

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

When St. Luke wrote his Gospel, the recipient he had in mind was Theophilus. It's an odd name—odd, in that it's very rare name, not often, if ever, found in any historical records—outside of Luke's writings, there is hardly anyone named Theophilus, especially anyone not connected to the Church. The name means "friend of God" or "one who loves God," and for that reason, some surmise that Luke's recipient is not a specific person, the epithet "most excellent" aside (as perhaps referring to a government official), but any person who is a friend of God or who loves God; as they might explain it, Luke's Gospel and Acts are written for the believer—he wrote them for you, dear hearer.

To what end did Luke write to Theophilus? "[T]hat you may know the certainty of those things in which you were [catechized]." (Luke 1:4) Theophilus was someone who had been catechized—prepared for Holy Baptism in the ways of the ancient church—and Luke was writing to the catechized friend of God so that he would know for certain the reliability of the words by which he had been catechized. It's a stated purpose in several places in the Scriptures that the Word of God is given in order that faith would be created in an individual. (cf. John 20:31) And in fact, God's desire is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4) In essence, these are all the same thing: God wants all men saved, to that end, He sent His Son and gave His Word in order to redeem mankind and give them faith.

So, it may come as a bit of a shock to you, dear members of this congregation or of a sister congregation, that the confession to which you assent, given that it is the confession to which this congregation and her pastor subscribe, says,

[Our churches] teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight.

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, **where and when it pleases God**, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. (Augsburg Confession, Articles IV and V, Triglotta, *emphasis added*)

You believe because you obtained faith in God where and when it pleased Him. It almost sounds as if God is in heaven, picking and choosing the times and places where it would be most fun for someone to come to faith. And if something should happen to a person before that time and place...whoops, oh well!

Couple that with what you heard in today's Gospel reading, and you may begin to wonder if the God you believe in is, at best, mischievous or, at worst, sadistic. Jesus said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'" It's enough to prompt the question, "What kind of a God wants all men to be saved, but then hides the truth of His kingdom in parables?" Then, you may begin to wonder, "If I don't understand the parable, does that mean the truth of His kingdom is hidden from me?"

It's enough to throw you into a spiral of doubt and loathing. You may begin to doubt the mercy and grace of God toward you and others. You may begin to hate God because you have come to think of His mercy and grace as just a chance occurrence because it pleased Him at a particular moment, unbeknownst to you. All that you have come to believe is thrown into doubt.

It's the age-old question of those who despise God. "If your God is really all-powerful and loving, why doesn't He just save everybody?" Well, the truth of the matter is that God has saved everybody. Every last living person on this planet, everyone who has ever lived, and those yet to be conceived and born are those for whom Christ died. It pleased God to do that nearly 2000 years ago on a hill outside of Jerusalem called Skull—there's an answer to the where and when it pleases God. You hear it in the proclamation from John

the Baptist: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Jesus didn't only take away the sin of part of the world, as if doing it only for those He knew would believe in Him, but for the whole world. As St. John put it, "[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

"Well then, if your God is really all-powerful and loving, why are some not saved?" Some are not saved because they refused to receive God's grace and mercy. They deny the all-saving sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. They have closed their eyes and plugged their ears and yelled, "Nah, nah, nah...I don't hear you." Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not understand.

In summary, then, if someone is saved, it is because Jesus has saved them, as He has saved all people, but if someone is not saved, it is because that person has damned themselves in their sin. Jesus Christ is the propitiation for all sins—all men are justified. St. Paul wrote, "For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness..." (Romans 3:22b-25a) All have sinned, and all are justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Prepare to be shocked, dear hearers: there is not a single human soul in hell that is not justified by Jesus Christ. Why will they be there, then? Because they refused to believe it and the forgiveness that He has won for them!

Hence the parable that Jesus told about the sower. As the sower scatters seed in his field, some falls on the wayside, some falls on rocks, some falls among the thorns, and yet some falls in good soil. For one reason or another, they wayside, rocks, and thorny soils all represent people who do not believe the Word of God. The seed is cast to them; they are told about the wonderful deeds of God, freely given the merits of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice, but, for one reason or another, it doesn't take root. The problem is not the seed, as it takes root in the regular soil, but the problem is in the person. So, while there are four soil types mentioned, they only really represent two kinds of people.

That's what Jesus tells the disciples when they press Him for a meaning to the parable. Type 1: to you it has been given to know the mysteries of God. Type 2: to the rest, it is given in parables so that they do not understand the mysteries of God. Type 1 is the good soil in which the seed that is the Word of God takes root. Type 2 is the rest, who may believe for a while, if at all, but ultimately refuse to believe the Word of God.

For the first type, everything is already done. You hear it in the words Jesus used. "To you it has been given..." Here it is for you and given to you. You've done nothing, either in deserving the gift or in obtaining it. It's freely given to you and placed in you. It has taken root in you and caused you to believe and trust in Jesus for forgiveness, life, and salvation. If you do anything at all, it would be to reject the gift, to deny the faith, and to refuse the gifts that Jesus has won for you.

If someone is saved, it is all God's doing. If someone is damned, it is all their own doing.

And contrary to what it might seem, your understanding of the Word of God does not impact your salvation. As mentioned earlier, you may be tempted to ask if the truth of God's kingdom is hidden from you if you don't understand a parable. "To you it is given," Jesus told the disciples who asked Him to explain this parable. They didn't get it, but that didn't disqualify them from being Jesus' disciples. The same can be said of you. Whether you understand the parables or not, if you are one to whom faith was given and received, salvation is yours! What's guaranteed of the other soil types is that they will see and hear parables and the Word of God, but not understand it. If they ever do come to an understanding of the Word of God, that is entirely God's doing in Jesus Christ, and they are welcomed into the fold of Christ's sheep.

Luke was a very thorough evangelist. He researched the events of Jesus' life in order to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus. You can be certain that what you have been taught from the Word of God is true because it is the Word of God, and also, in Luke's case, because he verifies the accounts historically. These things really happened. Jesus really said what He said. Jesus really gave His life as your ransom and the ransom of all men. To you it is truly given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. You have been given faith to believe this, and so you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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