

Is Salvation Something We Are Given or Something We Earn?

Luke 10:21-42

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"In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." - Luke 10:21-22, ESV

Is salvation something we are given or something we earn? What is the difference? What distinguishes someone who is grateful for what God has given and revealed and someone who is discontented and still striving to justify himself?

In today's reading in Luke, Jesus clearly proclaims the wonderful grace of God in salvation, first in a prayer to His Father (vv. 21-22) and then in a private statement to His disciples (vv. 23-24). In His prayer, Jesus says very clearly that God has hidden the truths of salvation from some people ("the wise and understanding") and has revealed them to other people ("little children"). He then tells His disciples that they are greatly blessed to be able to see and hear the things they have seen and heard. It is clear that Jesus views knowing Him and seeing His kingdom as great blessings given by the grace of His Heavenly Father.

Jesus' view of salvation is immediately contrasted by a man who desires to justify himself and then by Martha, "*anxious and troubled by many things.*" First, a man asks Jesus, "*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" The flaw in his question is obvious: He things eternal life is something to be earned, the kind of thing you do something to inherit. Since he's thinking this way, Jesus pushes him toward the Law, hoping to humble him to the point where he will see his need for saving grace. But he's still trapped in the bonds of legalism, wanting to justify himself, and so he asks Jesus, "*Who is my neighbor?*" He's hoping to get the requirements of the law down to a manageable task.

When Jesus tells this man the story of the Good Samaritan, He is showing him what a transformed heart and life look like. In the story, the priest and the Levite were concerned about their legal obligations for cleanliness, and they fail to love their neighbor. Only the Samaritan, already an unclean outcast, has the evidence of a changed heart that overflows with mercy to others.

After Jesus tells this story, we see Martha busily slaving away, serving Jesus. She resents the fact that her sister, Mary, is content to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. The problem with Martha is that she thought her service to Jesus was more important than learning from Him. She had not learned the contentment of resting at His feet and listening, and so she was "*distracted with much serving*" and was "*anxious and troubled about many things.*" Mary, on the other hand, knew that only "*one thing is necessary.*" And so Jesus said she had "*chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.*"

If we understand that salvation is a gift, to be received and not earned, given and not deserved, grace transforms our hearts. But if we are seeking to justify ourselves or are "*distracted with much serving,*" we remain restless, discontented, and anxious. Those whose hearts are freed by grace are filled with mercy for others and a longing to learn more from Jesus. They bind up the wounds of the fallen and they sit at the feet of their Savior, not because they're doing so to earn salvation, but because they know how blessed they are.