

**"Whoever
comes to me
I will never
drive away."**

**--Jesus
JOHN 6:37**



Am I Really Saved?

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When my father-in-law was born in Milwaukee on March 26, 1932, his parents laid him in an empty dresser drawer. I was never told the reason why a dresser drawer was turned into a makeshift crib—perhaps it was to keep him close to his parents during the night—but it was a story that Leigh told many times over the course of his 88 years.

I wonder how often Jesus told the story of his birth and of being laid in a manger. If you happened to catch my Christmas Eve sermon, whether in person, on Facebook, or on WRMJ radio, then you heard me explain the theological imperative for why the baby Jesus was laid in a manger.

It's because a manger is nothing more than a feeding trough; that's where sheep go to find their feed. Also, if you happened to catch my Christmas Eve sermon, you also heard me baa like a sheep. It's not something I do very often; in fact, when I got to that part of the sermon, I was feeling a little *sheepish*.

I have a feeling Jesus told that manger story often. And now, in John 6 we find the fulfillment of that manger promise.

The chapter opens with Jesus feeding five thousand people with just a few loaves and a couple of fish. In essence, the crowd, like a flock of sheep, came to the feeding trough where they found Jesus, and they were fed.

Later that day, the disciples set sail across the Sea of Galilee while Jesus took a shortcut by walking across the sea.

The next morning, the crowd finds Jesus and asks him to repeat the miraculous feeding, much as the miracle of manna in the morning was repeated under Moses almost every day for forty years.

Gospel Lesson, John 6:32-40

³² [But Jesus replies], “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they [respond], “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus [declares], “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and **whoever comes to me I will never drive away.** ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

I read those words during my devotions this past Monday, and they just seemed to leap off the page—especially one critical phrase. But before I address that phrase to you, I want to ask you a question: What does it take to be saved?

Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday, a day in which we remember and celebrate the Baptism of Jesus Christ under the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus, of course, was without sin and therefore did not need to be baptized. But he was baptized as an example for us to follow.

Some people believe that all one has to do in order to be saved is be baptized. Indeed over the years, I’ve talked with parents who’ve wanted me to baptize their infant children.

I’m always happy to oblige; I consider baptism to be a means of grace, and I don’t want to deny anyone the grace of God. But I also explain to these parents that baptism is not Brylcreem. Do you remember the old Brylcreem ads? Brylcreem is a hair product for men which makes their hair shine and, if you believe their ads, drives the ladies wild. Their slogan was, “A little dab’ll do ya.”

I’ve talked to parents who wanted to make sure their babies would one day go to heaven, so they wanted me to baptize them with water—just apply water and they’re safe for eternity. *A little dab’ll do ‘em.* And you can understand their logic because they go to the pediatrician so little precious could get his or her vaccinations against hepatitis, measles, mumps, and rubella.

And then they came to me so I could vaccinate them against hell—except baptism is not a vaccination! Baptisms are rooted in that which is spiritual. Vaccinations are rooted in that which is physical.

It never dawns on some parents that baptism is just the beginning of a lifelong journey with Jesus. And they have to lead their children on that journey. Baptism is a means of grace, but the means of grace do not save us, although they do lead us to God's grace.

That's why I'm not particularly fond of the language of asking Jesus into your heart. I've encountered people who will tell me that they asked Jesus into their hearts back when they were in middle school, but that was the total extent of their Jesus Journey. And it comes from a rather shaky belief that as little dab'll do ya.

I much prefer the language of following Jesus. After all, when Christ walked among us, he never said to anyone, "Would you ask me into your heart?" But time and time again, he challenged people by saying, "Follow me." And that suggests a lifelong Jesus Journey.

So I don't believe that being saved is a matter of "a little dab'll do ya." Ultimately, though, the final say is up to God. If God wants to welcome Brylcreem believers into heaven, who am I to argue?

But that brings up an important matter—perhaps the most important matter, and that is the will of God. What is the will of God when it comes to my salvation? That's an important question, especially in light of the Christian doctrine of election.

Later in John's gospel, Jesus declares, "You did not choose me, but I chose you..." (John 15:16).

That and other verses like it have led some to a doctrine in which God chooses certain individuals to be saved—they are the Elect—while others are not elected, and are doomed. That's how some people interpret the doctrine of predestination, and it leads some people to wonder if they really are saved; they wonder if they really are among the Elect. Sadly, those questions and fears can lead someone into a destructive pattern where a pastor or another church elder can turn them into a victim of spiritual abuse.

And that where John 6:37 leapt off the page for me this past Monday. For there we find the beautiful and powerful declaration of Jesus: **"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."**

Let that sink in for a moment. *Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.* In other words, if we choose Jesus, he will accept us. Without condition. He receives us just as we are. The songwriter has rightly said, "Just as I am, thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come. I come."¹

If we choose Jesus, he will receive us.

But what about the verse I quoted earlier, the verse which says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you"? The key is found in the context. Jesus spoke these words to his disciples, and the scriptures point out that every one of them was chosen by Jesus. No one volunteered

¹ UMH No. 357 vs. 5.

to become one of his twelve disciples. And notice what the verse goes on to say: "I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit."

Apparently, this verse speaks to those who have been called to ministry, as the disciples were. I can testify to the truth that in order to become an apostle, an evangelist, a bishop, or a pastor, you must be called of God.

On the other hand, in John chapter 6 we find Jesus speaking to a large crowd. That's where he says, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." What that says to me is that when it comes to salvation, all you have to do is choose Jesus and he will accept you.

It appears to me that that some are saved because Jesus has invited them into salvation. But others are saved because they chose to follow Jesus. Of course, in both cases, the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of each one, leading them to either accept Christ's invitation or prompting them to come to Jesus who has promised to never turn away any who would seek him out.

And that promise of Christ is in line with the will of the Father. Notice the words of Christ in verse 40: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Do you suppose that once God sets his will that God gets his way? I think so. All we have to do is look to the Son and believe in him and we will be saved! Praise the Lord!

All we have to do is look to the Son and believe in him and we will be saved! The language of "looking to the Son" is drawn from a story in Numbers 21 where the Israelites sinned against God, so God sent venomous snakes into their camp. The people cried out for salvation from the snakes, so God had Moses make a bronze snake and put it high on a pole. Then, when the Israelites were bitten by the snake, they simply went to the bronze snake and looked at it and they were healed.

It almost seemed too simple to be real, but looking up to the snake was an exercise in faith. And it was real.

And as far as we know, no Israelite complained about the protocol. No Israelite said that Moses was guilty of propagating fake news. No Israelite said, "My body. My choice. You can't mandate me to look up to the bronze snake." Rather, in simple, obedient faith the Israelites simply looked to the bronze snake and were healed. And God's will was done "on earth as it is in heaven."

My friends, God is in the business of salvation. And **Jesus is our bronze serpent**. And it is God's will for you to continually look up to Christ in simple faith and believe in him. And keep when you do, you will be saved.

Why don't you let God have his way in your life. Let God's will be done in your life as it has been determined in heaven long before you were born.

You will be saved. God will raise you up at your last day. Remember, whoever comes to Christ will never be turned away. Thanks be to God. Let us pray.