

***Our Sovereign Savior***  
***John 6:37, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024***

Some time ago, I built a box for my bible (scabbard) to keep it from getting banged up in my bag. Since this box would carry the most precious cargo, I wanted to use a particularly strong hardwood. So, I leafed through my wood pile and came across a nice plank of curly maple. Now, maple is a lovely, cotton-white wood. When it's sanded and stained, the grain ripples with three-dimensional waves. But maple isn't just beautiful, it's dense, the choice wood for butcher blocks, guitar fret boards, basketball courts, and bowling alleys. It's so dense, that as I ripped it along my table saw the blade caught and stuck. I forgot that maple must be cut very slowly.

John 6:37 is just like that plank of maple. It's beautiful but dense. And if we are going to faithfully open this verse to behold and be changed by the awesome truths within, we have to go slowly. Though it's only 18 words in the Greek, this single sentence grants us a glorious glimpse ***of God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners.***

One of the questions that generates a good bit of family feuding between believers is this: *Is my salvation the result of my choice or God's?* But before we can talk about man's will (what he chooses) we must first talk about his nature (what he is). In our previous study, we saw that man is spiritually blind to the things of God. Despite witnessing Jesus' miracles, the minds of those who followed him were darkened and their hearts were hardened so they could not and would not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. What's more, Christ said that he came down from heaven to "give life to the world" because that world, meaning the people in it, were dead and dying under the dreadful curse of sin.

The Synod of Dort called this condition ***total depravity.*** In 1617, 50 years after the death of the great reformer, John Calvin, a Dutch group called the Arminians (named for their late leader) rose up in protest of the core tenets of Calvin's doctrine of salvation. Insisting that man is spiritually disabled, not dead, with the unaided ability to respond to the gospel. So, church leaders came together and responded to the Arminians with what are known as the Five Points of Calvinism, expressed in the acrostic TULIP; every petal of which we find here in John 6.

The "T" stands for total depravity. Now total depravity doesn't mean that people are as evil as they could be or that the image of God in mankind is effaced by the fall. It means that sin has radically corrupted the whole man, body, and soul, leaving him "dead in sin and trespass" and hostile to God & his gospel. *How then can someone "dead in sin and trespass," choose to come to Christ in faith to be saved?* They can't. Not unless they are first chosen by God.

Christ speaks of God's ***unconditional election*** ("U") in the first phrase of **v37**: "All the Father gives me..." From beginning to end, the Bible is the story of a sovereign God choosing to deliver sinners. Of all the people on earth, he chose to save Noah and his household from the flood. He chose to enter into a covenant of grace with a pagan from Ur named Abram. He chose a murderer named Moses to lead his people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. He chose Israel to be his treasured possession (Deut 14:2). Of all the people on earth, Jesus chose 12 to be his disciples saying, "you did not choose me but I chose you" (John 15:16). God also chose every Christian. Paul said in Eph 1:4-5, God the Father chose some "in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."

A few years ago, I was visiting a church member and as I passed his open barn I looked in and saw something familiar. It was a red, 1976 TLC. But it was in rough shape. The tires were flat with dry rot. The glass was broken. The paint was peeling. The fenders were eaten up with rust and the engine was laying lifeless on the floor beside the car. You see, the father owned an

automotive salvage yard. And from the fields of countless cars that belonged to him, he chose this one to give to his son to restore. In the same way, those whom God the Father chose, he gave/entrusted/gifted to his Son, TLJC, so that he would redeem and restore them to life again by dying for their sins on the cross and sending the Holy Spirit to live in them.

Pride is one of the most common temptations Christians face. We tend to quietly congratulate ourselves for our grasp of the gospel, love for Jesus, holy living, and church participation. But as we swallow this truth of election and it dissolves in our souls, it ought to produce a heavenly humility. Because it forces us to confess, “I contribute nothing to my own salvation. I was so sinful and blind; I could have never chosen God unless he first chose me. The only difference between me and the unbeliever living in sin is the sovereign election of God, who chose me not for anything commendable in me but according to the riches of his own mercy.” Humility.

Note Jesus did not say “all will come to me,” but “all the Father gives.” God has not given *all* mankind to the Son to be saved, but the *elect* only. Which brings us to the “I” in our Tulip: **“limited atonement.”** Now, limited atonement, doesn’t mean that Jesus’ atonement on the cross is limited in its sufficiency to save, but in its scope. The angel told Joseph, “you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save *his people* from their sins.” (**Mat1:21**). In his high priestly prayer, Jesus said to the Father, “I am praying for *them*. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours” (**Jn17:9**). In his Revelation, John heard those singing around the throne of the Lamb in Heaven, **Rev. 5:9** “by your blood you ransomed people for God *from every tribe and language and people and nation.*” So, Jesus died for the elect only.

*“But I always thought that Jesus died for everyone.”* But think about it: *Do you believe in hell? Yes. Do you believe that people actually go there to be punished for their sins? Yes. Then tell me, why anyone would go to hell if Jesus already paid for their sins in his blood? Would it not violate the justice of God to punish the same sin twice?* You see, Jesus didn’t die for the potential salvation of everyone, but the actual salvation of his particular people.

