

August 15, 2021

How Can I Help, God?

OK. Well good morning out there everyone. I will be bringing the message this morning as Norm and Nancy are enjoying a well deserved vacation. We will be taking a look at the age old question, is it works, or is it grace? Another way of asking is Did Jesus do it all or did God require our help in the work of our salvation. The Title of this mornings message is “How Can I Help, God?”

January 1961, President John F. Kennedy, during his inaugural address uttered these words challenging Americans with this proclamation “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

I don't have a particular scripture that I will be using as our text this morning, but we will be looking at several passages from the book of Romans, we will be spending some time in the book of Ezekiel as well as some quotes from Galatians and Ephesians and a few other places. Last week both Mike and Craig spent some time looking at parts of Romans 8 verses 15-17. I would like this morning to look at those passages again as a jumping off point as to what we will be looking at today. Let's look at these first few verses,

Romans 8:15-17 *15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

How many times have you read or hear a passage of scripture that you have read or heard many times before but this time you hear something new, see something you just had not seen before? Some new meat on the bone if you will. Well that happened to me last week while this passage was read. When read my mind began to wander thinking of the blessings we have been given in salvation. I found myself thinking about where we as believers were in

our lives before that salvation came to us in comparison to where we are after God revealed His saving grace to us.

We went from being lost sinners to being children of God and by the Spirit of adoption, we call out Abba, Father. How could this happen to such an undeserving, wretched sinner such as me? How can it be that I should gain such an interest from the Savior? These are just some of the questions we will be looking at as we go through this study today.

You might be wondering just what does all this have to do with the statement made by President Kennedy that I left hanging out there in the opening paragraph of the study? Well in today's "church", and I say the word "church" with quotation marks around it, because there are varying thoughts on how this salvation thing actually happens. So. To open up the discussion of these opposing theologies, I am going to change up the president's statement just a bit. Let's put a little different spin on it and also change the cast of characters. So now the statement is going to go like this, "Ask not what you can do for God, ask what God has done for you." We will take that statement and look at it from two different points of view. There are two distinctly different theologies involved here, is salvation by grace, or is it by works. Variations of these thoughts do exist, but in the end it still boils down to is it grace or is it works. Is it by works where man helps God accomplish our salvation. "What can I do for you, God?" Or is it by grace where God the savior has done it all, "Ask what God has done for you." Salvation is of the Lord, but how is it accomplished in man? It goes even deeper because we have to ask "is it by grace that we persevere in our salvation to the end, or is up to us through our own effort to maintain our salvation?". These are obviously very different theologies presented and it is important as to what side you come down on because it really determines, I believe, how you see Christ.

In John Chapter 6 Jesus is asked by a crowd of people who have been pursuing him **"What works must we do to do the works of God?"** And Jesus' response was telling but simple: **"The works of God is this, believe on the one whom He has sent."** That's it. Believe on the one whom He sent. There's no command to observe a special day, no command to not eat

certain foods, no command to be circumcised, no command to be baptized, no command to take communion, just simply believe on the one whom He has sent. I'm hearing that many will say, and we have all heard before, Does that mean we need not worry about doing good works? The book of James has warnings about such an attitude. He says **faith without works or deeds is dead**. In Matthew 25 we get an idea of good works being done, not to obtain salvation or a self righteousness, but because we have been saved and with that we were given a new nature. Jesus, when speaking to the gathering of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25: 35-40 said this: ***"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go visit you? 'The king will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."***

Those righteous ones were not counting their good works like they were scoring points in a game, in fact, they weren't counting them at all. They didn't see this as helping God obtain or maintain our salvation, they saw it as being good faithful servants, helping their brothers and sisters in Christ. They were not using good works as a way to find favor with God. What the works world fails to take in to account is when it comes to the flesh in any way being able to please God or to help God, there is a problem.

That reminds me of another well known proclamation from American history. It came from a crew of astronauts that were manning the Apollo 13 spacecraft. After an explosion coming from somewhere in their spacecraft some 200,000 miles up into space, they radioed mission control in Houston saying "Houston, we've had a problem." They had a problem alright, a life threatening problem that had the potential of becoming catastrophic. Fortunately, NASA was able to bring the crew safely back home to earth. It is safe to say though that the crew was as good as dead unless some outside force, which the astronauts themselves had no way to produce, was to

intervene. Well, that intervention did come via the rocket scientists and engineers that manned Mission Control in Houston.

