

“The Father’s Will to Save”

John 6:35-40

Many years ago I remember learning that as human beings we prefer to think in terms of “either/or” instead of “both/and.” That is, our minds work at their best when we can sort people, groups, or events in different, distinct categories. Take one example from sports. You are either a Husky fan or you are a Cougar supporter. Those are two distinct categories with a powerful (and antagonistic) barrier between them. When I take a “both/and” approach instead of an either/or one, and I say, “I support the Huskies, but I cheer for the Cougars when they’re not playing Washington,” the response I normally get is, “You’re an intelligent person, why would you even think something like that?” Or if I say it to one of my sons: “Are you crazy?” We prefer to keep things we think are contradictory apart. “Either/or.”

“Either/or” is certainly evident in the words of Jesus. Either you are saved, or you are lost. Either you will spend an eternity in glory, or you will spend an eternity in hell. From last week’s look at Jesus, the Bread of Life: either the inner hunger and thirst of your heart and soul have been satisfied in Jesus Christ, or they have not. A challenge to us as human beings is that Jesus not only speaks in “either/or” terms, but in “both/and” terms, too. This is often a struggle for us. Think of how difficult, for example, it can be to “speak the truth in love.” Truth and love are an “either/or” for us, not a “both/and.” We think of truth as being hard and confrontational, love as something very different. We hold them apart in our minds and too often in our words and actions. And yet God brings them together – both/and. In John 6:35-40, there’s an important “both/and” statement made by Jesus Christ. It’s found in verse 37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” In the first part of this sentence we have a great statement of God’s work in salvation. Then, “And whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.” Here we have the free offer of the gospel to all who will come to Jesus Christ. “Both/and” thinking when we prefer “either/or.” I want to focus our attention on this verse, and see if these words will not only challenge our thinking, but will also encourage and strengthen our faith in and our outreach for our Savior and Lord.

First, “All that the Father gives me will come to me.” These words speak of a great transaction, and that transaction is this: In sin, you and I are spiritually helpless; there’s nothing we can do to change for the better our situation. If that wasn’t bad enough, as a sinner, in God’s hand you live under the certainty of His wrath and eventual judgment and condemnation. Here you are, under God’s sentence of death and damnation for your sin, helpless in the face of this verdict, and God, by His grace, and it truly is amazing grace, astounding grace, astonishing grace that He chooses to give to His Son those who are saved. “All that the Father gives me.” This is the greatest transaction of all time, and this is not the only place in the Bible where this truth is mentioned. For instance, in His prayer in John 17 Jesus makes repeated reference to this exchange. In John 17:2 Jesus prays to His heavenly Father, “For you [Father] granted Him [the Son] authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.” In verse 6 it is mentioned twice: “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.” In verse 9 He says, “I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me.” And in verse 24, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory.” Who are these people who have been given to Jesus Christ? The Apostle Paul writes of them as the “chosen” ones in Ephesians 1:4: “For He [God] chose us in Him [His Son] before the creation of the world.” Those who are given to Christ are the same as those who are chosen. And still another name for those given to Christ is found in Titus 1, where Paul writes that he is “an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect.” “Given to Jesus,” “chosen by God,” “God’s elect,” we’re talking here about the biblical doctrine of election. You can call it reformed, Calvinist, Presbyterian, whatever. What’s critical is that it’s biblical. It’s what God’s Word clearly states. Look at what Jesus says will happen to those who have been given to Him by His heavenly Father. Those given to Him will come to and believe in Jesus. That is, they will be saved. In verse 40 Jesus says they also receive eternal life. In Jesus’ mind, eternal life isn’t something “out there in the future,” it’s the present possession of those who have been given to Him. It is

not the case that God begins a work in our life at the moment you come to Jesus Christ, then He completes it at the moment of your death, but is completely indifferent to what happens to you in the meantime. Eternal life is yours now, to live in, enjoy, and grow in as you live your days. In verse 39, Jesus says that those who are given to Him will not lose their salvation. “I shall lose none of all that He has given to Me.” Jesus keeps those given to Him. God never begins a work that He does not intend to finish. As Philippians 1:6 says, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” No one whom the Father has given to Jesus Christ will ever be lost. Finally, those who are given to Jesus will be raised at the last day as Jesus was raised on Easter Sunday (verses 39 and 40). In these words of Jesus we see the certainty of God’s purpose, the invincibility of His will, and the absolute assurance that Jesus will triumph in His saving work!

In the second part of this sentence Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” These words speak to the invitation, the opportunity, the call to come to Jesus. What does it mean to come to Him? It means to have faith in Him. God’s Word speaks repeatedly of the importance of faith. Ephesians 2:8: “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith.” Hebrews 11:6: “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Faith in Jesus is commitment to Him based upon the belief that He is Who He said He is and that He will do what He has promised to do for everyone who trusts in Him. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon described it this way: “Faith is not a blind thing; for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing, for faith believes facts that are certain. It is not an impractical, dreamy thing, for faith trusts, and stakes its destiny upon the truth of revelation. Faith is believing that Christ is what He is said to be, and that He will do what He has promised to do, and then to expect this of Him.” Since Jesus said that He came into the world and was dying for the sin of mankind, and that He would save any who would come to Him, saving faith is simply believing this and putting your life into the hands of the Savior. Next, note what Jesus says about anyone who comes to Him. He or she will not be rejected: “I will never drive [them] away,” He says. The force behind Jesus’ words here is especially evident in the original Greek text, which contains a double negative. The best way to translate this phrase is, “whoever comes to me I will never, never drive away.” Is there any possible or conceivable reason Jesus will ever reject any person who comes to Him? No, absolutely not. You have Jesus’ word on it. Lastly, Jesus says that His invitation is a universal and free one. The gospel is offered to any man, woman, boy or girl who will come. It is for you, whoever you may be. There is no restriction to how you come to Him, or when you come to Him. On this point, I can tell you that one of the blessings I enjoy about being a pastor is receiving new members into the church. The reason that it is such a wonderful time is because I get to learn how they came to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The truth of Jesus’ words here come through loud and clear. There is an incredible variety of ways in which people come to Jesus Christ. Across the age spectrum they come as well, mid-age, seniors, children. It is incredible the way people come to Jesus Christ. I don’t think any two stories are alike in my 25 plus years in pastoral ministry. The message is this: Jesus invites any and all to come to Him. Call it Baptist or free will or even Arminian, whatever. What’s critical is that it’s biblical.

On Easter Sunday I had a young man in our church ask me, “Given the doctrine of election, why do you offer the Gospel to everyone?” This is not the typical question I get when I greet you at the end of a worship service. I answered, “I offer the Gospel to everyone because I don’t know who’s and who isn’t. That’s between the person who hears the Gospel and God. It’s only by God’s sovereign grace that anyone is saved. My responsibility is to preach Jesus Christ and to give people the opportunity to come to Him.” God the Father gives to His Son, and we must come. God works, and we are responsible. “Both/and.” It’s argued that the door of salvation has two signs. The outside reads, “Whoever will may come.” On the inside, “Chosen by Christ before the foundation of the world.” You ask, “But am I chosen, am I one of the elect?” I don’t know. Come to Jesus. Put your faith in Him. I will tell you the answer after you either receive Him or reject Him. If you do come to and believe Him, it’s because God has put into your heart and mind and soul the desire to do that very thing. In that work of God’s grace in your life, you know on the authority of your Savior and Lord that you are saved; that you possess in this life eternal life; that you will never lose your salvation; and just as Jesus was raised from death to life on Easter Sunday, the same will happen to you!