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The Essence of Salvation

John 6:36-37

Intro: Last time we looked at what is considered to be one of the most profound statements that Jesus made about Himself: “I am the bread of life” (vs35). This statement is significant for not only what it teaches concerning the nature and character of Jesus but more importantly, it reveals to us how we, the objects of His love, are to respond to Him. What’s amazing about ch6 is that vs35 is not the only profound statement Jesus will make. In fact, the next several verses are also among the most profound words Jesus ever spoke because they contain the Lord’s own explanation about the process of personal salvation. These next few verses are difficult. They may be among the most difficult parts of the Gospel of John to comprehend and as such, we cannot hope to plumb their depths completely. But yet, we dare not gloss over them because, if we allow them to, they will carry us deep into the mind and heart of God!

Fair warning: these verses deal with the very essence of salvation and they delve into areas that have been a source of great contention within the Body of Christ for centuries. But, no matter which side of the argument you tend to stand on, the Bible says what the Bible says and it is our responsibility, first and foremost, to rightly divide the Word and faithfully apply it to our lives regardless of which long held traditions or doctrines of men it might trample on. My own concept of salvation has been challenged by these verses but at the same time, they have also been confirmed. So, hang in here with me. Every point made about salvation will be backed up with corresponding Scripture.

36- But- introduces a strong contrast to what Jesus would’ve wished to see from this multitude (35b), what He expected. His listeners had seen Him and were still seeing Him, but were far from appreciating the significance of what they saw. They did not believe! Their attitude was the exact opposite of what Jesus called for in vs35b. This verse teaches us the first great principle of salvation: man’s complete spiritual inability.

Jesus is not just describing that particular situation because, while speaking to the same crowd He’ll also say in vs44

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” In other words, the people didn’t believe because they couldn’t believe and because of this, Jesus wasn’t surprised by their attitude in the least. They had witnessed all the evidence for Christ’s claims that a person could wish. They had seen Him, heard Him. But they couldn’t believe.

Note: when I say the natural man has no ability in himself to turn to Jesus I’m not referring to a physical failing but of something deeper, something that resides deep in man’s nature, something for which he is guilty. Let me illustrate this with the nature of animals. In the animal world there are animals that eat nothing but meat—carnivores. There are animals that only eat grass or plants—herbivores. What would happen if you placed a wonderful bowl of oats or a bale of hay in front of a lion? Will he eat the oats or hay? No! Why not? Is it not physically possible for the lion to eat oats? Yes; it is physically possible for him to eat oats. But it is not in his nature to do so. Thus, he won’t eat them. In the same way, it is physically possible for a lamb to eat meat. But a lamb won’t eat meat. So it is possible to say, in the same sense in which we are using the word of human inability; that it cannot.

In talking about man’s will, we come even closer to the true nature of man’s problem. The full tragedy of man’s situation apart from God’s grace is that man will not admit his need and will not come to Jesus Christ to have that need met. Plus, since the will (more than any other part of man’s makeup) is the real man, this means man is totally depraved in spiritual things. He is depraved at the very core of his being.

The well-known verses of [Rom 3:10-11](#) should be seen in this light. These verses express man’s total inability to find or please God in 3 different areas: 1) in the moral life (“there is no one righteous”); 2) in the intellectual realm (“there is no one who understands”); 3) in the sphere of the will (“there is no one who seeks God”). In fact, it’s this combination that makes man’s case so desperate. “Doesn’t the Bible say that anyone who will may come?” Of course! But that’s not the point here. Certainly, anyone who will may come. But who wills to come? No one except those in whom the Holy Spirit has already performed the irresistible work of the new birth so that, as a result of this miracle, the spiritual blind eyes of the natural man are opened to see God’s truth and the totally depraved will of the sinner is

turned around to enable them to embrace and accept Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior.

When a person begins to understand something of their nature and the absolute necessity of God's grace, only then will they see how desperate their situation actually is. When they realize the Bible is completely accurate and serious when it says they're dead in trespasses and sins, that they can't come to Christ apart from a miracle, the working of which is entirely the sovereign choice of God, then they'll find themselves close to despair. How can someone be saved if it is neither in their nature or power to trust in God and in the work of Jesus Christ? They can't. They have no hope; no hope, that is, unless God intervenes, in spite of them and their desires, to save them by pure grace. This is exactly what **vs37** teaches us that God does.

