

# **International Christian Fellowship of Oulu Music Worship Service**

Date & Time: Sunday, 07.05.2006 at 15:00

Place: Chapel of St. Luke

Topic: Faith or Works or Both? The Christian Way of Salvation

Prepared by Bastian Fähnrich, according to the NIV and Rainer Gross  
([www.nikodemus.net/1682](http://www.nikodemus.net/1682)). Music performed by ICFO's Music Group

Document: Structure, sermon & Vladek's blessing and sending

## **Structure:**

Welcome Words (Bastian)

Opening Music & Songs (ICFO Music Group)

Opening Prayer (Johan)

Sermon & Readings from Scripture (Bastian)

Music & Songs (ICFO Music Group)

Testimony (Sandy)

Offering (optional)

Music & Songs (ICFO Music Group)

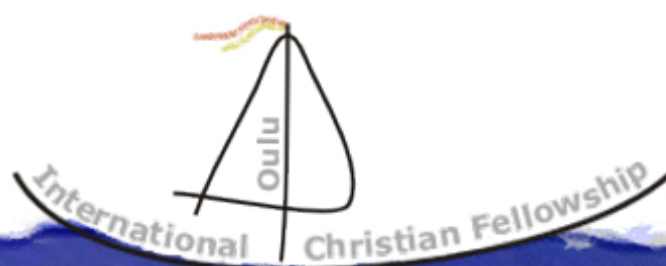
Thanksgiving & Prayers (ICFO, Wiesje or Bastian)

Blessing & Sending of Vladek (ICFO and Bastian)

Announcements (Bastian: Torinon enkelit musical, Farewell Event for Vladek, Rokua Retreat, International Church Days, Crossworks Art Exhibition etc.)

Closing Music & Songs (ICFO Music Group)

Coffee & Tea Fellowship (ICFO)



## Sermon:

Today's topic of the sermon is:

### **Faith or Works or Both? The Christian Way of Salvation**

I'd like to begin this sermon by posing the topic as questions: What (or rather who) leads a human being to salvation? What is the Christian way of salvation, that is, the only possible way of salvation? Is it through faith, or works, or perhaps by both faith and works?

Answers to these questions can be found in the Bible, especially in Paul's and James' writings in the New Testament, and in their references to the Old Testament. All in all, there are basically three answers. Before I will explore these three answers in detail, let me summarise them quickly – just to give you an overview of this sermon:

**(1)** The Christian way of salvation starts with the acceptance of our sinfulness as human beings. That is, we, as human beings, simply have to accept that we cannot overcome sin by our own strength, willpower, or good works. In other words: We cannot become righteous, or live a life according to God's will relying entirely on our ourselves.

**(2)** The Christian way of salvation continues through the belief in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead in order to free us from sin and to make us righteous before God.

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

And in **John 14:6** we can read: *I (that is, Jesus) am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.*

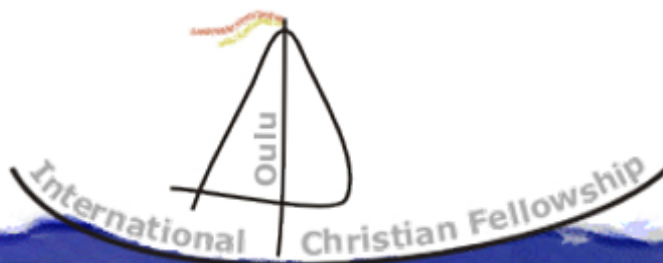
But the Christian way of salvation doesn't stop at accepting Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer. It goes on.

**(3)** By having faith in Jesus Christ, by trusting that He alone is the Saviour and Redeemer, we are able to live a life according to God's will. We, that is, believers in Christ, are called to follow Jesus, and to become like Him in the long run. We are called to walk in Christ's footsteps. Remember that our faith in Jesus is a gift from God. Moreover, we – as human beings and Christian believers – have received also other gifts from God. And, by following Jesus, we are also called to use these gifts: to do good works. Our faith is shown in our life, through good works, inspired by the Holy Spirit. So, in the end, the Christian way of salvation includes both faith and good works.

Let's go into more detail, and also use references from Scripture:

#### **(1) Sinfulness of human beings – no way to be saved only by living according to the Law or doing good works**

All human beings are living in a state of sin. No-one can become righteous before God on his or her own account. The Law set out by God and handed down by Moses in the Old Testament cannot be fulfilled by us – as human beings – through our own strength, willpower, or good works. Rather, the Law makes us recognise our sinfulness. Let's have a look into the Bible.



