

EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



Certifiable Saints

People are sometimes profoundly disappointed because they don't qualify. A young woman has her heart set on a job only to discover she doesn't have the right level of training. She need not bother to submit a resume.

A young man desires a career in law-enforcement, only to find that he doesn't meet the minimum weight and height restrictions. For him, there's no sense in even applying.

Someone else wants to enter university, but finds out to her chagrin that the entrance requirements have been raised so that her high school grades no longer qualify her for admission.

Or, think of the young person who desperately wants to join the basketball team, but fails to make it through the tryouts.

To mention another example, think of the immigration applicant who fails to qualify for entrance into Canada due to lack of money or skills.

There's no doubt that the failure to get necessary accreditation can be very deflating. The discouragement is even more intense if a lot of effort and energy has been expended in striving for the right qualifications.

How can people be sure they won't experience failure in qualifying for the greatest privilege – that of eternal life with God?

Qualifying for Heaven

A lot of folks labour diligently to ensure admission into the presence of God after this short, temporal life. They do what they feel is necessary to qualify for heaven. After all, many people have a vague sense of inadequacy before God. They know something is lacking in their lives. Their conscience bothers them. As a result, they strive to obtain the necessary moral and spiritual upgrading. They do what they can in the way of charity and good works. They search for deeper religious experiences.

What does it really take, though, to qualify for heaven? How does a person find the necessary accreditation for divine acceptance and approval? How can we obtain the status of a "certifiable saint" – people who are fit for life with God?

According to the Christian faith, we need to abandon forever the idea of getting ourselves qualified for eternal life. No amount of deep spiritual experiences will gain for us the right papers for admission. Even a large number of works of charity will fail to silence our conscience before God. The truth is that if we were to write a resume seeking entry to heaven, we would not be able to record any of our own achievements.

All our efforts to get qualified for admission to the presence of God will fail because the admission standard is nothing less than perfection. The Kingdom of God has very rigid entrance requirements. Not just anyone can become a citizen here. Perfect love for God and man is a basic necessity for admission. Not only that, God is just

and requires that all failures of love, past and present, be punished in an appropriate manner. If you have violated the standards of God, you have to pay the price before you can get the rank of a "certifiable saint."

So how can anyone, then, be qualified for heaven? The answer is found in knowing that qualifying for heaven is not so much an achievement as it is receiving a gift. The Bible teaches us that it is God Himself who qualifies people for heaven (see, for example, Colossians 1:12). He is the one who confers on people the status of being a "certifiable saint." Unqualified in ourselves, we are made worthy by divine action.

One of the basic ideas of the Christian religion is encapsulated in the word "grace." Grace means the unmerited favour of God. Grace means that God is compassionate and shows favour to those who don't deserve it. He allows into His presence those who could never pass any entrance examination.

Qualified in Christ

The Good News of the Bible is that God in His grace qualifies for admission to heaven all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ. The Bible portrays Jesus Christ as supremely qualified to have fellowship with God. In all His actions and words and thoughts, He did demonstrate moral and spiritual perfection. Furthermore, the teaching of the Bible is that Christ paid the price for the sins of God's people. He experienced the awful reality of God's just sentence against His people's sins. When Christ died on the cross, He was experiencing the burden of God's wrath against the sin of others.

To understand these truths, we have to come to grips with the idea of **transfer**. This is not a common idea of contemporary society, but is

a basic biblical concept we need to understand. The Bible teaches us that God transferred the punishment of His people's sins to Christ. We could think of our obligations to God in terms of a financial model. We owe Him obedience and love. We also owe Him the payment of the penalties for all our sins. Thus, a colossal debt looms over us. The Good News is that God transfers this huge debt to the account of Christ. Not only that, but the Bible also teaches that Christ has discharged this debt.

In other words, Christ has given to God the perfect love and obedience we never gave. In addition, Christ has also satisfied the justice of God by taking on Himself the burden of the punishment we deserved. Thus, it is in Christ that God qualifies people for admission to His presence. He makes the qualifications of Christ our qualifications. Whatever Christ is and whatever Christ did is attributed to us. His accreditation is transferred to us.

A strange concept

Obviously, these biblical ideas about transfer of credits don't really fit well with normal daily life in the twentieth century. After all, who ever heard of somebody getting into college on the merit of somebody else's marks?

Or, who ever made it to the basketball team on the strength of a friend's athletic ability?

