

## Lost by Man's Fault; Saved by God's Grace.

Text: Eph 2:8-9, Rom 6:23, Mat 23:37

Suggested Hymns:

167, 323, 324, 329, 159

- 1) Saved by God's grace
- 2) Lost by our own fault
- 3) Incorrect attempts to solve this difficulty
- 4) Solving the problem

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 theme for our sermon today is Lost by Man's Fault; Saved by God's Grace. It is based on three Scripture texts,

Ephesians 2:8-9, <sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (NKJV)

Romans 6:23, <sup>23</sup> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (NKJV)

Matthew 23:37, <sup>37</sup> *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Certain subjects occur regularly in informal discussions of the Christian faith, in open forums, in question boxes, in speaking of Biblical doctrines, and from those who are contemplating joining the church.

Every Christian should know how to answer recurring questions concerning his faith. One of the admittedly troublesome doctrines is the Scriptural fact that when a person is spiritually lost, *"having no hope and without God in the world"*<sup>1</sup> it is his own fault.

However, when a person is eternally saved, he is saved solely by the grace of God through faith. The pertinent passages are clear enough, but one must know just what God's Word teaches, lest he lose his way in a jungle of human

speculation about determinism and human responsibility, about a free will, about eternal election, about God's fairness, and the like.

These matters are "*solid food*" and not "*the milk of the Word.*"<sup>2</sup> The plain Scripture facts of LOST BY MAN'S FAULT, YET SAVED BY GOD'S GRACE present one of Christianity's paradoxes. The very term paradox indicates that though these statements seem contradictory, they are eternally true. The seeming contradiction in this case is due to the limitations of human understanding.

But though he cannot resolve this paradox, the believer who has a strong faith in the full inspiration of the Bible has the means for solving this problem. Our three texts state simply but clearly that man is lost by his own fault, yet he is saved by God's grace. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Saved By God's Grace

Ephesians proclaims "*Saved by God's Grace.*" The text is simplicity itself. It reads *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.* In majestic monosyllables we here have the assurance that we are saved by God's grace through faith.

In the opening chapter of this Letter, Paul wrote, <sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ ... <sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*<sup>3</sup> "*Grace*" in the Christian sense is God's forgiving favour toward us undeserving sinners. The Apostle emphasises that our salvation is not of ourselves, but is achieved by Christ. This is not your own doing. No one can pride himself that he earned the love of God.

Next we note that salvation is completed. The Greek tense is the *perfect*, meaning literally, "*you have been and continue to be saved.*" Thus our salvation is an accomplished and permanent fact. This salvation is never self-produced, and never self-initiated.

The Apostle drives home this point when he adds that since our salvation is a gift of God, it follows that it is *not of works, lest anyone should boast.* If a person was responsible in whole or in part for his salvation, it could not be by

grace. God's gracious attitude was eternally demonstrated to man when the Son of God poured out His life-blood on the cross to accomplish redemption for mankind. *"Grace is one of the operative, not one of the quiescent attributes of God."*<sup>4</sup>

The paradox is summarised in Romans chapter 6. The second text contains both portions of the paradoxical truth that man is lost by his own fault, yet saved solely by the grace of God. *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Temporal and eternal death have been earned by sin. But by grace alone, through faith alone, as the gift of God alone, we have eternal life. This is achieved *"through Jesus Christ, our Lord."* We must mentally underline these words and emphasise them, for all too often in our day any religion or belief is wrongly equated with Christianity.

It must also be noted that perfect obedience would save. If a man could keep the whole Law, he would be saved. But since the Fall no man born in the natural process of generation has been able to do so. And God tells us in James 2:10, *10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*

If a person would be clinging to a chain with thousands of links, any broken link would cause him to fall. Likewise one single sin causes rejection by God. *"The wages of sin is death."* But God's gracious gift is eternal life through Christ the Lord. It is a gift so great that when Paul was thinking of it, he could not find an adequate word to describe it and wrote simply, *"Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift."*<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Lost By Our Own Fault

Jesus says man is lost by his own fault. The third text contains Jesus' lament over Jerusalem's rejection of Him and His message. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"*

Here our Lord laments the unbelief of Israel, with its sure doom. *"How often"* is the expression that demonstrates God's love in action. The invitation

was given repeatedly and sincerely. Jerusalem typifies the entire nation. Christ was ready, willing, and able to save them, but they ***“were not willing,”*** and thus they were lost through their own fault. The Good Shepherd was sent to the lost sheep of the flock of Israel, but they wilfully rejected Him and His Gospel. Similarly, through succeeding generations up to our time, we have those who have turned a deaf ear to the Gospel invitation.

These truths are echoed in Scripture. In a matter as important as this paradox, ***“Lost by Man’s Fault, Yet Saved by God’s Grace,”*** we want to be certain to know that we are standing on firm ground. The fact that we are saved by God’s grace, and that this grace is universal, is stated time and time again in the Bible.

God seriously offers His grace ***“to every creature.”***<sup>6</sup> Through the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel God places Himself under oath and says: ***“As I live, ’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.’”***<sup>7</sup> The familiar words of John 3:16 tell us that ***God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

John writes that ***“Christ is the Propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”***<sup>8</sup> ***“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”*** is Jesus’ promise.<sup>9</sup> ***“The Lord ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”***<sup>10</sup> ***“God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”***<sup>11</sup> In the face of these clear Bible texts we dare not accept any doctrine that puts aside the fact of universal grace and salvation by grace alone.