That ought to make us profoundly grateful, because it personalizes Jesus’ sacrifice. It means that every step of Jesus sinless life was taken for me. Every selfless deed, every holy thought, every God honoring word was for me that I might be declared righteous in God’s sight. It means that on the cross, I was on Jesus’ mind as he bled and died to save me from my actual sins for himself. It means that when Jesus said “It is finished,” full atonement for my sins had been made and they were gone, never to condemn me again. That’s why we sing, “I need no other argument, I need no other plea; It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.”

But see the effect of God’s grace in the hearts of those he chose and gave to the Son: “All the Father gives me **will** come to me.” Jesus doesn’t say they, “may come,” “might come,” or “could come,” but they “will come to me.” The Synod of Dort called this **Irresistible Grace**, the “I” in our “Tulip.” “Now wait a minute,” you might be thinking, “Isn’t the bible and this world filled with people actively resisting God’s grace & suppressing his truth in unrighteousness? Didn’t Stephen accuse the Sanhedrin of “always resisting the Holy Spirit?” (**Acts 7:51**) Yes. Some of you may remember resisting the grace of God; maybe some of you are resisting still.

*But if God’s grace is resisted, how can we call it irresistible?* Because there is a difference between the external offer of grace and the internal work of grace. Like the seed scattered along 4 soils, the free offer salvation in Christ is to be sown liberally, throughout the world, to any and all who will listen. But only in the hearts of those chosen by God and tilled by his Spirit will that gospel seed sink in, take root, and bear fruit of saving faith. In Acts 6:14, Paul was preaching to a group of women outside Philippi, but we know of only one, Lydia, who believed and who came to Christ in faith. *But why did she believe?* Acts 16:14 “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” This opening of the heart is called regeneration. Lydia’s

faith is the result of God's sovereign work of grace in her heart which had been dead in sin and trespass. After Paul preached to gentiles in Antioch, Acts 13:48 "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." You see, our faith is always in response to God's gracious initiative. "We love," John wrote in his first epistle, "because he first loved us" (*1Jn4:19*).

Though people resist the offer of God's grace all the time, they cannot resist the internal work of God's grace in their heart. God may allow us to fiercely resist him for a long time, but the moment he pleases, he overcomes our resistance and draws us to Christ. In Jn 6:44, Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me *draws him*." The Greek word here is "constrain." It's the same word used in Acts 8:3 to describe how Paul dragged off Christian men and women to be persecuted. But by drawing us, God doesn't violate our wills, he renews our wills and opens our blind eyes to see and savor the irresistible beauty of Christ and come to him.

Some time ago, some dear ladies came and made cupcakes with our kiddos. When they left the countertops were covered in piles of chocolate and vanilla cupcakes. Later that evening, I was out in the yard and I looked in through the kitchen window to see the hulking body of our Rudy dog up on the counter inhaling cupcakes. He's a good boy. I'm sure he resisted as long as he could, but eventually he broke & could resist no longer. I wasn't even mad. So, it is with Christ. He is so lovely, so magnificent, so gracious, so glorious, so kind, so delicious to our souls, no one who's ever come to Christ, did so against their will. They can't not come.

When considering these lofty truths, it is easy to become enamored by the design of the doctrines and puffed up in knowledge. It's easy to miss the fact that the most repeated word in the verse is the word "me." These glorious truths are all about Christ! If these doctrines fail to fill our hearts with the urge to fly to him in faith & praise, you are misunderstanding them...like a tourist marveling at a building's beautiful architecture without ever going inside. *Have you been irresistibly drawn to Jesus and come to him in faith?* God's choice may be the first and ultimate choice in the salvation of sinners, but it is not the only choice. Scripture is clear, you must choose Christ to be your own personal Savior and hail him as the Lord of your life. Since, "all the Father gives [Christ] *will come*," you must come to him! Only "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom10:9). *Have you done that?* "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:31).

John 6:37 makes it clear that our salvation began not with our choice, but with God's choice in eternity past to save us and predestine us in love. But lastly, we see that this salvation which began in eternity past endures into eternity future because Jesus promises, "whoever comes to me I will never cast out." This is the final petal in our Tulip is "P" - ***perseverance of the saints***.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, is the story of a man named Christian making his way to the Celestial City. Along the way, his friend Interpreter showed him a fire burning against a wall. And a man was standing beside it, pouring water on it to quench it. But the more he tried to extinguish the flame, the higher and hotter it burned. The interpreter explained, "This fire is the work of God that is wrought in the heart: he that casts water upon it to extinguish and put it out, is the devil; but, in that thou seest the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that." So then he led him about to the other side of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast, but secretly, into the fire...Int. said, "This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of His grace, helps the work already begun in the heart; by the means of which notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still."

This is a picture of what Christ is promising in John 6:37. He is promising to tend & keep & build the holy flame of faith he sparked in our hearts. Jesus is promising to overcome a hostile world, the attacks of the devil and betrayals of our own flesh to finish the salvation he started! **RDP** said, "All who come to Jesus are as safe as Jesus is faithful; our defense against sin, the world, and Satan is as sure as he is strong; and our acceptance into heaven is as certain as Jesus' dying work on the cross is finished." *Dear one, are you weighed down with grief and shame this morning? Do you fear that the well of God's mercy for you has run dry? That his patience has run out and he has washed his hands of you?* Fear not for he says to you "whosoever comes to me I will never cast out." And he sings to you, "The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose I will not, I will not, desert to its foes that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake I'll never, no never, no never forsake."