

To God Alone Be The Glory

Let's talk about manna. You remember what manna was, right? It was that bread-like substance which the Lord sent to the children of Israel six mornings a week during their 40-year wandering of the desert. Every morning except Saturday the Israelites would go outside and gather up the flakes of manna. They gathered up only as much as they needed for one day. There was no need for storing any up, because God was going to send plenty of manna for them the next day. On Friday they were to gather twice as much as they needed, because on Saturday there was never any manna. The Lord didn't want them to do any work on Saturdays. That was the Old Testament rest-day, a day for them to contemplate how much he loved them.

Manna makes such a great picture of God's grace, his unearned love. The Israelites didn't have to do anything for the manna. God just sent it. We don't have to do anything for God's grace. He just gives it to us. Each day we sin. But then we go to him and admit what we did wrong, even the sins we aren't aware of, and there is plenty of grace to cover over our sins. We never have to take more grace than we need for that moment, because tomorrow when we come with our sins, God is going to forgive them all again. It's just like the manna, except that God gives forgiveness **seven** days a week.

After a while the Israelites got tired of manna. They didn't stop to think what their lives would be like without it. So they grumbled and complained about not having any variety. "We're tired of the same old thing." | Sometimes Christians get tired of God's grace. Maybe we don't stop to think what our lives would be like without God's love. So we grumble and complain about not having enough variety. "We're tired of the same old gospel." It doesn't take long before our attention strays away from God's Word. Wishes are made: "I hope the sermon is short today." Or "Why didn't I just stay home."

As manna strengthened the bodies of the Israelites, so the good news about Jesus strengthens our faith. In fact it's the only thing known on earth to do so. Besides, we tend to forget important details of God's grace. How many of us remember our confirmation verse? How many of us can recite the Bible passages or the parts of the catechism we once memorized? Reviewing can help keep our knowledge sharp. And when you consider that we still have our rascally sinful flesh, which thinks God ought to dispense his justice and mercy based on merit, we need to be continually refreshed in the good news. So with the Holy Spirit's help, let's review a few points on **HOW WE ARE SAVED**.

You know the basics. Jesus died on the

cross for us. And before that he lived perfectly for us. Was the Father pleased with Jesus for obeying his will completely? Sure he was! He said so on two different occasions: at Jesus' baptism and at the Transfiguration. Jesus had actually earned the Father's favor by his good behavior. If the Father had asked Jesus, "Why should I let you into my heaven?", Jesus could have answered, "Because I never once disobeyed you—not in my actions, not in my words, not even in my thoughts." The Father wouldn't even have to fudge the record a little in Jesus' case. And now everyone who believes in this Law-Keeper Jesus—no, let's bring it closer to home—if right now you believe in Jesus as your Law-Keeper, then you have already received the same favor from the Father as if you had lived a sinless life. Can't you just see yourself standing before God's throne on Judgment Day, expecting Satan to bring up the time that you lied to stay out of trouble, or the Sundays you preferred to sleep when God's holy Word was being explained, or when you spoke disrespectfully to someone in your household, or when you stuffed your face, or some of your so-called "really big sins" like porn or adultery or stealing or fighting. But when the Father examines the record books where the events of your life were recorded, He says, "According to my records, there are no entries here on your 'sins side,' just blood stains, the same blood type my Son

Jesus has. And over here on the side where I keep track of all the good things you were supposed to do, every entry in every category is filled. You know, this looks an awful lot like Jesus' record. But your name is at the top of the page. I guess that means you have a reservation for dinner in my home. Why don't you go take your place at table number 46,891,327. You'll find a little card with your name by your place setting." Is that awesome or what? I dare say, if you don't think having God's favor through faith in Jesus Christ is the neatest thing since the round wheel, you haven't heard the good news often enough yet. I'll be delighted to see you every Sunday for the rest of the year.

Some people have asked me, "How can salvation be so easy? Are you sure I don't have to come to church a certain number of times? Are you sure I don't have to take at least twelve weeks of Bible instruction first? Are you sure it didn't have anything to do with my standing up and publicly saying that I want Jesus for my Savior? What about how much time and money I give? Doesn't that count for something toward my salvation? What about when I help people? Doesn't that make God bless me? Don't I have to make a pilgrimage to some place in order to please God?"

