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Grace and peace be unto you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” – Romans 10:9

Sounds simple, right? “Confess, believe, and you will be saved.”

The grammar is simple. The words are simple. But does it meet the acid test of reality?

All of our Scripture lessons today revolve around this theme of being saved, salvation.

Psalm 91: “No evil shall befall you, no plague come near.” “A thousand may fall at your side, but not you.”

Deuteronomy 26: “We cried to the LORD, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with signs and wonders.”

And finally our Gospel, Luke 4—quoting again Psalm 91!—“He will command his to guard you so that you won’t even strike your foot against a stone.”

Let us summarize: No evil, no ouchies, just sit back and watch God’s fireworks!

I’m not making this up. One thing about life as a chaplain seems like I’m always getting boxes of books from well-meaning folks I don’t know. One day hundreds of copies of a book based right here on Psalm 91 showed up at my door. Obviously the giver intended me to pass these out to Soldiers stepping out onto harm’s way.

Before I put them out on my literature rack, however, I thumbed through a copy. It consisted mainly of dozens of veterans relating their “that bullet should’ve gotten me but didn’t” stories. Vivid. Compelling. And I’m sure true.

But...incomplete.

You see, Psalm 91 really is true. God really does command his angels to guard and protect us who believe in him and call out to him.

But it’s not the whole story.

Take our forebears in the faith back there in Deuteronomy 26. “We cried out to God and he saved us from those nasty Egyptians.”

That is utterly true. God did send the plagues, God did split open the Red Sea, God did hear the prayers of his people.

But, the people of God wasted away in slavery for 400 years before God did all these wonderful things! Think, people! For generations, for time out of mind, fathers and mothers and

children were slaughtered and oppressed. If it were you or me, would we not have concluded that God had forgotten us? That he didn't hear our cry?

What have you been missing all your life and you still haven't gotten it?

What have you suffered and you still cry out "Why?" and you've gotten no answer?

What is so unfair that it keeps you up at night? What is so oppressive that you drown in the salty brine of bitterness every single day?

Romans 10 is true. Those who believe will be saved. When you "believe in your heart that God raised [Christ] from the dead." Jesus' resurrection is true. Jesus really did defeat death. But here's the thing: for Jesus to rise from the dead, he had to die first, people.

And even before Jesus died and then rose again, he didn't have it easy. He was tempted just like you and me. That's the whole point of today's Gospel.

It was the Holy Spirit; it was God's will that drove Jesus out there all alone, with no friends, no backup. No encouragement. How many of us would be there if it wasn't for the alarm clock—the alarm clock that came an hour earlier this morning? If it wasn't for someone else saying, "All right, time to get up?" Jesus didn't have that.

Jesus didn't have food or water or friends for forty days. And then Satan came and said, "I can take this all away. You are weak, but I am strong." That's what Satan said.

Would any of us sin if it didn't look good? If it weren't tasty and delicious? If it weren't fun? If it didn't look like it was necessary for survival's sake?

Of course not. Satan's trick is to make evil look good, or at least unavoidable. How often is sickness disguised as, "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do"? "Everyone's doing it"? "What else was I supposed to do"?

And yet Jesus never gave in. "Man's gotta do what a man's gotta do"? "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

"Sure looks tasty!" "Man shall not live by bread alone—but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

You see, all of God's promises are true. All who call upon Him—He does hear; he does save. But he saves on the time scale of eternity. As we look back over our lives, we'll be able to say with the psalmist, "Look at all those close calls! Look at all those times I was sure I was a goner, yet here I am."

But in the meantime, are you willing to live day after day, year after year, perhaps until the day you die, with no obvious sign that God hears and God cares?

Are you willing to live content that Jesus is real and his Word is true? Are you willing to have faith that your sins are forgiven is enough for you?

Some time ago I was serving my vicarage up in Michigan. One of my responsibilities that year was the 6th grade pre-confirmation class. It was a big class; we had 25 kids. And my goal that year was to teach my students how to pray. We ended each day with them composing a prayer.

But one of my students, Steven, really struggled with that assignment. Week after week, he was always the last kid done. Truth be told, that whole year was a struggle for Steven. Sixth grade can be brutal. Lots of changes!

Finally one week I had a chance to sit with Steven one-on-one. “Don’t worry,” I said, “we got this. We’ll do this together.” Steven didn’t look hopeful.

So I said, “Tell you what, Steven. Tell me about something you want that’s so big that you’re afraid to tell anyone for fear they’ll laugh at you.”

Steven looked down, looked up and said, “I want to be an NFL football player!”

“Hm. Well, have you ever asked God for that?”

“Well, no!”

“Well, what’s stopping you?”

“Oh. Uh, ok. God can you make me an NFL football player? In Jesus name, Amen.”

And then Steven looked up, kind of expecting to see a Charlotte Panthers jersey to come floating down from the ceiling and rest on his shoulders. Steven had a ‘Psalm 91 moment.’ “No evil shall befall you, no plague come near, the angels will guard you.” Steven expected to see something NOW.

So I said, “Steven, do you realize that God has answered your prayer?”

“No!” Sullen. Suspicious.

“Well, yes, he has. Either in his good time you will in fact be an NFL football player. Or you won’t—but only because he has something better in mind.”

People, are you willing to hear God’s answer? Are you willing to wait? Are you willing this Lenten season to follow Jesus to the cross, to what looks like shame and defeat, because that’s the only way to life and to victory?

Are you willing to pray like Steven, to ask God for something so big you’ll afraid everyone will laugh at you?

Let us pray...