Paul states in his letter to the Romans:

**Romans 3:10-20** (see also **Romans 7:7-25**)

*10 It is written (e.g. in **Psalm 14:1-3**): There is no-one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one. 13 Their (our) throats are open graves; their (our) tongues practise deceit. The poison of vipers is on their (our) lips. 14 Their (our) mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. 15 Their (our) feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and misery mark their (our) ways, 17 and the way of peace they (we) do not know. 18 There is no fear of God before their (our) eyes. 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

So, how can we as human beings, as sinners, then become righteous, *if not* by obeying the Law and doing good works?

**(2) Salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ and the grace of God**

Paul states clearly that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. That is, righteousness is possible only by having faith and putting our trust in Jesus Christ.

Let's read in the Scripture. Paul says in the letter to the Romans:

**Romans 1:17**

*16 The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith (...), just as it is written (in **Habbakuk 2:4**): The righteous will live by faith.*

Paul continues:

**Romans 3:22-23**

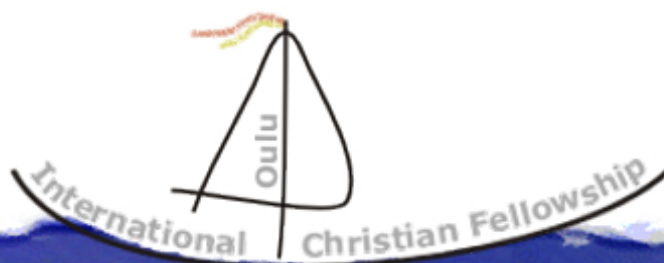
*22 Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

As you heard, Paul explains that salvation by faith is given to us freely due to God's grace. This can be seen also in his letter to the Ephesians. In addition, Paul stresses there once more that righteousness cannot be achieved by works alone:

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

*8 It is by grace you (we) have been saved, through faith- and this not from yourselves (ourselves), it is the gift of God- 9 not by works ...*

So, even faith is not an achievement of ourselves. Faith is God's work, as we can also read in the Gospel of John:



## **John 6:29**

*29 The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent (Jesus Christ).*

Furthermore, according to the Bible faith as the way of salvation or becoming righteous (through God's grace) is not only made known to us in the New Testament, but also in the Old Testament:

Abraham was considered righteous before God, because He had faith in God. That is, Abraham put his faith in God and trusted that the promises made by the Lord may come true in his own lifetime, in our times, or even in the future.

For instance, Abraham received the great promise of God that he will be a father of many nations and that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him.

Moreover, Abraham, at the age of 100, was granted a child – Isaac – with his wife, Sarah. In human terms this would have been unthinkable, but for God everything is possible.

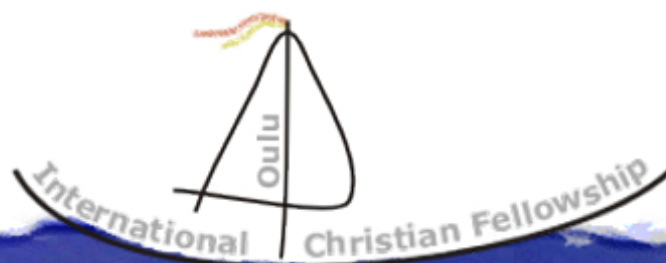
Abraham also obeyed God as a simple act of his faith towards God, for example, when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Let's see what Paul tells us in the New Testament about Abraham and his faith in God (I list also a few of his references to the Old Testament):

### **Romans 4:3 and 13-25** (see also **Galatians 3, Hebrews 11:17-19, Genesis 12,15,17,22**)

*3 Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. (...) 13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, 15 because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. 16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: I have made you a father of many nations. He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. 18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, So shall your offspring be. 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why it was credited to him as righteousness. 23 The words it was credited to him were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

So, it is now clear – both according to the Old and New Testament – that we as human beings can be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. But is it enough for us humans to profess our faith in Jesus? Does the Christian way of salvation end in accepting Jesus?



### **(3) Faith & the Holy Spirit works in & for us, to do works according to God's will**

According to Paul (in his letter to the Philippians) we as believers in Christ should continue to *work out our salvation*. God promised to us, that once we have professed our faith in Jesus, *He will work in us to will and to act according to his good purpose*. (see **Philippians 2:12-13**.)

Also, James says that we should go on after having received the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Redeemer:

#### **James 2:14-26**

##### *Faith and Deeds*

*14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18 But someone will say, You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that- and shudder. 20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? (see **Josua 2**) 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

The things James says here about salvation and the role of faith and works are not contradicting Paul's writings. Rather, James and Paul talk about the very same thing: They both talk about the works of faith, not about works required by the Law. Remember that no-one can become righteous before God on his or her own account, or by obeying the Law.

