



"I believe in Christianity as I believe in the sun—not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."  
—C.S. Lewis

27-May-16

## Belief and the Firstfruits (Part Three)

In [John 6:35-40](#), [Jesus](#) expands on His earlier saying that believing in Him is the work of [God](#):

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Notice the confidence in His words. *All* whom the Father gives to Him *will* come to Him. If the Father has given someone to Christ, that person *will* be brought into a relationship with Him. Then He gives us further assurance, saying that He will in *no way* cast out those who come to Him. He follows

this by asserting that He came to do the Father's will, which is that *none* should be lost. It is the Father's will that the firstfruits—those who have been given or appointed to true belief ([Acts 13:48](#))—be resurrected to eternal life at the last day.

These statements are extremely positive and brimming with power. Few verses are more encouraging—if we believe. If we do not believe the Messenger, then these bombshells hit our ears as just so many words.

With a passage like this, it is easy to see why so many think that the Bible teaches the concept of "[once saved, always saved](#)." Those whom God has called have all the power in the universe working to bring them to salvation. Yet, when we consider *the entirety* of the Word of God, we cannot say that future salvation is assured. Rather, it is better understood that *salvation is ours to lose*. We can [fall away](#) (see [Hebrews 10:26-31](#)). While salvation is within our grasp, it is not determined until we have finished the race. How we run and finish that spiritual race has everything to do with how we exercise the true belief that has been given to us.

The [book of Hebrews](#) was written to people neglecting their salvation ([Hebrews 2:3](#)). They, too, had all the power in the universe working for them. Salvation was theirs to lose—and from the epistle's tone, they were losing it. Many, perhaps even most, during the first century left their first [love](#) ([Revelation 2:4](#)). They had been appointed to know the Father and the Son and had been given the true belief that sets the [firstfruits](#) apart from [the world](#). But their belief was slipping away; something else had begun to be more important to them than their opportunity to know the Father and the Son. The fault was not a matter of blatant or rampant [sin](#) but of neglecting the priceless gift given to them. They had the true belief that, if used, would produce the right actions and glorify God, but they were not using it as they could or should.

This should prod us to evaluate our own level of belief and stir us to reflect on what it is that we *cleave* and *adhere* to, where we put our trust, and who or what we rely on.

We can draw on numerous examples. The Hebrews believed but were allowing something else to grab and hold their attention, causing them to

neglect their salvation. When Paul was imprisoned, rather than focusing on his dire situation, he believed in the God that allowed him to be put there. This allowed him to take part in the conversion of the jailer and his household.

At one point, Jesus' disciples were sure that their boat was going to sink, yet when they had matured, they recognized that the turbulent times were for their benefit. Paul even had at least one boat sink under him, but it did not damage his [faith](#). On the other hand, the crowd in John 6 looked to Jesus only because they knew He could supply a meal, rather than following Him because they recognized that their hearts were fundamentally dysfunctional and that only He could lift them out of their spiritual plight. We can see this blindness contrasted with the twelve disciples in [John 6:64-69](#):

"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus knew who had been given to Him and who had not. He had said many difficult things in this chapter and knew that those whom the Father had not appointed to eternal life would be offended and fall away—and He let them go! The twelve, though, who *had* been appointed to know the Father and the Son, were not offended at His hard sayings. After receiving a taste of true belief, they knew that nothing in the world could compare with it. They knew that nothing could bear fruit like the belief that God had given them. They recognized the words of eternal life, and they recognized God-in-the-Flesh in their midst.

Christ's focus is on those who have been given to Him. He does not try to force belief on the world at large. The rest of Israel and of the world will have their chance; they are not being overlooked by God. He is creating

conditions for His work with them as well. For most people who have lived on this earth, this opportunity will come after they are resurrected to physical life in the Great White Throne Judgment ([Revelation 20:5](#), 11-15).

He says specifically that the work of God is belief in His Messenger ([John 6: 29](#)), and only certain ones are equipped to believe. As we have seen, that encompasses far more than just believing that God exists or that He [died for our sins](#). True belief pervades every detail of life. It allows us to make a witness of God to the world that there *is* a belief system that is not, as Michael Crichton put it in *State of Fear*, "a cautionary tale."

We who have been called have been given the ability to believe in God's sovereignty, providence, protection, and [goodness](#). The challenge for us is to live this life with these truths continually at the forefront of our minds, forming the basis of *all* our decisions and actions. Our job is to walk through life with the Father and the Son, because through our relationship with them, their fundamental attributes and qualities will always be before us, which is how we will take on the character [image of God](#).

The firstfruits—those who have been ordained or appointed to eternal life—will cleave to, adhere to, trust in, and rely on God and His Messenger. Producing fruit as evidence of that belief, they will be raised up at the last day.

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [God of Our Salvation](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Many people go to their graves with their spiritual problems unresolved because they carelessly follow the dictates of their own hearts. Even just men fall into sin. Many people have lived their whole lives not aware of their sin, unaware of the law that defines sin. The Great White Throne Judgment is not a special judgment, but a general judgment or resurrection to mortal life,

allowing the vast majority of those who have ever lived opportunity for salvation. Jesus Christ is the source for the Holy Spirit, the way to Eternal Life, where we can with joy draw water from the wells of salvation. At the time of the Great White Throne Judgment, there will be a Utopian environment with abundance, a time when the majority of the world will experience God's way for the first time. The etymology of Jesus Christ's name is inextricably connected to Yeshua or "salvation," the Savior of Israel and a light to lighten the Gentiles. Salvation is all about Jesus Christ.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Wandering the Wilderness in Faith](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The wandering of the children of Israel stands as an object lesson for God's people. Hebrews 3 testifies that a whole generation of Israelites died in the wilderness, failing to reach the Promised Land, because they lacked faith in God. John Ritenbaugh examines this vital component of Christian living, exhorting those whom God has called to choose to trust Him and avoid the Israelites' lamentable failure in the wilderness.

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