No! God's gift is close by! As the apostle Paul says, ⁸*"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your*

heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming. It’s in your heart because that’s where God’s Word goes in order to do its work. And the Holy Spirit goes right into your heart with God’s Word. He grabs hold of your sinful flesh, throws it on the ground, stomps on it a few times, and starts cleaning out your heart to make room for all the blessings Jesus plans to pour out on you. That, by the way, is why God’s people love God’s Word. It feels good to be clean, and God makes our hearts clean through his Word. | God’s Word is also in our mouth because we repeat it. And we contemplate it. And we ask questions about it. When we come to church and speak the parts of the liturgy, which are drawn from the Bible, and when we sing the hymns, which also stem from God’s Word—God’s Word is in our mouth. When we talk about God’s Word in our home, God’s Word is in our mouth. When we mention God’s truth to friends and acquaintances, his Word is in our mouth. God puts his Word into our mouth in order to strengthen salvation in us and work salvation in other people near us.

He does this so ⁹that if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Now here’s where some very

sharp but incorrect minds say, “Ah, ha! I knew there was something a person has to do in order to be saved. You have to confess Jesus as your Lord with your mouth. Pastor, we should have a time in each service where people can come forward, and say the sinner’s prayer, and ask Jesus to come into their heart. It says so right here in Romans.”

Of course, astute Bible students will say, “Not so fast. Paul says that you are justified through believing in your heart. To be ‘justified’ means to be ‘declared innocent’ by God. So even before you have a chance to say, ‘Jesus is Lord, I want him as my Savior,’ God has already declared you fit for heaven through faith in Jesus. Before you can speak your faith, you already believe.” When this passage talks about the part our mouth plays in salvation, it’s simply teaching that it is impossible for a person who is brought to faith in Jesus not to say so from their lips ...unless of course we’re talking about someone who physically can’t talk. But even there, the faith-filled heart will want to praise God and communicate his love to others. As the Bible says, “*out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks*” (Matthew 12:34). And like the apostle Peter said to the leaders of his day who wanted him to stop telling others about Jesus, to stop confessing his faith—Peter said: “*We cannot help speaking about the things we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20).

Today's sermon text also teaches that it doesn't matter who you are. Listen.

¹¹*As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."* ¹²*For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,* ¹³*for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* You can be a Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, long-time Christian or deathbed convert—everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Did you notice the warning implied in this text? It would be a dreadfully foolish mistake to have salvation so close and not lay hold of it by faith. The apostle Paul says in another place: *"Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. Be reconciled to God"* (2 Corinthians 6:2 and 5:20). Since you are already reconciled to God, make time in your schedule every day for at least a few verses of the Bible. If you don't get anything out of reading the Bible the first few times, wrestle with your Bible until you master it, or better, until it masters you.

Several years ago in Florida an alligator attacked a nine-year-old boy. The alligator had the boy by the arms and was trying to drag him into the water. Fortunately the boy's mother was right there. She grabbed her boy by the legs. It was a tug-of-war. But the mother

won. As time passed the boy would ask people if he could show them the scars on his arms from where the alligator's teeth had hold of him. And he would tell how his mom held him by his legs and put up a loud fuss until the alligator let him go. The whole time he told his story, he was smiling because he knew how much his mom loved him. The proof was right there on his arms.

Since you live in Minnesota, I suspect no alligator has had you by the arms. But something even more fearsome than an alligator has—something like a dragon. "Pastor, there's no such thing as a dragon. The idea of a dragon probably came from people who had never seen an alligator in real life but imagined what an alligator looked like based on the description of a description of an alligator." Even so, the Bible calls Satan a dragon. He had hold of us from the moment we were conceived. Fortunately our heavenly Father was right there. He sent Jesus. Jesus forced open the dragon's mouth, pulled us out, and put his own hands in the jaws of the dragon. Then the Father grabbed hold of Jesus and helped him. It was a tug-of-war. But God won. So now I hope you will ask people if you can show them the scars of Jesus. We know how much our Savior loves us. The proof is right there on his scarred hands and feet and side. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. It's that simple.