

## **He Would Do It Anyway**

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

You are saved by grace through faith without works of law. That is Ephesians, chapter two, verse eight. We maintain that person is justified by faith without works of law. That is Romans, chapter three. If a person is justified by his works, then Christ died for no reason. That is Galatians, chapter two.

It is replete throughout Scripture that our salvation takes place completely because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us in His death and resurrection. Our salvation has nothing to do with anything that we do or achieve.

The reason that our salvation has nothing to do with what we do or achieve is because we are sinners. Most people misunderstand sin. They think that sin is a series of actions that we take that are wrong. Sin is not that. Sin is the status of being dead or turned away from God. Because we are turned away from God we produce a series of actions that are wrong. The basic problem is not the series of things that we do that are wrong. The basic problem is that we turned away from God. Even if we managed to do an occasional good thing every once in a while, it would not change the fact that we are turned away from God. Because we are turned away from God, it would not matter how many good things that we might do, we would always continue to do bad things, or worse we would do good things with a bad motive.

Because we are turned away from God, we deserve God's wrath. We deserve everlasting death. We have turned away from the One who made us who deserves to be the center of all that we are. Because we have turned away from Him, we deserve His wrath. God has a right to be angry with a creature that He has made who turns away from Him. What gives us the right to turn away from Him? What gives us the right to try to do anything our own way? Who do we think we are? Since we think that we are God we turn away from Him. We try to do things our own way. We deserve God's wrath. We have an idol that we consistently worship. Each of us worships ourselves.

God's wrath is everlasting damnation. Damnation is eternal separation from God while being in endless torment. It is like being eaten with worms with no end in sight. It is like being burned constantly with fire with no relief possible. There is no parole with hell. There are not levels of hell, like some parts of hell might be less painful than other parts of hell. Hell is eternal darkness where you can see nothing at all or at least see very little. There is no hope of the sun ever rising in hell.

While it is easy to become distracted onto the physical aspects of hell, the chief suffering that occurs in hell is that the people there are separated eternally from God. They do not pray. They do not want to pray. Hell is a place where people who do not want to pray get what they want and they live forever without God. There is no one there to save them from the torment that they have brought upon themselves. Furthermore the people in hell are not there with all of their friends. The purpose of hell is isolation. It is a permanent solitary confinement. There is no comfort there. You cannot appeal to your friends in hell for support in your torment. They will not answer you, just as you will not answer them.

This is the suffering that your sinful state has earned you. This is the suffering from which Jesus Christ has saved you. By dying upon the cross Jesus offered an atoning sacrifice that atones for your sin. The death of Jesus upon the cross atones not only for the individual actions that you commit that are wrong, it also atones for your sinful state. In other words the death of Jesus upon the cross atones for the fact that you are turned away from God. Because the death of Jesus atones for your sins, your sins are forgiven. Not only are the individual acts that you have committed that are wrong are forgiven, but also

the fact that you are turned away from God is forgiven. The idolatrous self worship that you have committed is all forgiven. It is forgiven completely and totally because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Absolutely none of it is forgiven because of anything that you have done or achieved.

Because Jesus has forgiven you of your sins by His death, you are justified in God's sight. When something is justified it is right. If you were justified in your actions, that means that your actions were right. Since you are a sinner and turned away from God, you cannot be justified in your actions. The only way for you to be justified is if Jesus dies for the ungodly, which He has done. Since He has done that, you are justified. You are forgiven. You have been spared the wrath of God. You will not go to hell.

Instead of hell, you will enjoy the divine favor. You enjoy the favor of God now and you will enjoy the favor of God eternally. Under God's divine favor, He listens to your prayers. He listens to them not only now, but also forever. Under God's divine favor, He grants you blessings of all kinds. He grants you blessings not only now, but also forever. In fact the divine favor extends so far as to even overthrow death. In other words even your death will be undone. God will raise you from the dead. When you live forever with Him you will live forever with Him body and soul. God favors you completely and in every way. Not only does He give you everlasting salvation even though you do not deserve it, He also gives you all kinds of blessings right now even though you do not deserve it.

He does this because in Christ Jesus He has justified you. Jesus died for you. Jesus rose from the dead for you. Jesus forgave your sins in this way. Jesus justified you in this way. Since Jesus has justified you in this way, you did not justify yourself. You did not save yourself. There is not one single good deed that you did that justifies or saves yourself. Jesus did it all. Jesus accomplished it all. All glory goes to Jesus.

Thus you are saved by grace through faith and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. It is not by works lest anyone should boast. We maintain that person is justified by faith and not by works of law. If salvation came by works of the law, then Christ died for no reason.

Now, you have heard that it was said, "If you were the only sinner on earth, Jesus would have died just for you." The point of such a statement is to comfort individual sinners who doubt whether or not the salvation that Jesus has provided was provided for them or for everyone else except them. The statement is not in and of itself bad, but I say to you, "That if absolutely no one wound up believing in Jesus after His death and resurrection, He would have died and rose again anyway." Let me say that again, "If absolutely no one wound up believing in Jesus after His death and resurrection, He would have done it anyway."

That means that if no one were found after Jesus to thank Him for the salvation that He provided them, He would have done it anyway. Just like all ten lepers were purified even though only one came back to give thanks to Jesus. If after the death and resurrection of Jesus absolutely no one on earth sang the praises of Jesus for the great salvation that He had accomplished, He would have done it anyway. He would have died for everyone's sins and made atonement for them anyway, even if not one single solitary soul chose to acknowledge it.