Or, who ever made it into Canada as a landed immigrant because somebody else had money and skills?

The whole idea of a healthy society is that you have to be self-qualified. We take it for granted that people should make their own as well as pay their own way – not resting on the achievements of others.

Obviously, then, accepting the message of the Christian faith will turn some of our values upside down. God's grace in Christ can't be compared to anything in our daily experience. Becoming a Christian means above all that you are going to have to rest your life on the achievements of Christ instead of on your own accomplishments.

Perhaps, however, we can think of a rough analogy to what the Bible teaches about the transfer of the qualifications of Christ to ourselves. If a woman from, for example, Jamaica, applies for immigration into Canada, she will have to pass through a certain examination procedure. She will be tested with respect to her financial resources, her job skills and whether or not she will in any way be a stress instead of an asset to the economy. If she passes the test, she will be admitted to the country. However, also her children will be admitted with her!

The mother in this case is regarded as representing and including the children. They enter Canada, we may say, on the merits of their mother. Similarly, we can think of God's people as being included in Christ. God regards Christ as their representative and includes His people in all the achievements and accomplishments of Christ. Christ's merits are transferred to God's people.

Is Christ holy? Well, God regards His people as holy, too.

Has Christ paid the terrible price for sin? Well, God regards His people as having paid that price, too.

Is Christ without sin? Then God regards His people as being sinless, too.

In fact, the Bible states in many places that God sees His people as being "one with Christ."

To proud to believe

The question may arise as to how and when this transfer of Christ's credits to us is accomplished. The answer of the Bible is that this occurs when people learn to believe in Christ. Yes, when people learn to say, "I am in myself completely unqualified for heaven, but I know that Christ is qualified and I am putting my trust in Him – I'm resting my life on His accomplishments as described in the Bible," then God transfers Christ's credits to them.

Our human problem is that we are too proud to accept the qualifications of Christ as our own. We cling to the hope that we'll make the grade on our own. After all, it's hard for a student to admit she flunked a test. It's hard for a young athlete to admit he didn't make the team. And so, in the same way, but at a much deeper level, it is hard to admit to God: "I don't qualify for eternal life with You and I never will because I'm sinful and weak and can't pay penalty for my sin.

As long as people cling to delusions of self-qualification, they remain disqualified. Jesus Christ and He alone is the way to fellowship and life with God. Put your trust in Him and His achievements.

Maybe your conscience is telling you that you don't deserve heaven. You feel unsuitable and unworthy to be one of God's people. After all, you lack perfection. You are not full of complete love for God and man. Well, your conscience is right! You don't deserve eternal life. You are in no way a certifiable saint.

How can you be qualified? Only by resting your hopes on the marks of Jesus. In Him, you do make the grade. You have all you need. His accomplishments are on your resume.

R. Schouten

Being able to do the humanly

I'm sure that at one time or another you have faced difficulties and challenges that completely overwhelmed you. They unsettled you, robbed you of sleep and were constantly on your mind. Humanly speaking, the difficulties could not be dealt with and the challenges not be met.

At a time like this, it is good to go to the Word of God. The Bible has a lot to say to us about who our God is. It also tells us a lot about who we are. At the same time, it tells us about the miracle of faith through which we can do things which, humanly speaking, might otherwise be impossible. If you have a Bible, I would like you to turn to the book of *Genesis*, beginning with chapter 12. I would also like you to turn to the book of *Hebrews*, especially chapter 11:11. If you do not have a Bible, you can still read this article and benefit from it.

A humanly speaking impossible situation

One look at the biblical givens in the book of *Genesis*, will tell us that God went a very difficult route with Abraham. Over a period of some twenty-five years, God repeated the promise of a child to him. And during all these years, Abraham continued to advance in years. By the time he finally did father the child of the promise he was no less than one hundred years old!

With regard to Sarah his wife things were not all that much different. Repeatedly, we are told in the book of *Genesis* that Sarah was

barren. Furthermore, we are told that she was past the age of being able to bear children. By the time she finally did conceive the child of the promise, she was about ninety years old!

In the light of these biblical givens, you will agree that the humanly speaking impossible did indeed happen with Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was as good as dead – sexually dead, that is – and Sarah was barren and past the age of being able to bear children.

And yet, the impossible did happen! And you ask yourself, "How? How in the world was it possible for Abraham to father a child when humanly speaking this was no longer possible?"

