



THE NEW SHOFAR

Doing God's will means trusting in the Son/believing in the Son.

Exodus 16:2-15 - John 6:24-35

Trinity 10

Salvation is not about us “doing” or “not doing” – It is about God

John has the Jews echo the questions of many, believers and non-believers alike... *Then they said to him, ‘What must **we do** to perform the works of God?’*²⁹ *Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you **believe in him whom he has sent.**’* Notice the way Jesus has turned the thinking from the deeds of the people to the actions of God in creation. Discipleship is about how far we are willing to allow God into our lives not about chalking up good deeds. Good actions in life follow on from a genuine faith in a living Christ. But it is a common mistake, to think we can “earn” salvation.

Salvation is what happens to us when we live close to God

The equivalent question (in the Synoptic Gospels) to the one being asked here by the Jews could be expressed along these lines: *what must I do to inherit eternal life?...**Luke 3:10**... ‘What then should we do?’...**3:12**...¹²*Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’...**3:14**...¹⁴*Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do?’* The question about what was essential for eternal life was one of great importance to the Jews. It helps explain the reason the Pharisees felt obliged to add more and more oral traditions, customs and laws to the Law of Moses. The future of the nation depended on them keeping the covenant made by God at Mt Sinai. To breach one law meant to fail and to fail meant alienation from the very God who had established a covenant with them. It was this covenant that made them the people they were. Jesus is now found telling the Jews how their focus should not be on **their own works**, that is, on the things **they** do or do not do. Eternal life is a divine gift, it is something God does in them, to them and through them to the world.**

The concept of *God's mighty works* was well known in the Scriptures. Generally they are the marvellous things God has done and continues to do (e.g. **Tobit 12:6**...⁶*Then Raphael called the two of them privately and said to them, ‘Bless God and acknowledge him in the presence of all the living for the good things he has done for you).* Sometimes God's works refer to the commandments given by God but here in John's Gospel it means *faith/trust*. In a thoroughly traditional way the Jews do seem to appreciate how this teaching of Jesus requires something of them. The problem continues to be how their understanding is way off the point. They ask what *works* are demanded of them by God. They ask *what do **we** need to be doing* when the proper and more appropriate question to ask would be *who is this man who gives us this bread?*

The fundamental question is always: who is Jesus for me?

John wants his reader to linger on the important *who* question – who is this giver of this bread of eternal life? The way this sermon is constructed by John leaves the focus on the required responses to Jesus: the most important thing in finding salvation is *doing* what God wants. The answer Jesus gives them is simple

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and clear: they must *believe/trust the One sent by God!* The wording of his answer to their question is revealing. They ask of him now *what should we be doing...* which keeps the emphasis on the person acting, as though it was possible for a man or a woman to find eternal life through their own actions, through what they do (or do not do). It is as if they think they can establish a proper relationship with God on their own. The proper and more appropriate approach is set out here by John – *God is at work in us, enabling us both to do the will of God and to do God’s good pleasure – i.e. trust his Son.* This *doing* means *trusting in the Son* and *believing in the Son.* Believers are called upon to trust in the Son whose mission it is to bring them into a state of intimate union with God his Father. It is when they are one with God that they will then find they are already doing the will of God. In a very Johannine fashion, all things come back to the God who is constantly (and so already) at work within them and to the Christ who works away at the Father’s will which is unfolding in them. Complicated, yes but worth the effort in spiritually digesting this significant message.

It is all too easy to take the good things God is doing for us for granted

From John’s perspective, the Jews should have been amazed at the miracle Jesus had performed for them and the promises that are on offer through him. They had just been fed in a miraculous way. While they linger on the magic of the moment and the satisfaction of a full stomach, their minds should have been challenged by the person who had fed them. This explains why they are pursuing Jesus – they want something more from him. If he can feed their rumbling stomachs he can probably do even greater things for them. They want to be free of the Romans. Maybe Jesus could ride at the head of a conquering army that will throw out the occupying forces. They want Israel to be great again. Maybe with Jesus as their military king they could take their rightful place among the company of nations. To this could have been added a range of other expectations as well: my brother is ill; I am not well; there is something coming up with which I will need assistance; my roof needs replacing and I do not have the money; my children need..... and so maybe Jesus will be this or that for me.

The answer to all of our prayers is Jesus – God’s gift that changes everything

This crowd reminds Jesus how Moses had managed to feed God’s people with *bread from heaven.* If Jesus wanted them to believe what he was saying to them about *eternal life,* all he needed to do was to prove he was bigger and better than their beloved patriarch. Big, dramatic miracles are a sure way of growing faith! But this is such a human response: do this and I will believe! Jesus’ response is clear: *It was not Moses who fed you with manna, it was God my Father in heaven who fed you. The same thing is happening here. Today.* Jesus is speaking to them in a situation similar to that experienced by their ancestors during the Exodus. They are close to giving up, in danger of dying in the wilderness and/or being crushed by the many enemies surrounding them but they are powerless to change their circumstances. As Jesus points out, God has heard their cries, is aware of their needs, hopes and anxieties and is feeding them with a New Manna.

This New Manna is nothing other than Jesus himself. The Father is offering them much more than what they “want”. He is feeding their “needs” and the initial answer to their every need is Jesus. Taking up this *food from heaven* means to *believe in the Son.* The more they align themselves with Jesus; the more they imitate the ways of Jesus and follow the words of Jesus the more they are one with God. With God at work within them, their view of life will be forever transformed, and they will know a true and enduring peace and so will be alive in the present and at the same time will live forever.

The reality is how many times we will not “get” the things for which we have prayed so fervently but that does not mean we have not been answered. In praying to the Father, the presence of the Son becomes clearer in our lives, graces flow and we are filled with the Holy Spirit. At that moment we are transformed, and we live in the world differently, with a greater sense of peace, hope, courage and insight. Then we get on with tackling our challenges.

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