37a- Just as **vs36** teaches that left to himself, man is totally unable to believe on Jesus or come to God, it's also equally and gloriously true that God doesn't leave men to themselves but acts, in spite of man's will, to save some. This verse is split into 2 halves. The first half is a clear statement concerning the sovereign work of God in salvation. As such, we'll want to look at individual parts of this statement to get a fuller understanding of what Jesus is saying.

1) Everyone is in God's hands. This has to be so if God's going to give some of those in His hands to Jesus. Sure, our first reaction is to disagree. We all like to think our lives are in our own hands and we can go any direction we choose. Truly; we can make our own decisions to a certain degree. But **vs37** teaches that all men are held in God's hands in relation to everything important, whether they are believers or not. What happens to those in God's hands who are not given to Jesus? Jonathan Edwards preached it as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." As terrible as suspended wrath sounds, even in their sin and rebellion, God still holds them and extends His grace to them.

2) A great transaction. Some of those held in of God's hand have been handed over to Jesus in His mercy. This is the greatest contract of all time is referred to all over Scripture (**John 17:2, 6, 9, 24; Eph 1:4**). Who're these given by the father to Jesus? These are the elect! They will make up a vast and innumerable company of souls.

3) This great transaction that took place in eternity past is followed by decisions made in the present. The choice of God in eternity past means people come to Christ now in time, coming as sinners who need to be saved, coming with nothing in order that they might receive everything from Christ. The gospel is preached precisely so that people will come! Someone may say, "If I'm not among those God has given to Jesus, I cannot come." That's true. But you don't know if you're in that number or not; no one does. All you know is the gospel is preached and the command is given: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." ([Acts 16:31](#)) I know there are difficulties in sorting this out intellectually. But the text needn't be a problem. It can be a blessed comfort. If God's given certain people to His Son, why should you not be among them? Or your co-worker, neighbor, family member? Why not them as well? Do we really believe this? Has God's planted us here specifically for this reason? If so, this should be our prayer focus.

4) There's no exception. All that the Father gives to Jesus will come! This should be a great encouragement for all preaching and witnessing! If taken at full force, this verse teaches us that God is serious when He declares that all whom He's chosen will come. Nothing can stop them from coming, not our failures (tho we must take heed how we live), not even the devil! I don't know why God has chosen to save some through the foolishness of preaching and witnessing, but He has. You may seem to be sowing seed with little result but God will see to it that some seed falls onto ground He has prepared and that it will prosper ([I Cor 15:58](#)).

I'll be the first to admit that some of these points are a little disconcerting, especially if you are (as I am) predisposed to reject most of the Calvinist doctrines on salvation. Still, you cannot deny what Jesus is saying here. But, to set all minds at ease, I want to say that none of these principles have been given to limit in any way the free offer of God's amazing grace as it is presented and extended through the gospel. This is what the 2nd half of [vs37](#) clearly teaches.

37b- Wow! This swings the gates of heaven wide open and promises that Jesus will receive all who come to the Father by Him. It means the gospel is for anyone if they will hear it and come to Christ. It's for anyone personally.

Years ago in the Midwest there was an old German farmer by the name of

Klein. He was an ungodly man. Although he lived across the street from an Evangelical Lutheran Church, he never went in; and, of course, he didn't believe the gospel. In his mind, the gospel was for other people, not for him. One day, tho, the church Sunday school teachers began to teach the children the chorus of the hymn that goes:

Grace! Tis a charming sound
Harmonious to the ear;
Heav'n with the echo shall resound,
And all the earth shall hear.
Saved by grace alone!
This is all my plea:
Jesus died for all mankind,
And Jesus died for me.

