

What Do YOU See?

by Dennis Lange

“And getting into a boat, He crossed over and came to His own city. And behold, they brought to Him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.” (Matt.9:1,2).

What did Jesus see? In observing their efforts to bring the paralytic to Him for healing, Jesus saw their faith. Some look at works and see works in an isolated way, and say that man is not saved by works. So they would conclude falsely that the work of bringing the man to Jesus was not necessary for the man to be healed. But it was. They believed before they came to Jesus but the man was not healed until their faith was conjoined with the work of bringing him. As they came, Jesus looked at their works and saw their faith. And man is saved by faith. That includes what Jesus saw, their works of faith.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is filled with men and women of old who, by faith, acted. By faith, Abel offered. By faith, Abraham sojourned. By faith, they crossed the Red Sea. By faith, they acted. The actions were part of their faith.

In Rom.1, Paul said his ministry was to bring about the obedience of faith. That’s the obedience that springs from faith. Obedience is a part of faith because men believed as they obeyed by faith in Heb.11. They believed and their faith prompted them to act.

The Pharisee and the tax collector went up to pray. The Pharisee thumped his chest as he prayed and told how good he was. The tax collector humbled himself as he prayed and asked forgiveness for his sins. What do we see – the prayer of the tax collector as a nullifying work, or his prayer as a work of faith? It was a necessary work of faith. He believed before he came to the temple. There, he prayed, repented, and confessed his sinfulness, and appealed to God for forgiveness. But he didn’t come **to** the temple justified. He went away **from** the temple justified. He went away from the temple justified **after** his faith acted.

By faith, Noah built the ark. He couldn’t have been saved from the flood without the ark so his work was necessary for his salvation by grace from the flood. So, what do you see when you look at Noah? His nullifying work that could not possibly have been necessary for him to be saved (a false idea) or his work of faith as he obeyed God and prepared?

Paul wrote, “For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal.3:26,27). Baptism is given as an explanation or amplification of how they became sons of God by faith. Paul viewed baptism as a work of faith. Those who are against baptism see it as a nullifying, unnecessary work.

James wrote, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works and the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’ (James 2:21-23). How in the world could a work fulfill a statement about faith? James looked at a work of faith and saw faith that justified while some look at it and see a nasty nullifying work that couldn’t justify.

But, but, but, but....Paul said several times that man isn’t justified by works. In fact, he told the Galatians that if they went back to the Law and to its works, they had fallen from grace, were cut off from Christ, and He would be of no benefit to them (Gal.5:1-4). Paul could look at works and see works, couldn’t he?

But why didn’t Paul look at baptism (in Gal.3:27, Rom.6:3, Col.2:11,12, etc) and see a work that would cause the problems of Gal.5? It’s because he looked at baptism as faith, as explained in Gal.3:27. Paul also wrote, “He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5). In this passage, parallel to John 3:5, the washing of regeneration is being born of water. Why doesn’t Paul see baptism as a deed done in righteousness?

Because he saw it as faith.

So, what do you see when you see an act of faith? If you see faith, as Jesus did, then you will acknowledge that an act of faith can save, as it did the paralytic, Noah, the tax collector, and Abraham. If you look at the carrying of the paralytic in isolation as a work, the ark as a work, prayer as a work, the offering of Isaac as a work, then you will deny that all the things that saved/justified the above did save and justify them.

A believer must repent, confess Jesus as Lord, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Does he stop believing as he repents, as he confesses Christ, as he is baptized? Of course not. Those are acts of faith and not the nullifying works.

It has always been a matter of WHEN one is saved by faith. One is saved by faith WHEN he is baptized.