That's just kind of an example, a muddy picture of what we have in this world. There has been a catastrophic event here in our world. Our own message to God would be "God, we have a problem!" But it's a problem that God is already well aware of and has prepared for. Like the problem that fell upon the Apollo 13 crew, this problem we have now is also a catastrophic problem, a life and death issue. It happened in the garden and it is known as the fall. It has affected all the world and all its inhabitants since that very moment Adam partook of the fruit God had expressly told him that when he did, (notice, not if but when,) he shalt surely die. And he did die along with all humanity that followed. Physical death was not immediate, though it was ushered in at the same time, but he immediately suffered a much worse death, the spiritual death, that separation from God, no more communion, in its place was a new natural state for all mankind, enmity against God. He had in fact ushered in sin and death for all. It was immediate and affected all mankind from then on. Instead of sweet communion with God, it is now hostility with Him. Gone was that divine fellowship with God that Adam had known up until that fall from grace.

So, just how serious is that problem? Let us look in our bibles at Romans chapter 3 verses 10-12 and see just how far man has fallen from that sweet communion with God that was lost in the fall. Picking up reading in verse 10: ***"As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."***

So we can see that he is speaking directly to and about each of us. We were all part of that world, no righteousness of our own, no understanding, our backs turned against Him. No one was seeking or desiring God or anything He had to offer. Help God? Seek God? We were not willing nor were we even able to seek God let alone ever help Him. In fact we were like Adam and Eve who being very aware of the sin they had just committed against God, ashamed of their nakedness, hid from God. Just like them, we will hide

from God, run from God, not towards God.

Let's take a look at Romans 8, verses 5-8.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

So, once again we are reminded, the sinful mind is death, it is spiritually dead. The carnal mind is enmity against God, hostile against God, unable and unwilling to please God. Thankfully and by God's grace, we are no longer counted among those who are hostile towards God. The reason why is clear, we have had that intervention we talked about. Verses one and two of this chapter tell us this: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death....”*** and then verse 9 says: ***You however, are not in the realm of the flesh, but are in the realm of the spirit.***

So, by Christ Jesus and Him alone we have been set free from the condemnation of the sinful mind. Still, we know all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, so there can be no boasting in us. As Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1-3, ***“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the spirit of the disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”***

So, where are we now? Have things changed? One more passage then we will begin to look at the “other” side. Romans 7. We will start reading at verse 21 and go to verse 24, ***“So I find this law at work, when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law. But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law in my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at***

work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Paul gives us some good insight into the battle between the spirit and the flesh, a battle he knows can not be won on our own. So he asks, "Who can deliver me, who can rescue me from this body of death?" Well I would like now to turn to Ezekiel 36. Here we can start to put together an answer and begin looking at the positive side of things. We want to get away from following that ruler of the kingdom of the air, the prince of darkness. Following our sinful desires of self gratification and because of our nature being deserving of wrath. We just can't get away from being that man that Paul speaks of, that wretched man. I would like to start reading in verse 22 of Ezekiel 36.

"Therefore say to the Israelites, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.'"

These first two verses present a clear message to us, it was not for our sake He will do these things but it is for the sake of His holy name. He will prove His name Holy when He reveals to all the nations that He is the Lord proved holy through the Israelites before their eyes. The world will know He is the Sovereign Lord. That's His purpose and it's for His glory. Thankfully though, we do become benefactors of that which He does. Reading on in this same chapter we have more of how God works out his plan of redemption for His people, His elect. Picking up with verse 24 of Ezekiel 36: ***"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I***

will call for the grain and make it plentiful and I will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, oh house of Israel! “

There are many, many sermons in those few verses there, but for the purposes of this study we're going to break it down to the things that apply to what we are looking at this morning. Is it works or is it grace. First, just look at the number of times the Lord says “I” presented here. As we break this down, let's substitute the I's with the word “He”. Starting there in verse 24 and going on, HE will gather them out of the nations, HE will bring them back to their land, HE will sprinkle clean water on them cleansing them from all their impurities and idols, He will remove the stony heart and give them a new heart of flesh, He will restore fellowship by putting in a new spirit, the Spirit of Life, a spirit not at enmity with God, hostile toward Him but instead will be in full communion and fellowship with Him. It's that spirit that testifies to our spirit that we are children of God and by Him we cry Abba Father. He quickens us, awakening us to see just who we are, desperate sinners in need of a Savior. It leads us right back to Romans 7 where Paul is expressing his desperation and asking who will rescue him, who will deliver him from that wretched body of death. When we were here in Romans 7 earlier I left off reading at verse 24, but let's pick up reading now verse 25 where Paul declares ***“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!***

Wretched man, meet Jesus! You who cries out who will deliver me from this wretched body of death?! Well, meet Jesus. This man Jesus, sent by the Father, born of a virgin, ministered to the lost, the sick and the dying. The great physician who could bring the dead back to life. For His people He was beaten, had a crown of thorns placed upon His head, was nailed to a cross, mocked by the crowd, flogged, pierced through His side by a sword, shedding His blood, cursed by the Father, crying out 'MY GOD, MY GOD WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?' and then afterwards crying out 'IT IS