From his listening post across the street Mr. Klein heard the children sing. He heard most of the words clearly. But when they came to the line "Jesus died for all mankind," he thought they were singing "Jesus died for old man Klein, and Jesus died for me." The thought that Jesus died for him personally finally sank into his heart. He crossed the street, attended services, and eventually committed his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the message of [vs37b](#).

What does it mean to come to Jesus? Jesus is clearly talking about faith. To come to Jesus means to have faith in him. This avenue of salvation is always spoken of in the Bible and is well known to us ([Eph 2:8](#); [Heb 11:6](#)). Faith in Jesus is commitment to Jesus based on a belief that He is who He said He is and that He will do what He's promised to do for everyone who trusts in Him. Since Jesus said He came to die for the sin of mankind that He would save any who commits themselves to Him; saving faith is simply believing this and putting your life into His saving hands.

The first half of [vs37](#) is written in the abstract, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." This is the part that deals with election and God's sovereignty. It's plural, referring a great number. It's abstract' we don't know who "they" are who are called by God. The 2nd half of [vs37](#) is our half. It's both singular in number and personal: him. It's Jesus' way of saying "You," whoever you are, however and whenever you may come. Let's make it even more personal. According to [37b](#), who may come to Jesus? Anyone. How

may they come? In any way. When may they come? At any time. How can salvation, as offered by the gospel, be any more universal than that?

Who may come? Anyone! There's absolutely no restriction, even if you're a great sinner. Jesus Himself told us that He didn't come to call the righteous but, "sinners to repentance." What's your sin? Adultery, theft, murder or worse? It doesn't matter! If you will repent of your sins and come to Jesus in faith for salvation, you will be received!

How may you come? In any way! Some people come running: like Zacchaeus, who climbed a tree to get a saving look at Christ, or like Peter, who jumped into the sea and swam toward Him. For these people, the results of the gospel are immediate. They seem to come in the fullness of faith into a full knowledge of the gospel. Others come limping to Christ, with poor halting steps. They want to believe, they think they believe but then, they're not too sure. Like the man who cried out, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" These can come to Jesus as well, because Jesus doesn't specify how we may come to Him any more than He specifies who may come. Coming is for anyone.

When may you come? At any time! You may come as a child. Many children respond to the gospel and they can follow Jesus. If they are old enough to sin and old enough to die – they're old enough to come to Jesus. The value of coming to Christ as a child is immeasurable. You have your whole lifetime for Jesus to mold you into the person He would have you be and train you for the kind of work He has for you to do. In this way, the majority of the decisions you make in life can be made in the light of His call upon your life.

Maybe you missed out on coming to Jesus as a child. Maybe you've grown old and set in your ways. Maybe you think that change will be too hard and it's now too late for you. Nonsense! It's never too late! Sure, there are more difficulties associated with advanced age, like habits of mind and an entrenched worldly perspective. But God is equal to these difficulties and older folks do come to Jesus and they are still used by Him greatly. A good friend of mine was burdened for years for the salvation of his avowed atheist father. It was a constant source of concern and matter of prayer. Just in the last few years I've learned that his father was miraculously saved and has become a great witness and living testimony of the grace of God and the power of the gospel to save and change lives! You may not be able to do

very much for Jesus because of your age but He can do everything for you! You may only have a short time on this earth to serve Him but you will have an eternity in heaven to praise Him!

The grace of God is like a river in the desert: all life is supported by it, it's critical for the wellbeing of the entire ecosystem. But, despite its great importance, it's still open and available, free and abundant to anyone who finds themselves beside its banks. The river of God's grace is flowing freely. All may drink of it freely! Will you? You only need to reach out and scoop it up!

These verses clearly teach us that salvation involves both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Father gives men and women to the Son, a fact that is undisputable; but these men and women must come to Him and believe in Him. From a human perspective, we can't really comprehend how divine sovereignty and human responsibility can work together; but from God's perspective, there is no conflict.

When a church member asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled divine sovereignty and human responsibility, he simply replied, "I never try to reconcile friends." There is no conflict between these 2 principles in the Bible; the only conflict that exists is of man's making. I have no trouble believing what the Bible says but I refuse to carry water for any belief system that pits itself against the clear teaching of Scripture. 😊