The reason that Jesus would have done it anyway is that we are justified by grace through faith and not by works of law. Do you get it? If a person is justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works of law, then a person is not justified because they thank Jesus for what He has done for him or her. A person is not justified because they praise Jesus for what He has done for him or her. We are not saved by our works. We are not justified before God by what we have done. If that is the case, then we are not saved by thanking Jesus for His saving us. We are not justified before God because we praise Him. Jesus would have died and risen again for us without the thanks. Jesus would have died and risen again without the

praise. He would have done it because of who He is. He would have done it for the sake of His own name. He would have done it for His personal integrity. He would have done it because of His grace and mercy.

After all do you really think that we earn salvation from Jesus because we thank Him for it? Do you really believe that God justifies us because we praise Him for it? The very fact that we praise and thank Him at all is indication enough that He did it all and we did not. After all if we did it, why would we be thanking and praising Him?

Is our praise always sincere? Do we spend more time thinking about the great things that we are saying about Jesus or do we spend our time analyzing the tune of the song to see whether or not we like it? Do we spend our time in worship thanking Jesus for the great things that He has done or do we spend our time thinking about other things while we are here, things that we think are more important than Jesus or we would be thinking about Jesus while we were here.

We cannot be saved by our thanks. We cannot be saved by our praise. They are works. We are not saved by works. We are saved by grace through faith which is another way of saying that we are saved by Jesus and His death and resurrection. He would have done it even if no one thanked Him. He would have done even if no one had praised Him for it.

So if you are going to live the life of the Savior, you are going to do acts of mercy and not expect anything in return. If you expect something in return for your act of mercy, then you are relying on your works to save you and not on Jesus.

Therefore if you do an act of mercy and expect thanks or praise for it, then it was not an act of mercy. You have not accomplished anything before God. If you give a gift at a shower and then later complain that the recipient of the gift did not send you a thank you note in a timely fashion, then your gift was not really a gift. You expected something in return.

If you are generous to a certain individual over time and then later in life expect that person to do something for you in return, then your gifts were not gifts. They were really hire. And when you gave it did you tell the person to whom you were giving your hire that it was hire and that you expected something in return? How many of you have been disappointed when people to whom you expressed your generosity did not requite you. Your disappointment betrays the fact that you expected something in return. You are still thinking in terms of law expecting tit for tat. You are not thinking in the ways of Jesus who expected nothing in return. And if He expected nothing in return for the great salvation that He has given to you, who do you think you are, you idolatrous and faithless people, to expect something in return for the meager gifts that you give.

If what you are doing is hire and there are strings attached, then have the decency to let the person know that there are strings attached and that you expect something in return. But if you are making out that what you are giving is a gift, then give the gift and thank God you had the privilege and ability to give the gift and do not expect anything in return. After all what if the Lord expected something in return for the great salvation that He has given to you?

Therefore when you do your acts of mercy, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing so that your act of mercy may be in secret and your Father in heaven who sees what you have done in secret will reward you. The same is true of fasting and of prayer. After all do you seek the reward of your Father in heaven or do you seek the reward of people?

If you complain to someone else that so and so did not requite your generosity, then your generosity was done so that people could see it and you will receive no reward from your Father in heaven. You have already received your reward. You have received the attention of the person to whom

you complained about the one who did not requite your “generosity.” If you complain that someone has not sent you a thank you note, you reveal that you gave the gift in order to be seen by people. If that is the case then you have received your reward: the opportunity to try to look good in the eyes of the person to whom you are complaining. Maybe they will think highly of you if you gripe about how someone else did not requite your “generosity.”

This is why our Lord also instructs us, “When you give feast do not invite your rich friends for they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. Instead when you give a feast invite the poor, the blind, and the lame, who cannot pay you back. You will be paid back at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Sheldon Cooper is right. There is an implied social contract when a gift is given. It is expected that a gift be given back of equal or higher value. Interesting that Sheldon misses out on so many other social cues, but he has correctly observed that one.

Our Lord is not on the cross in answer to an implied social contract. He is dying there because of His grace and His name. Therefore those who believe in Him shall offer their gifts in the same way that He offers His.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

An advancement officer of an organization is an officer of the organization that asks people for money to advance the organization’s cause. Advancement officers of the seminaries of our synod ask people for large donations of various kinds so that the seminaries may continue to do what they do. One advancement officer of the Fort Wayne seminary pointed out to me an interesting phenomenon. He told me that some people write the seminary into their estate plans. When they die their will instructs the executor that a certain amount of money be paid to the seminary as a gift for a prescribed period of time out of a certain asset that is part of the estate. The person dies and often times their executor is one of their children. The son or daughter of the deceased is an adult typically older themselves. They execute the will and checks are written to the seminary on a regular basis out of their parents’ estate.

This advancement officer went on to point out that many of these children are people who have fallen away from faith in Jesus Christ. They have abandoned the Divine Service and failed to raise their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord. But once the checks from their parents’ estate starts going to the seminary, these faithless individuals begin to take an interest in the seminary’s work. After all if a large sum of money from my parents’ estate is going to this institution it behooves me to find out what the institution is doing with my parents’ money. It also raises the question, “Why is the seminary’s work so important to my parents that they left instructions like this in their estate plan?” Once they take an interest in the seminary’s work, they find out that the seminary is an institution committed to proclaiming Jesus Christ and His salvation. Once they find this out it becomes so important to them that they return to faith in Jesus Christ and rejoin a local congregation and resume attending the Divine Service on a regular basis. Where their treasure was, there their heart was also.

If your treasure is in getting a thank you note and in getting something back from what you gave others, then your heart will be there also. If your treasure is in hearing the praises and thanks of others for what you have done, then your heart will watch for the praise and thanks of others. But if your treasure is with the One who gave His life for you to save you, then it will not occur to you expect anything in return for what you have done for others. After all, you could never repay Him, why should you expect others to repay you?

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.