

Bible Basics Conference 2008: Dispensations

Part 4

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[00:00:01] Thank you, Ernie.

I'm very glad that, early this morning, both Brother Hugh and Brother Michael emphasized that these things which we're looking at today and tomorrow demonstrate that, from God's side of things, nothing's changed.

God is unchangeable.

And one definition that we've been given of dispensations is that they relate to God's dealings with men on earth.

They don't exactly coincide with time itself.

But because you and I, we live in time, we're characterized by time, we order our lives by time, it's sometimes difficult for us to think outside of time [00:01:04] and to think in different ways. Well, we know that God is outside of time.

He's not limited to time.

And it's already been stressed that these things which we're looking at, from God's side, there is no change.

It's not a question that God changes his mind.

You know, sometimes in my work, we're trying to achieve something and I make a few suggestions as to how we're going to approach it. We make a start.

And then the question might be put to me, now, if this doesn't work, have you a plan B?

I normally say, well, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Let's be clear.

God has no need of a plan B.

We mustn't look at dispensations with a view that God tried plan A, that didn't work, [00:02:05] so he tries plan B, that didn't work, so he tries plan C, and so on. That is completely the wrong way of looking at it. God is not taken by surprise.

God knew exactly what would happen. It was all in the counsel of his will in eternity.

But in making heavens and earth, in creating time, in creating man, certain things have to be worked out in time. And as time unfolds and men and women live on earth, God has dealt with them in different ways according to different times and different purposes. But essentially, overall, God has no need of a plan B.

And speaking reverently, we can say that we can look in this session exactly what is God's plan A. [00:03:02] And has it failed? Does it need to be replaced? Does he need to try again with another scheme? And I hope at the end of the session we'll be able to say, no, God is in complete control. I'd like to refer to some scriptures very briefly.

First is in Ephesians, and in the first chapter.

Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3, we read there, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him, that's Christ, before the foundation of the world.

So this verse alone teaches us that that which God had in mind, he had before the foundation of the world.

He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. [00:04:05] So that should settle at once any question that God's plans for salvation met with failure, and he had to start again with a new scheme. No, when God had in mind you and me, those of us who put our trust in the finished work of Christ, he can say we were chosen in Christ, in him, before the foundation of the world.

And then in chapter 3 and verse 11, we read, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. And as we'll see in due course, that which is at the very center of God's dealing with man is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is an eternal purpose. We read here, it's the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[00:05:05] So we can at least disabuse our minds of any notion that God is limited in time and he's had to make things up as he goes along, as we might say of ourselves. And then lastly, we can refer to Colossians 1.

Colossians 1 and verse 12.

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. [00:06:04] For by him were all things created that are in heaven, that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones

or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence.

That in all things he might have the preeminence.

So that verse is very helpful. It shows us what is the centre of God's thoughts. It's Christ. It's his own dear Son. And everything that God has done in creation and in his various ways of dealing with man through time in the various dispensations, it has one thing in common. It's all centred in that eternal counsel, the eternal plan of salvation, [00:07:07] and it's centred on the person of his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, we have a very well-known passage, Hebrews 11.

We should all be familiar with it, that great chapter of faith.

And the first point of this section is how do we obtain salvation?

Well, we obtain it by faith, and that's true throughout all dispensations.

However God has saved people, individuals, from whatever circumstances, the way is the same. It's an unchanged way. It's by faith. And we can read Hebrews 11, just go through verses.

[00:08:04] Verse 4, we read, By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. So right at the very beginning of creation, whatever dispensation or period we may think that fits, we have Abel by faith.

And then Enoch, we read in verse 5 of Enoch, and he was caught up.

He didn't die, he was caught up to be with God.

Noah, verse 7, we read, By faith, and he went into the ark, he preached, he was obedient. And it wasn't the fact that he was obedient, that he worked, he built the ark, that wasn't the point of it. The point of it was that it was by faith.

Abraham, verse 8, we read, By faith.

Sarah, by faith she apprehended, she believed that she would conceive.

[00:09:04] Isaac, by faith, he went willingly to be sacrificed.

Jacob and Joseph, Joseph Moses, we can read on.

Verse 29, it comes now not to individuals but a whole nation. Israel, by faith, they escaped Egypt, they went through the Red Sea.

And they apprehended by faith what God had promised them through the Passover. Rahab, an individual, a heathen.

Gideon, Barak, Samson, the scripture, Hebrews 11, it says, well we could go on and on. And finally, it

brings us in, the writer of the Hebrews says, of us. And by faith we apprehend that the worlds were made, created out of nothing. [00:10:04] So the scripture is very plain. It doesn't matter whether you start from the very beginning of man's history right up to the present day. Individuals, men, women, nations, ourselves, salvation is a matter, it's by faith.