The key of faith

The answer to this question lies in the little word *faith*. Hebrews 11:11 tells us that by faith Abraham even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise.

What a beautiful little phrase that is, "because he considered him faithful who had made the promise." The faithfulness of God is such a heartwarming expression. It simply means that the LORD our God is an *unchanging God*. He is a God whose life does not change. For He is a God who is from everlasting to everlasting God. He is a God whose character does not change. For He is a God who cannot deny Himself. He is a God whose truth does not change. For everything He promises is an abiding valid expression of his mind and thought. He is a God whose purposes do not change. For his plans stand firm forever and the purposes of his heart through all generations.

This is what Abraham believed. He believed the God who had made the promise of a child to him to be a

faithful, unchanging God. And because he did, he knew for sure that God's purpose of a great nation through him would surely come to pass. He knew for sure that the truth of God's promise was and remained an abiding valid expression of God's mind and thought. Because Abraham considered his God to be a faithful God, he knew for sure that his God would never deny Himself, but always remain true to Himself. Abraham knew for sure that the God who had promised a son to him was a God whose power did not grow stronger or weaker, but would continue to be strong for all eternity.

As a matter of fact, Abraham believed that by faith he could *release* that power. For faith is the *instrument* in releasing the power of the promises of God. Abraham knew that God's promise was charged with power, but that this power had to be released through the exercise of faith. Much like a car battery is charged with power, but this power can only be released by turning on the ignition. So, too, faith is the *key* to releasing the power of the promises of God.

The struggle of faith

That is not to say that Abraham had no difficulties. We all know about how Sarah advised him to father the child of the promise through Hagar their slave (*Genesis* 16). Abraham could have refused. But he didn't. That was a serious lapse in his faith. Later when God repeated his promise to him, Abraham fell facedown to the ground and laughed (*Genesis* 17). That was another tragic lapse in his faith. Obviously, it is not always easy to live the life of faith as God wants us to live it. The devil is out to infiltrate into our hearts and make us doubt the power of God's promises.

speaking impossible



Yet, these are the only two instances recorded in the Scriptures of Abraham's lapse in faith concerning the promise of a child. Two incidents in a twenty-five year waiting period for the fulfilment of God's promise. Which means that *as a whole* Abraham continued to live the life of faith. As a whole Abraham continued to celebrate the reality of the blessings of his hope and the proof of events as yet unseen (Hebrews 11:1).

Romans four gives us a beautiful description of this life of faith. There we read that against all hope Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. We are further told that without weakening in his faith, Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about one hundred years old – and Sarah's womb was dead. Yet, he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised (Romans 4:18-21).

The Hebrew Christians

This is what the author of *Hebrews* wants the people to whom he is writing to do as well. To be sure, their life was not an easy life. Their difficulties were great. Their problems, humanly speaking, sometimes insurmountable. Yet, by faith they are not. By faith they can release the power of God's promises. Those promises that are charged with power and whose power can be released by the key of faith. God had promised them that He would never leave or forsake them. God had promised them that they could do all things through Him who strengthens them. God had promised them that nothing would separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Neither trouble or hardship or persecution. Nor nakedness or danger or sword.

If only they would believe these promises! If only they would release the power of these promises through the key of faith! If only they would celebrate the reality of the blessings of these promises and the proof of these events as yet unseen! What a difference that would make in their

lives! How they would be changed from timid and compromising Christians into courageous and faithful children of God! How they would give glory to their God and be a hand and a foot to their fellow Christians!

You and I

What applies to the Hebrew Christians applies to you and me as well. To be sure, our difficulties are not the same as those of Abraham and Sarah. Nor are they the same as those of the Hebrew Christians. Yet, everyone of us faces difficulties and challenges. If not now, then most certainly in the future. Sometimes, these difficulties and challenges can be so awfully overpowering. Sometimes, they can even paralyze you. So much so, that you have absolutely no power to deal with them.

At times like these, we need faith. Faith in the promises of God. I realize this is not always easy. That was not always easy for Abraham. Nor was this always easy for the Hebrew Christians. It is much easier to live by *sight* and let your challenges and difficulties paralyze you. Then you simply do not have to deal with them. And supposedly your life will be much easier.

Yet, that is simply not so. Just look at all the problems Abraham ran into when he lapsed from the faith and agreed to father a child by Hagar! Just look at all the disharmony this one lapse of faith caused both him and his family (Genesis 16)!

