

We Are Saved By Grace Alone.

Text: Psa 46:4-5

Suggested Hymns:

192T308, 329, 195b, 282, 334

1) No merit in us at all

2) God's grace revealed in His Word

3) God is a tower of strength

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 46:4-5, ⁴ *There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.* ⁵ *God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On October 31, 1517, hammer blows outside the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany, posted a notice that brought about a gracious change in the church and in the world. The message of the change continues to re-echo around the world.

Martin Luther lived and worked in times that have been termed the "Dark Ages" for the Christian church. They are termed the "Dark Ages," because the light-bringing Word of God had been bound, and had become all but a closed book.

In many matters tradition and the word of men had supplanted the Word of God. Within the church it was prevalent to think that man could earn salvation by works. Luther himself was led to believe that he could appease God by his own good deeds.

In fact, the man on the street had the idea that he could buy the forgiveness of his sins. The people bought indulgences issued by the church because they thought such payment of cash entitled them to stand once again in God's favour.

It was in a church darkened by such false teaching that Luther held high the message of salvation by grace. He had grown up in this church. He had prepared for service in the priesthood of this church. He could not, however,

quiet the voice of Scripture that kept ringing in his ears, *“a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”*¹

At first he supposed that this teaching had simply been lost through the years and that the church would be willing to adjust its teachings to bring them in line with the Scriptural truths. He was soon to learn that the powers in the church did not want to return to the Scriptures. These were Dark ages indeed!

Luther found that some of the traditions of the church were actually contrary to Holy Scripture. Tradition has a way of becoming a powerful thing even when it is not looked upon as being divine. Because of Luther’s insistence that Scripture be taught, this Augustinian monk was labelled a heretic. And because church and state were intermingled, being termed a heretic meant having the death sentence hanging over him.

In a determined effort to spare his life, Luther’s friends hurried him away into exile. During his year of exile from society Luther worked extensively with the Word of God. He translated the Bible into the language of the people. This enabled people to know the Word of God and to appreciate the basic principle of the Lutheran Reformation, *“the Word alone.”*

In this Word we find the authority for the other two Reformation principles: — *“Faith alone”* and *“Grace alone.”* “Grace alone” — our salvation hinges not on self but on God’s love and mercy. It is because of God’s grace that you and I can be certain of eternal life.

On this Sunday preceding the anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, which occurs on Monday, let us think about the blessed truth that *We Are Saved by Grace Alone*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. No Merit in Us at All

Christ won salvation for us by grace. This is just another way of saying that there is no merit, and no worthiness in us at all. We are undeserving sinners. The apostle Paul goes to some length in speaking of this in his letter to the Romans. He writes, ⁶ *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.* He adds, ⁷ *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.* ⁸ *But God*

*demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*²

At a time when we stood in opposition to God, His will, and His way, God showed His love in giving His Son for us. His Son sacrificed Himself, His life, His all, in order that we may have the forgiveness of sins. Thank God for this message of grace!

This grace is beautifully pictured by the river in our text, *There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God.* The river pictures the outpouring of God's love. It pictures His abundant grace to us all. Yes, we can certainly say, thank God that our salvation does not hinge on ourselves but on God's abundant love for us!

However, there are some people who want to deprive us of God's grace. They want to deprive us of these riches. They do so, not because they do not want themselves and others saved, but because in their sinful pride they hope to earn the way of eternal life and salvation.

This has been a problem in the Christian church from the earliest days of Christianity. It continues to be a problem today. Because of man's pride, he is not content to sit back and admit that he can do nothing to earn eternal life. He is not content to admit that God must do it all — out of mercy and grace. But to try to earn eternal life is to lose it and to count on self is to reject the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are saved by grace! This means that even you and I can be saved. We cannot look into the hearts of others; but we can look into our own hearts. We do not know the secret sins of friend and neighbour. But we do know the sins that live in our minds, the sinful lusts and desires that are there. The knowledge of these sins must most certainly awaken in us a dread and a fear of the wrath of God, who knows everything.