And let us not forget that faith is a gift of God.

Let us not think that faith is an inherent thing which we have. We can't look back and claim the glory.

We can't say, well, it was our own faith that achieved this. Faith given to us by God, but it's by faith.

Therefore, having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5, verse 1.

So this follows on from Ernest's session, the principle of faith, the principle of grace, and it's through faith, by faith, that grace is made good to our souls. [00:11:10] Well, if faith is the means, we might say, what is the basis of it?

Has the basis changed? Well, I trust we've understood, we've followed Ernest's session, and we should have a clear idea that certainly the basis of salvation is not by keeping the law. In fact, there was a time when the law didn't exist. The law was given quite late on in the scheme of things. Noah, Adam and Eve, they weren't under the law.

Noah wasn't under the law. So it's not possible that the law could be that by which salvation is wrought.

All that law did was to bring another proof that man in himself was incapable of attaining the standards required by God. [00:12:07] No, the basis of salvation is Christ. And we've read in our verses, the eternal purpose, it's based on Christ.

Christ is at the center of God's thoughts. It's God's desire that Christ should have the preeminence in all things. And I believe that the scripture teaches us, and we'll see from some examples, that it is Christ that is pointed to in the various ways God has dealt with man throughout all the dispensations. And we'll start at the very beginning. Adam and Eve, a story with which I hope we're familiar. After the fall, God pronounced various judgments upon the serpent, upon Adam, upon Eve. And this is one of the things that he said. Her seed, he, that's Christ, shall crush thy, Satan's, head.

[00:13:04] This is a judgment addressed to the serpent. But what was God's point about it? What was God's answer? It was that Adam and Eve, Eve would have a descendant, her seed, who would crush Satan's head. So right at the very beginning, after the first failure of a dispensation, God's answer is that it would center on the person of Christ.

And Adam and Eve, they'd taken fig leaves, they'd tried to make aprons to cover their nakedness. And again, this is a picture of what man tries to do. He thinks he can earn salvation or work out his own salvation.

And it was insufficient, completely inadequate. And God himself made coats of skin. So it was a work of God. It was something that God did. Adam and Eve didn't deserve it, but it was something that

God did. [00:14:05] Undeserved grace.

And what do we understand by the coats of skins? Well, some animal had to die in order for those skins to be available. And it teaches us that salvation is through substitution. It requires the shedding of blood, the death of another, and this is a pointer to the person and the work of Christ. We go on to Noah.

Noah was saved and his wife and his sons and their wives ate souls. And they were saved through water from the flood by taking shelter in the ark.

And the ark is a type, a picture of Christ.

And the scriptures are very clear. If you read Peter, you see that it's a figure of Christ. So even in that, God was painting a picture which was pointing on to Christ. [00:15:01] Abraham.

Abraham and Isaac, they went up. Isaac said, where is the lamb? And Abraham's response was, my son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering. So they went both of them together. Abraham had faith.

He apprehended that there was one coming. God's lamb.

The Israelites, they escaped Egypt.

Passover lamb had to be killed and blood put on the door post, the lintel.

And God said, when I see the blood, I will pass over you. That Passover lamb, do you think it had any value in itself? Do you think the blood of a lamb in itself is sufficient? No. It's that it points forward to Christ. And it's Christ's precious blood. That's what has value to God. Because God, when he looked upon that blood, he saw not those lambs, but he saw his own dear son. [00:16:06] He saw Christ.

You may say, well, Christ hadn't yet come. Christ hadn't yet died. But remember what I said in the beginning. God is outside of time.

We're constrained by time. If time has gone, then we can't reclaim it. If something should have happened and it hasn't happened, we can do nothing about it. But God is outside of time. It matters little to him whether the thing is to be accomplished yet or it's accomplished in the past. And I put to you that Christ's work on Calvary's cross is sufficient for God to work before and after that event.

And so the Israelites, their escape was made good on the basis of Christ's work. It was at that point then future. But that's of no consequence to a God who is eternal and outside of time. [00:17:03] Let me come to Job.

Job is a very helpful character, one of the most ancient characters that we have in the Scriptures. And he's not a Jew.

He's a Gentile.

He's outside of that special nation called out for God's purpose. But it's clear from this verse that he

could say, For I know that my Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at that latter day upon the earth. Job evidently knew something of a Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that alone was the basis of the salvation of Job.

Simeon would come right up to the time of the Lord Jesus. He held the little child in his arms and he could say, Now let your servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. [00:18:02] Simeon recognized that salvation was of God. And there he held the Lord Jesus. Yes, the basis of salvation is the work of Christ.

I've put that.

