

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 3

June 21, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Dan Pautz

God's plan of salvation

—Romans 10:5-17

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

About fifty years ago the popular rock group The Beatles sang a song written by John Lennon titled “Imagine”. It is becoming popular again. Here are its words.

Imagine there's no heaven It's easy if you try
No hell below us Above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today

Imagine there's no countries It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for And no religion too

Imagine all the people living life in peace,

You may say I'm a dreamer But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world, you

You may say I'm a dreamer But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us And the world will be as one

Unrealistic, Atheistic! I would like to live in a perfect world but it is not and will not. This cannot be a Garden of Eden. Imagining no greed or sin or problems does not change the sinful human nature. As long as you're imagining things, you might as well imagine no cancer, no sickness, no Covid, no death, no hurricanes, no 110 degrees temperatures in the Valley. Imagining too that there is no God who cares for you and who commands you how to live does not make God away. Imagining there is no heaven or hell does not make them go away. Hell is not about to freeze over. And by the way we certainly would not want heaven to go away. How dreadful it would be if the only thing we had was this earthly life.

Every human being ought to know there is a God from the information within him, from the evidence all about him in the world, and also from the Bible. And every human being, if he listens to what is put in him, knows there is something beyond death and the grave. Ecclesiastes 3:11 reminds us that **“God has set eternity in the hearts of men.”** And all know that they have done wrong, and have offended God. But how does one get on the right side of God? How does one get to spend that eternity in heaven with God? How does one become righteous in the sight of God? In reality, there are only two religions that give answers to that. And one gives a totally wrong answer. Paul in the magnificent and inspired Book of Romans spoke of those two religions, a “do it yourself religion of works” and “God has done it for you” religion. He used the word righteousness nearly 30 times in this letter. He spoke about a righteousness that people think that comes from obeying the law and being good, and a righteousness that comes from God and His grace.

It is very natural to believe that one has to earn heaven. That's what Buddhism and Hinduism and Islam all teach. If I left to my own nature had to come up with a religion, I too would be teaching works. That I am righteous through a person who lived for me and died for me – no, never. That God on high grants salvation as a free gift – no, there isn't such a thing as a free lunch. I would be teaching that God is like a big scorekeeper in the sky checking to see whether I have scored enough good works to atone for my sins. Can you imagine appearing before God, pointing to your good works, and asking Him to give you what you deserve, what you got coming. That would be terrifying, would it not?

The Lord Jesus has done it all. When Paul was brought to faith in Jesus, his life, his attitude, everything changed. No more persecuting Christians. No more struggling with the teaching of being saved by your own works. It was a big load off of his shoulders. He rejoiced. He rejoiced in salvation by God's grace. He rejoiced that righteousness came from Jesus who as our Substitute lived the perfect life for us, and who suffered and died taking the

punishment of our sins. And isn't it the same for you? You rejoice. Maybe not always! There is the danger of becoming indifferent to salvation by God's grace. We have heard it often – and what a blessing that is. But there is the danger of being apathetic to it all. Don't be.

You have to be very happy and thankful that God has loved you so much that He gave His one and only Son to redeem you. You rejoice that you will not live forever in this sinful world but in the joys of heaven. You rejoice that your battle with your sinful nature will come to an end and you will live in perfect heaven. You are looking forward to that day described in Revelation, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4) We pray in the words of Psalm 51, "Restore unto me the joy of your salvation.

Do you know that you are the most blessed person in the world? There are others as blessed as you are but nobody more blessed. Those as blessed as you are your brothers and sisters in the true faith of Jesus. You are going to heaven; you have been brought to faith. You have been given what really counts

Paul was excited about the Gospel. He, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." Thirteen of the twenty seven New Testament Books were written by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He spent the rest of his life as an avid spokesman for the Lord, traveling thousands of miles, some by ship, but most of it by walking to cities and provinces throughout the Roman Empire. He often was beaten, mocked, imprisoned, and rejected.

Why did Paul endure it all? One of the reasons Paul gave was that he felt he was in debt. It was not a financial debt. He owed it to other people to spread Christianity to them. He did not want them to end up in hell. He wanted them to know about God's plan of salvation through Jesus.

And isn't that true for you also. You have been brought to faith in Jesus and are heading for heaven. You want others to be brought to faith in Jesus and go to heaven too. You love others, and you feel you owe something to those who are not followers of Jesus. You want them to be Christians too.

So how do we spread Christianity? Listen to segments of Romans 10:13-17. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Christianity is spread not by the sword but by the word, the word of Christ which is the Bible. It is not through force or trickery or clever logic but through the simple and wonderful message of the Gospel of Christ crucified for you.

The Lord has never asked us to convert people. That is something we are unable to do. But He has directed us to spread the Word. God the Holy Spirit works through that Word. He is the one who does the converting. After Paul wrote that He was in debt to spread the Gospel message, he also wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16) The Greek word used for power is 'dunamis' from which we get the English words dynamic, dynamo, and dynamite. It is powerful because none other than God the Holy Spirit works through it.

Keep on speaking the word. Keep on planting the seed. The seed of the Word might sprout right away but will when the conditions are just right. You also spread the Word through the congregation. When one of your teachers in Sunday School or in our preschool and grade school or our high school teaches God's Word, you are through them teaching the Word. When your pastors preach or teach a Bible Class or Confirmation Class, you are through them spreading the Word. When your pastors visit hospitals and care homes – as we hope we will soon be fully able to do again – you are spreading the Word. Eight dollars of every \$100 you contribute for the Lord's glory are used to support world-wide mission work and assist in the training of future pastors and teachers.

Our main concern is not to make this sinful world a little less sinful but to have all enter into heaven. And a by-product of Christianity is that it does improve the world, it is an asset to this world. It alone is the religion of peace – peace with God and then peace with others.

Imagine a perfect world. There is one. It is coming soon. After our brief life is over, there is the eternity of joy with our Savior in heaven.