

tax collector who cheated, , and embezzled from his neighbors. But the moment Zacchaeus was brought to faith in Jesus, he brought forth the good works of a living faith. **“Lord, Lord,”** Zacchaeus said, **“I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore it fourfold.”** (Lk. 19:1-10)

These good works of faith are done willingly and freely. But this does not mean that they are an option that we may choose to do or not do. Because of our salvation, we owe it to our great Savior God to do all that He wants us to do. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome: **“I beg you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”** (Rom. 12:1; see also 1Peter 2:9)

What did Paul say? – Because of the **“mercies of God”** our service to Him is **“reasonable.”** Because the Israelites at Mt. Sinai knew what God had done for them, they made a promise in v. 8. They said: **“All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”** Our faith reacts to God’s mercy and grace in the same way.

We did not provide our own life and breath – God did! We did nothing to save ourselves from the curse of the Law – but Christ **“was made to be a curse in our places.”** We had no power to believe in Christ, but the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel and lit up our hearts with faith.

We were certainly no treasure to God! But God’s free grace has made us to be a **“kingdom of priests and a holy people”** through faith in Jesus. God has made us His treasure!

May we then be led by the Spirit to repent of every self-serving thought or deed, every evil word, and all the other sins of our flesh. May the Spirit of God empower us through God’s forgiving love to obey His commandments and do all that He has spoken.

And may we do so with glad hearts, knowing that our good works are necessary, not in order that we may yet be saved, but because we have already been saved – We have peace and fellowship with the God of heaven and earth! – Heaven is our home, and a glorious, eternal future is waiting for us because of Jesus! Amen.

s9/23/12 T16

INI

Exodus 19:4-8

In the Name of Jesus, who shed His holy precious blood as payment for the sins of the whole world, dear fellow redeemed,

In 1454 Johann Gutenberg invented the first moveable-type printing press. He would be astounded at the printing equipment in my office. Martin Luther was a child toward the end of the 1400's. The whole continent of Europe was dominated by the Roman Catholic papacy. At that time Leonardo Da Vinci, who painted “The Last Supper,” was making drawings of very primitive airplanes. Recently Americans mourned the death of the first man to walk on the moon!

Who can count the tremendous changes that have taken place in almost every area of human experience during the past four to five hundred years? Yet some things have not changed at all. For example, in spite of the fact that the Lutheran Reformation uncovered the Gospel of Christ 500 years ago, people still misunderstand the true relationship between faith and works.

How would you answer someone who thinks he must do good works in order to be saved? On the other hand, how would you answer a person who thinks he believes in Jesus Christ, and yet lives his life without regard for the commandments of God? You should be able to say in both cases, “My friend, our eternal salvation before God depends upon the right understanding of this matter.”

So, I ask you this morning,

ARE GOOD WORKS NECESSARY?

I.

I’m sure that many of you remember reading in Exodus of how Mt. Sinai was shaking and smoking as the Holy God gave the “Ten Words” or “Commandments” to Moses. But do you also remember that it was NOT the words of His Law that God first spoke to Moses and the children of Israel at Sinai. Before He gave the people His Law God said: **“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to myself.”** Like the powerful eagle that fights to preserve its young from danger, the Lord had freed Israel from slavery to the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Likewise, the Lord has freed us from spiritual and eternal slavery to Satan, sin, and death in hell! Since all people are by nature the **"children of wrath,"** as Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1, they cannot please God or free themselves from sin and death. God Himself won our freedom when He gave His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to be the ransom for our sins. **"For while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** – Romans 5:8.

From our youth we have known that God gave His only begotten Son for the whole world, so that **"whosoever believes in Him should not perish."** In other words, God freely offers complete salvation from all sins to all the world. But what good is any gift given to me, if I don't believe that it truly is for me and take it to myself and use it? For this reason Jesus says in Mark 16:16: **"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be damned."** Only those who accept Christ's redemptive work by faith shall be saved from their sins and have everlasting life.

Now many say that this acceptance of Christ by faith is man's contribution to his salvation, which he makes through the exercise of his own free will. But the Bible teaches that no one has free will in spiritual matters to please God by choosing Jesus. For we are **"dead in trespasses and sins"** – Eph. 2:1. If a person truly feels his own sinfulness and believes in Christ as his personal Savior, this also must be God's work alone, as Paul writes in 1Corinthians 12:3: **"No one can say that Jesus is the Lord, except by the Holy Ghost."**

It's the same with us as it was with Israel. Our text tells us that the Lord did not choose Israel out of all the other nations because Israel was good and more deserving than other people. Rather, God chose Israel to be His **"special treasure"** only because **"all the earth"** belongs to Him and he can choose whomever He will. So also today and always, the Lord freely chooses and has chosen all those who finally become His eternally saved people.

In each one of us poor sinners there is nothing but rebellion and hostility toward God. That's why in Romans 9 (14-18), Paul explains that God **"has mercy on whom He will to have mercy."** If you and I believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we must confess

with the hymn writer: "Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee; that I know could never be; for this heart would still refuse thee, had Thy grace not chosen me."

So, our gracious Lord has freed us from the condemnation of our sins, called us to be His children through faith in Christ Jesus, and promised to preserve us as His special treasure. All this He has done and still does for our eternal salvation, without any cooperation on our part whatsoever! Good works are NOT necessary for our salvation! Neither can they help us in any way to be saved, for our salvation is **"a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"** – Ephesians 2:8-9.

II.

But now because of this salvation, our God expects and produces in us works of thanksgiving to His glory. Because we are saved, good works are necessary. The Christian is like a fruit tree or a stalk of corn. When God and the farmer have done all that needs to be done to give life and nourishment to a peach tree or a stalk of corn, peaches and ears of corn are expected from these plants.

Likewise, when the Holy Spirit works faith in Jesus Christ, He gives a new birth and a new life to the one who was spiritually dead. **"If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation,"** Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2Cor. 5:17). **"Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new,"** Paul says. It's because of this new life of faith worked by the Holy Spirit that Jesus could say to His disciples: **"I AM the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit."** (John 15:5ff.)

James says in his N.T. letter that just as it is necessary for a living person to breathe, so also good works will also come from a true and living faith in Jesus Christ. This is why Luther wrote: "This faith is a living, busy, active, efficacious thing, so that it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them. But he who does not do these works is a faithless man."

You remember Zacchaeus from our gospel reading. He had not believed in his Savior, Jesus Christ. Everyone knew him to be a