Our all-knowing God says, *"The soul who sins shall die."*³ Knowing our sinfulness, we cannot stand before God with our heads high. But knowing that salvation is by grace, we can rest assured that even we can be forgiven, that even we can have eternal life.

2. God's Grace Revealed in His Word

Salvation by grace alone! This message of God's goodness and grace is revealed to us in His holy Word. This, too, is a blessing of the Lutheran Reformation. God's Word was again opened up for us in those years.

It is not as though the pre-Reformation Church was without the written Word. But the Word was not used. It was not read. It was not understood in the language in which it was available. Thus it had become a closed book.

The Bible pictures God's inspired Word as being a light and a power; but it can be so only when it is used, read, and understood. The Scriptures say *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.*⁴ In His high-priestly prayer the Lord Jesus said, "*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*"⁵ This can be so only when it becomes a light in us. This is why we say that the Word was opened up for us in those years of the Reformation.

For Hebrew and Greek became German and then English. The language of the ancients became the language of the man on the street, as Luther painstakingly took the original Scripture and wrote down on paper the words as they would be spoken by the person on the street.

By God's providence, at the very time when the Scriptures were being translated into the language of the people, God gave men the wisdom to invent the printing press. Some of the first books produced on a printing press were copies of the Bible.

This made copies of the Bible available inexpensively enough so that the average home could have one. Before that Bibles were reserved for monasteries and university libraries because they were neither in the language nor in the price range of the people. Now God's Word became an open book, and this insured the success of the Lutheran Reformation.

It is vital to the Christian's spiritual life that God's Word continue to remain an open book. A beautifully bound copy of the Bible on the living room table is not a light. A lovely inscribed Bible presented to us on the day of our confirmation but put aside so that it remains pretty to look at, is not the power of God unto salvation.

If this Word is to be a power and keep us in the church and in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, it needs to be an open book. We need to use it, or we shall lose it. We need to read it because we need it.

3. God Is A Tower Of Strength

God is a Tower of Strength, a mighty Fortress. One of our favourite hymns is Luther's Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." This hymn is based on Psalm 46, from which our text is taken. Concerning this psalm the Reformer said, *"This is my psalm."*

Luther found great comfort and encouragement in its words. In these words he saw the assurance that although earth itself should crumble away, God would be with him. He found the assurance that God was able to help him in every trouble. Note the assurance of our text, *God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.*

God is our strength in trouble. God is our strength in every hour of trouble and distress. While we refer to the times before the Reformation as dark ages, from another point of view we may think of the years in which we live as dark ages also. Christian principles are being ignored and outrightly rejected by many people. Many people are now proud to call themselves atheist. We can tremble and quake at what is happening in the world today, or we can simply trust and rely on God.

To trust in God means more than to simply sit back and say, *"Well, everything's going to be all right; God has His hand over us."* No, to trust in God means, first of all, that we humbly repent of our sins; that we acknowledge our wrongdoing and in the faith and grace given by the Holy Spirit, return to the way and the will of the Lord.

It means that we pray that His guiding, protecting hand will be with us and that He will protect us. It means that we confidently trust that, no matter what enemy may beset us, whether it be enemies within the church or without, that we have a Mighty Fortress. It means that God is our Refuge and Strength, and that He is a very present Help in trouble.

The worst tragedy that could happen would be if an atheistic power was in control and threaten to wipe out this message of Christ and His salvation by grace alone. Consider the greater danger of a power that would forbid us to teach these truths to our children and grandchildren.

We need to be concerned about the well-being of our souls, of our spiritual, of our eternal well-being. God is our Refuge and Strength. As His children by

faith in Christ Jesus we trust in Him, we rely on Him. As His children we know that even though our enemies may deprive us of everything else, they cannot deprive us of eternal life and salvation, because this is ours — by grace.

Let us conclude with a hymn verse Luther wrote,

The Word shall stand despite all foes—
No thanks they for it merit—
For God is with us, and bestows
His gifts and Holy Spirit.
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife:
Though these all be gone,
Yet have our foes not won;
The kingdom ours remaineth. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 3:28

² Romans 5:6-8

³ Ezekiel 18:20

⁴ Psalm 119:105

⁵ John 17:17