FINISHED'. Who will rescue us? Who will redeem us, justify us reconcile us? It is He who died on the cross crying out IT IS FINISHED. And then on the third day He validated it all by coming forth from the grave, leaving an empty tomb and through it all proving that Yes, He was the Son of God. He is the Risen Savior delivering His people to the Father just like the promise was declared from way back in time. He put away death, sin and the grave. He did away with that enmity with God for all his people. He truly was the Spirit of life because as Christ rose, we rose with Him to eternal life. We have been restored again to that perfect, sweet communion with God that was lost in the garden at the fall. We are no longer enemies of God, but perfectly willing, loving servants of the Almighty God.

Going back again to Ephesians chapter 2 and picking up reading with verse 4 and ending at verse 10:”***But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***”

God did and He continues to do it all, all accomplished through and by His one and only Son, Christ Jesus. It is by his mercy He sent His Son to die and it is by His grace we have been saved. It was not of ourselves, not of our works but completely by His grace so that no one can boast. Remember those last couple of verses we read back there in Ezekiel 36 where it told us what we would do? It said “**You will loathe yourself for your sins and your detestable practices. You will be ashamed and disgraced for your shameful sins and your conduct. But for His namesake, for His glory, for HIMSELF He will raise up a people and they will be His people and He will be their God.**

And as we look at ourselves, how can we not feel that shame, that disgrace? Just the image of that man hanging on that tree, cursed by God. I see Him bleeding and dying for my sin, my enmity, my rebellion against God the King. My detestable acts, my wretchedness. How can we not feel ashamed and disgraced? But, you know what? He died for it, all of it. All of our sin done away with, paid in full. We are then and forevermore of those who have been saved by His grace. We can now stop fixing our eyes on our wretchedness, our failings but instead we now fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, the captain of our salvation. Sometimes it is so hard to believe, but I believe it, all Gods people believe it because He has told us it is true right here in Gods word. We've read several passages telling us all about it today and yet there is so much more to read, to see. It tells us this for sure, we are sinners saved by grace and it is an eternal salvation because He did the saving. It was by grace and not by works. Jesus paid the price and He did all that was required for our redemption. He did it all or it just has not been done.

I would like to conclude this mornings study by reading a short excerpt from a sermon preached by a man many of us had the privilege of meeting several years ago., Pastor DJ Ward. At the time he was the pastor of Mainstreet Baptist Church, a church in Lexington Kentucky. It's hard to believe that it was over 30 years ago when he traveled out here to be our speaker at our annual summer camp. He has since passed, but his preaching lives on as there are many of his sermons on YouTube. It was on YouTube where I originally heard this excerpt that I am going to read. I don't know what the title of the actual sermon was, but the original poster titled this excerpt "Jesus Paid It All". To me, it's a perfect cap for this mornings study. I won't be able to deliver it like he did but the message is what is important and I go back to it on YouTube quite often and listen to it because it is a great inspirational way to start a day.

Jesus Paid It All

I contend this morning that the death of Christ was not an attempt, it was an accomplishment. And now brothers and sisters, when one accomplishes something it means somewhere they had to have an assignment. Well, what

was the assignment? His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save. Not attempt to save. Not try to save. Not hope to save. Not want to save. But He shall save His people from their sin. Is that right? Now I hear this, I hear this, I hear it on television and I hear it in churches.....that” God has done all He can do, the rest is up to you.” If the rest is up to you, then He didn’t accomplish it. If anything is up to you, He didn’t accomplish it. I’ve even heard this: you’ve got to help God save you, He can’t do it by himself. If God cannot do it by Himself, then He didn’t accomplish it. He’s a false God, He’s a liar and you best not trust Him. If he didn’t do it then we ought to stop singing “Jesus Paid It All “, sing instead “He Paid Some Of It.”

Now brothers and sisters, if He did not accomplish it, we are here in vain. And you can have all the religion you want , if this was not accomplished we are going to hell. It’s just that blunt, it’s just that simple, it’s just that clear. But if He did do it, He doesn’t need your best and your works need not speak for you. If He did do it, you can leave here rejoicing that your sins are now under the blood. And He stands as your substitute, your mediator before God this morning. Pleading the blood. Pleading His blood. That perfect sacrifice, that Holy attainment. He’s pleading the blood. You can rest that all of my sins are under that blood.

Did He accomplish it? Did He fail? Do we need more having to come after Him? Do we need another prophet after Him? I declare this morning He Paid It All! He paid it all, every drop of it. Every sin I was going to commit. Every sin I thought about committing. He nailed it to His cross and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! It is well with my soul.....

May it be the same for each of you today....That you may also be able to say “It Is Well With My Soul.”