Similar things can happen to you when you fail to deal with your problems in faith. So do not do this, but believe. Follow the example of Abraham and live the life of faith he lived. For only *that* type of a life will bring glory to your God and enable you to deal with your problems and challenges – even those which humanly speaking are impossible to solve.

D. Moes

King of Wisdom and Peace

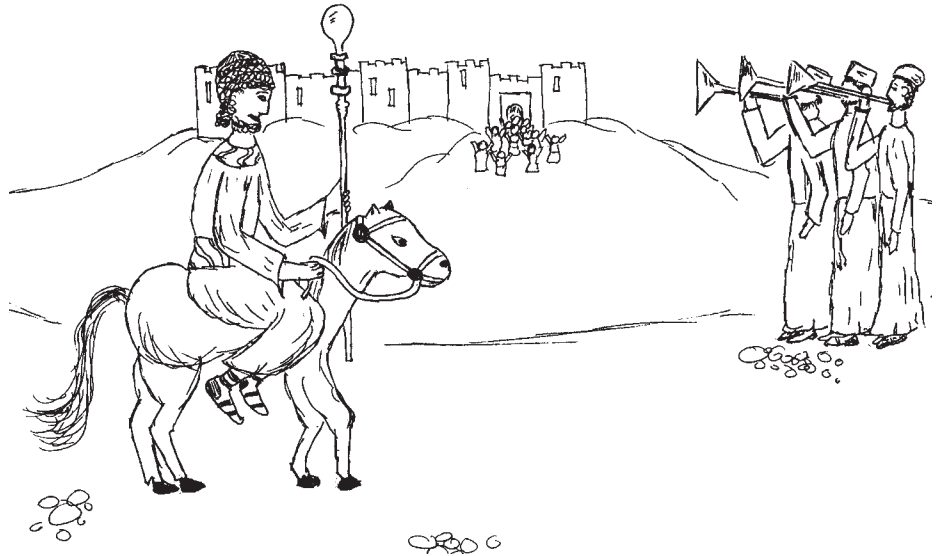
Bible Story

Based on 1 Kings 1, 2, 3 and 4

Solomon would never forget the day when he was crowned king. Although several of his older brothers had plotted to become the next ruler over the Israelites, King David had decided that the young Solomon would be heir to the throne. One day David realized that he had to act quickly to show to the whole nation who would be the next king. That very day King David ordered his loyal servants to proclaim Solomon as his successor. Solomon was put on a small horse. At the call of the trumpets the people were told to start shouting "Long live King Solomon." And shout they did, as loudly as they could. They made so much noise with their voices and musical instruments that the earth was split by it. Even the thought of that massive sound still deafened Solomon's ears. But one thing was clear to all. Solomon was to be Israel's new king.

There is another day that Solomon will never forget. It was the day his father died. Every one in the palace knew that King David's days were almost over. Solomon understood that soon the enormous task of ruling God's nation would rest on his youthful shoulders only. That day father David called for his son Solomon. The old king embraced the young one emotionally. "My son," he spoke slowly and with great effort, "When I am gone, you must be strong and courageous. You are chosen to rule over Israel, God's people. You must do so in the ways of the Lord. Keep the words of the holy laws, and behave yourself well. You are an example to all the people. Punish evil-doers and reward God-fearing men. Go now, my son. May God's peace be with you." Solomon left the room. He could hardly imagine what life would be like without his father. But David's last words had made him ready to take on the work for which the Lord had chosen and prepared him.

A third day would always stand out in Solomon's memory. Had his earthly father played a major role the first two times, his heavenly father spoke to him on that third special day. This event took place shortly after King



David had died. King Solomon had prepared a big offering for God. He had one thousand animals slaughtered as a gift to the Lord. The following night God spoke to Solomon in a dream. "Ask of me what you want, and I will give it to you," God said. Solomon did not have to think very long before he gave his answer. "Lord, I am so young. I would like it if you would be with me, like you were with my father David. Please help me in ruling the Israelites. I need godly wisdom to do my job well. Please make me wise." God was very pleased with Solomon's answer. "You did not ask in a selfish way. You did not wish for riches, army victories, or a long life. I will give you what you asked, but I will also give you what you did not ask. You shall not only be wise, but rich and powerful as well. And if you serve me, you will also have a very long life."