The other part of the paradox, that man is lost through his own fault, is taught in the last two of our texts and other passages of the Bible as well. Let us be clear on this subject. For Hosea 13:9 says, ***“O Israel, you are destroyed, But your help is from Me.”***

Our text from Matthew follows a chapter in which Jesus had told about a wedding feast as symbolising the kingdom of God. Plainly Jesus there says that ***“many would not come”*** thus rejecting the gracious offer of God. The same thought is found in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, ***“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded,***

*who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

If it was not possible to extinguish the fire of God's love, His inspired writers would never have warned us in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, <sup>19</sup> ***Do not quench the Spirit.*** Pertinent here is also Stephen's ringing rebuke to the Jews for their unbelief in Acts 7:51, <sup>51</sup> ***You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.*** And in Acts 13:46 Paul and Barnabas speak of the Jews as rejecting the Word of God. When the Scriptures speak of God rejecting men, as in the case when we are told God hardened Pharaoh's heart, they point out also that God did so only after a previous self-hardening had taken place.

### **3. Incorrect Attempts To Solve This Difficulty**

Any attempted solution of this paradox that runs counter to clear Bible texts must be rejected. One such incorrect view is that God saw better things in some people and therefore He favoured them. Thus they were saved to their own credit. Their actions determined their eternal fate.

We reject this possibility, since it is diametrically opposed to the Bible texts quoted earlier, which tell us that salvation is by grace, that it is not of works, lest anyone should have a cause for boasting.

Others attempt to solve the paradox by proclaiming two types of grace, special grace and common grace, with the elect alone receiving both, and all others only the latter. The alert and thorough student of the Scriptures cannot accept this solution, because the Bible knows of no two types of grace. Such a doctrine, moreover, makes mockery of the Scriptural statements regarding universal grace.

Further, this theory in effect charges God with insincerity. One commentary sums the whole matter up like this, "The gracious antecedent (prior) will and its call to grace is equal for all. To make it serious and real only in the case of one class of men and only a pretence in the case of another class, is to attribute duplicity to God, against which all Scripture cries out."<sup>12</sup>

A third unsatisfactory solution is to speak of a double election, as if God by His grace saves some while He rejects the rest of mankind. One can go over the

whole Bible with a fine-toothed comb and never find from Genesis to Revelation even a hint that God elects some men to damnation. Such passages simply are not there. Moreover, the very idea is irreconcilably opposed to clear Bible texts.

#### 4. Solving The Problem

Rejecting as inadequate and incorrect the above solutions, what attitude shall we take over against this paradox? First of all, as we await the future light of eternity, let us say with Paul that *“now we see through a glass, dimly.”*<sup>13</sup> We now *“know only in part.”* That is why we cannot expect to harmonise to the complete satisfaction of our human reason all Scriptural statements.

But we accept as eternally true whatever God plainly tells us. Therefore we accept as correct all statements that man is *“lost by man’s fault, yet saved by God’s grace.”* We believe that this matter simply transcends our present knowledge, circumscribed as we are by the limitations of our own nature. Hence we accept the paradoxical statements of our sermon theme, with the difficulties involved, thus avoiding on the one hand false security and on the other hand hopeless despair.

In beginning its discussions of these and related subjects Article XI of the Formula of Concord emphasises that we should distinguish between eternal election and the foreknowledge of God. The “foreknowledge of God” includes everything — good and evil. The “eternal election” concerns itself only with the children of God, as Paul says in Ephesians 1:4, *‘just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*

Pastoral experience confirms the benefits of teaching these Scriptural principles *“Lost by man’s fault, yet saved by God’s grace,”* despite the seeming contradiction. By not casting aside universal grace, we can be sure we are covered by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and we can take comfort and find refuge in that grace. By not having to rely even in part on our own merits, we are positive that atonement for us has been completed and now is ours through Christ.

Let us be sure that we do not magnify all out of proportion the difficulty involved in proclaiming this paradox. While a naturalistic religion might be more easily believed, it would not be worth believing because it could never answer supernatural needs.

Much in Christianity is not simple. The Virgin Birth, the miracles, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Trinity, the Verbal Inspiration of the Scriptures — these and other doctrines transcend human reason. They simply are above our natural ability to understand them. Really they are supernatural but not contrary to what is natural.

Whenever the Bible refers to the fact that we are saved by God's grace, it does so with the purpose of bringing us comfort. We read in Titus 2:11, <sup>11</sup> ***For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.***

While we confess our faith that by our own reason or strength we could never believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, yet we know that the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, and has sanctified and kept us in this faith.

Our gracious heavenly Father has gathered us as a hen gathers chickens under her wings. Let us accept the Gospel promises in Word and Sacrament and be grateful for this gift of God. Abraham was commended for not ***“waver[ing] at the promise of God through unbelief.”***<sup>14</sup> So we are not to hesitate in accepting the assurances that we are saved by God's grace through faith.

If we believe these Scriptural assurances, then although we may lose some of the minor skirmishes, we will not lose life's battle. God is faithful. What He has promised, He will fulfil. We read in 1 John 5:4, <sup>4</sup> ***For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith.*** And in Romans 8:37, <sup>37</sup> ***Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.***

So let us conclude with the words of 2 Corinthians 2:14, <sup>14</sup> ***Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.*** Amen.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:12

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 2:2-3, Hebrews 5:12-14, 1 Corinthians 3:2-3

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:1, 7

<sup>4</sup> Lenski's Commentary

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. 9:15

<sup>6</sup> Mark 16:15

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<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel 33:11

<sup>8</sup> 1 John 2:2

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 11:28

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

<sup>12</sup> Lenski, Interpretation of Matthew, p. 992.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. 13:12

<sup>14</sup> Romans 4:20