We might say, well, the basis is Christ. Well, it is. The basis of salvation is Christ. But it was necessary that the Lord Jesus should die and be raised again for the work to be complete. So I've put it in this way, the work of Christ.

John the Baptist, again, we had brought before us that he was the very greatest, we might say, of his own dispensation, but the least in the kingdom of God. John, he saw Jesus coming up unto him and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. And we should note carefully, it's the sin of the world, not the sins of the world.

[00:19:02] The Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God. He dealt with that which was offensive to God. The matter of sin. And because he dealt with sin, God is able to come out in grace and blessing. The Philippian jailer, he said, What shall I do to be saved? The answer, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. A well-known matter in the Gospel of John.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Again, that serpent in the wilderness, it was a picture of the Lord Jesus. And that's why those who had been bitten by the serpents were saved. Not because that bronze figure had any power or efficacy in itself, but because it was a symbol of the work of Christ. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. [00:20:04] For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. Now that encompasses everybody, whosoever, you and me.

And I especially urge, if there's anyone here that doesn't know the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Savior, well, this is a word to you, whosoever believes on God's Son.

Going into the future now, I think we should cover something of this.

The remnants of Israel, this verse, I believe, refers to them in Zechariah 12. And it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come up against Jerusalem. So this here, I appreciate, is a salvation from a real, literal, physical enemy. But the principle remains that the salvation from anything is always on the work of Christ. [00:21:01] I will call upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him. So even in the coming day, God is able to act in salvation on the basis of the person, the work of Christ. And the remnants of Israel, looking upon the Messiah that they once rejected, and will then recognize on that basis God is able to come out in blessing. Well, those two things are unchanged.

The principle of faith, the basis, the work of Christ. But here's a definition from the Concise Bible Dictionary. Saving faith is confidence in God founded on his word. It is believing in a person as Abraham believed God. And we have the quote here. He, Abraham, believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness. [00:22:04] The object of faith, the detail of it, is something which differs from dispensation to dispensation. But the principle and the basis is unchanged. So it's not a question of God changing his mind, but it is a question of a different administration, a different economy. When Mary, that servant girl, moved from one house to another, there were different rules, different things to bear in mind. And this is what we see.

What was it that Eve had faith in? Well, we read, she conceived and she bear Cain and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. Now, what little Eve appreciated, she knew about this seed, the seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head. And when Cain was born, rightly or wrongly, she apprehended that this possibly was the answer.

[00:23:02] Was this God's answer? And she said, I've gotten a man from the Lord. Well, we know what happened to Cain and Abel.

And later on, she bear another son, called his name Seth. For God, she said, she hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel. Another seed. She still had in view this promise of God. She had faith in the promised seed.

She didn't understand. She didn't have faith in what we have faith in. But nevertheless, that which God had revealed to her, she believed in. Abraham, he went up.

He says to the young men, you stay here with the ass. I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you. He had faith that even if he went through what he'd been told to do, if he sacrificed Isaac, that somehow Isaac will be raised. [00:24:01] And they would both come again. He had faith practically in salvation and revelation and resurrection.

Job, we've already seen that.

Whatever little he understood, he understood there was a Redeemer and that in a later day, he would stand upon the earth. Wonderful statement for a man of that time to make.

He had faith in a coming Redeemer.

What is the object of our faith? Well, many things, but I would particularly refer us to this verse. Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. And I suggest to us that the blessed hope is the rapture, our being caught up to be with the Lord and also the glorious appearing. Get yourself a reliable translation. [00:25:02] Regrettably, some of the more modern so-called translations, if you read this verse, there's no and. It reads, looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, as if these two things are one and the same thing. And I believe a good, reliable translation will help us maintain a proper distinction, rightly dividing the word of God. So for us in this dispensation or this period, day of grace, what is the hope of the Christian believer? Well, we're looking for that blessed hope. The Lord Jesus will come for us, each one. And we're also we're looking for that day when he will come in glorious appearing and be vindicated in this scene where he was once rejected. The nations, too, they have an object of faith.

If they if they think of such things, thus saith the Lord of hosts, in those days shall come to pass that 10 men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you. [00:26:10] For we have heard that God is with you.

This, I believe, is of future fulfillment.

The nations will recognize in the nation of Israel, the Jews, that God is with them. They will have faith in association with the Jew, with the Jewish nation.

So you can see that the object of their faith is quite different from our own. It's quite different from the patriarchs and the others we've had some examples of. The woman at the well, she said to the Lord Jesus, I know that Messiah is coming who is called Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things. She had faith in a coming Messiah who would tell her all things.

[00:27:01] Whatever else she knew, whatever great detail she didn't know, nevertheless, she had faith. The object of her faith was in the coming Messiah. After lunch.