These three days shaped Solomon as king. The whole nation knew that he was the rightful king. He would follow his father David in the ways of the Lord. And the Lord Himself would make him wise beyond human standards.

It was not long before Solomon's skills as king were put to the test. Two women came to him. The one woman explained their case. "We are living together in the same house, your majesty. We each had a baby. One night this woman slept on her baby, killing it. But quietly she exchanged babies. I woke up with her dead baby beside me." "Not true," interrupted the other woman. "The dead baby is hers. She made up this story." "You liar,"

shouted the first woman. "No, the living baby is mine!" the second one called. And so it went on for a while. All the other people in the room paid attention to the king. Did Solomon not want to stop these fighting women? Shouldn't some soldiers remove them from his presence? Then the king spoke. "Bring me a sword!" In the sudden silence a soldier stepped forward, pulling his sword from its sheath. The king spoke again. "Divide the living baby and give one half to each." then the mother of the living child broke out in tears. "Don't kill him. Then give him to her," she cried. But the other woman said coolly, "Go ahead. Kill him. That way we'll share." King Solomon knew enough. "Give the child to the woman who wants it to live. She is the real mother!"

After this incident the Israelites realized that the wisdom of God was with Solomon. It was good to have such a wise king. But that was not all. The Lord also gave Israel peace from their enemies during Solomon's reign. Solomon became the king of wisdom and peace. The Israelites who lived in those days were greatly blessed with such a king.

But we are blessed in the same way if we acknowledge Jesus as our King. As King, Jesus prepared peace with God for us. With great wisdom our heavenly King rules his people, and prepares them for everlasting life in his Kingdom. Submit to your wise King, and you will be filled with the peace of God!

Jane

The one way

The Bible teaches very clearly and emphatically that there is only one way to the kingdom of God. There is only one way to salvation. There is only way to be right with God – to escape his anger against sin and to be received again into favour with him. That one way is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Admit it! This does not sit so well with us. We like to live and let live. You do your thing, I'll do mine. One man's opinion is as good as another's. How can anyone dare to say that that their way is the right way – the only way – and that every other way is the wrong way?

Well, God has said exactly this in the Bible. The Word of God teaches very clearly that there is only **one way** to salvation: Through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus said:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"
(John 14:6).

There is life only with the Father. To be with the Father in heaven is to have everlasting life. Apart from God the Father there is death. The only way to the Father is through Jesus Christ. You must confess your sins to God in prayer and ask God to forgive them for the sake of Jesus Christ who died on the cross.

Often people think that they'll "go to heaven" because they led a pretty decent life. They were good to their neighbours, did not steal, and did not swear very much. But the Bible teaches that we are not saved because we are pretty decent people who do quite a few good and nice things. In his letter to Titus, chapter 3:5-6, the apostle Paul said:

[God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus

Christ our Saviour. . . .

Again, very clearly, there is no other way to the Father but through Jesus Christ.

Another apostle, Peter, said there is **no other name** by which we are saved except the name of Jesus. This is what he said:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The name of Jesus is powerful. It has saving power. The name of Jesus means: *The Lord is salvation*. Before he was born, the LORD God sent an angel to Mary and then to Joseph telling them both to name the baby "Jesus" because he would save his people from their sins. Jesus proves that the meaning of his name is true – it's no lie. *The Lord is salvation*. The Lord saves people from sin and hell through Jesus Christ. Believe in him!

Jesus Christ provides **the only gate**. In John 10:1 and 9, the Lord Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

He is the gate; he is the door. Enter through him, and you will walk in the green pastures and along the still waters.

There is **no other saving power** than the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 1:16:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has power to save you. It saves everyone who believes from the wrath of God against sin. Believe and you will be saved!

And then build your life upon Jesus Christ. He is **the only foundation** upon which one can build a lasting life. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, Paul wrote:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The true church of Jesus Christ preaches this gospel – this exclusive gospel with its far-reaching claims. The gospel is exclusive in that it excludes our works as a means to salvation. It excludes any other way to the Father beside Jesus Christ. It excludes any other name as a way to salvation than the name of Jesus Christ. There is **no other gospel** to be preached. As is written in Galatians 1:8:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

The gospel is exclusive. There is only one Saviour, one name, one way, one foundation. However, it is also inclusive. It includes all who believe. Do you believe?

George van Popta

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