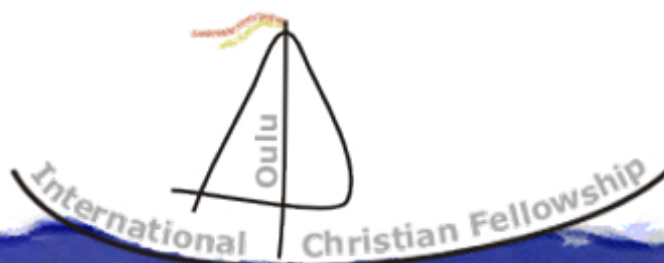
So, we as Christian believers are called to do good works, because we have faith in Jesus or God, like Abraham, the Disciples, Apostles and other Christians.

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians:

#### **Ephesians 2:10**

*10 We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works ...*

Moreover, as a consequence of putting our faith in Jesus, we are called to stop *following the ways of this world* (see **Ephesians 2:1**), and to continue the way of salvation by following Jesus, or by becoming – step by step – more like Christ.



Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians:

### **Ephesians 5:1-2**

*1 Be imitators of God, (...) 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Paul even stresses the importance of love as an act of Christian faith in his letter to the Galatians:

### **Galatians 5:6,13,14**

*6 The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.  
13 Serve one another in love. 14 (...) Love your neighbour as yourself.*

Now, as we set out in this world to live our lives according to God's will, we must remember that we are not alone, but that the Holy Spirit is there to guide us. Paul even says that Christians live by the Holy Spirit (see **Galatians 5:16**). Indeed, it is through the Holy Spirit that we gain strength and willpower to follow Jesus Christ in the long run, or that we are able to do as God has commanded us and resist sin in all its forms – throughout our entire life.

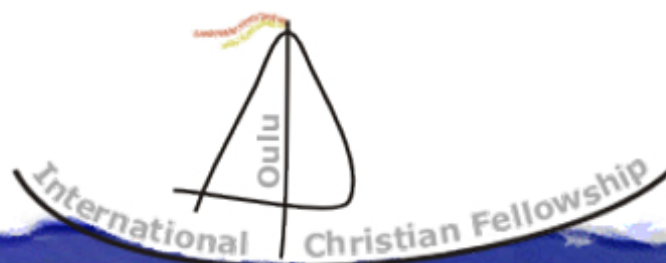
Moreover, if we put our trust solely in God, the Holy Spirit will also work through us in many more ways. Paul speaks about the fruits of the Holy Spirit (see **Galatians 5:22**). But this is already another topic, into which we could look at another time. All in all, I wanted to show in this sermon that the Christian way of salvation includes both faith and good works.

Maybe we need to ask ourselves from time to time if we really live our lives as Christian believers. Do our lives truly reflect a Christ-likeness, as Paul emphasised? Or do we just proclaim our faith in Jesus in words and let no deeds follow, as James warned?

Let us spend a minute or so in silence to ponder on these things, and then I will conclude this sermon with a short thanksgiving and prayer. For those who want to read more about today's topic or who couldn't make it I will send this sermon by e-mail as a pdf-file.

Let me now end this sermon by reciting to you the words that Paul chose in closing his letter to the Romans (**Romans 16:25-27**) and also refer to a passage in his letter to the Galatians (**Galatians 5:25**). I've put Paul's words into everyday language, though, and prolonged them a little bit:

Our Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son's sacrifice on the cross. Thank you that you have redeemed us by grace and given us the possibility to live our lives according to your will. Lord, you alone are able to strengthen our faith and to give us willpower to follow Jesus Christ, wherever we are or go. Our Father in Heaven, You want all nations and people, like the ones who are gathered here today, to believe and obey Jesus Christ. You want all of us to become a blessing to this world, like Abraham, the Disciples, Apostles and other Christians. Lord, since we are called to live by the Holy Spirit, let us keep in step with the Holy Spirit. May you receive glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen.



## **Blessing & Sending of Vladek**

We'll ask Vladek and a few congregation members to come forth. We'll form a circle, and everyone will lay his or her hands on his head or shoulders, and bless him, while Bastian says the following words:

Dearest Father in Heaven! Thank you for the time Vladek could spend with us here in Finland. Lord, you turned his stay during the past months into a blessing for us, our congregation, the colleges and the city of Oulu. We ask you to bless now his time of departure and return to the Czech Republic. Grant him a safe trip, and make him being welcomed by his loved ones at home. Smile upon him and surround him, Lord, with the soft mantle of your love and peace. Our Heavenly Father, we ask you: Continue teaching Vladek to follow in your footsteps, and to live life in the ways you have once laid out for us through your Son, our Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. We commend Vladek into your hands, and send him home with your blessings. Guide him with the help of your Holy Spirit, so that Vladek can go on and be a blessing to all whom he meets on his journey through life. Amen.

