look like to have “faith in your faith?” Do you think we can have confidence in our belief? Why or why not? How does putting our faith in Jesus' work and God's promises (instead of putting our faith in our faith) change how we live? How does it change the way we worship? The way we work? The way we treat our spouses, family, or neighbors?