

RUMINATIONS OF A FORMER HEATHEN

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Jesus said, in Matthew 9: 37: “The harvest is truly plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” Does that mean that there are many who could be saved, but will go to Hell because I was not there to tell them the Gospel? I hate to think of that. What happened to being chosen from the foundation of the world? What influence could I possibly have if people are chosen (or not chosen) from the foundation of the world? If they are chosen, they will be saved; if they are not chosen, they will be lost. That’s it; my input does not affect who is going to end up where. But, do I really know that? That my input makes no difference? How would I know? One thing I know is that God keeps calling people. But, if God has decided whom he is going to save from the foundation of the world, why does he keep calling them? He will catch them anyhow, why call them? So, does God say superfluous things? Does he utter meaningless statements? No, of course not. He is completely reliable and trustworthy; there is no guile or vain speech from him. He says what he means. But the fact that he calls us seems to indicate some level of free will on our part. Are the chosen, chosen to be saved? Or are they chosen to receive instruction?

Regardless of the whole debate about election and free will, the spreading of the Gospel is not a choice for us; we have direct orders to go into all the world. So, at some level, it becomes a question of shut up and do your job. Fine, fine, I have no problem with that. In fact, I feel privileged to have a pin to carry. But I still want to know why God says certain things, and why Jesus tell us to pray to the Father to send more labourers to the field. Why are the labourers so few, seeing there are so many Christians? The harvest is the end of the world, Jesus said. But, the end of the world comes to everyone who dies before that day of the end of the world. In other words, the harvest is happening right now, not sometime in the future. The time to disseminate the Gospel is **now**, before that day of the end of the world, people are dying now. Yet, the labourers are few. There are a couple of reasons. One of those reasons is that the only ones who will show up for work are those motivated by grace. That is, they are those who are motivated by the unmerited favour of a complete pardon for their sins. It is not uncommon for people to think they *merit* favour, when in reality grace is *unmerited* favour. Grace is the payment God has made for our sins,

when we did not merit it, no, not ever could merit. Is Jesus grace? Oh, yes, he is.

What is this motivation by grace? What does that motivation produce? One thing motivation by grace produces is gratitude. For myself, I am extremely grateful that all my sins are paid for, before I ever knew I needed that. That is what motivates my writing about the Gospel. I need to tell about this, because it is a discovery. It is the treasure that is found, it is the miracle cure, it is the pearl of great price, it is the kinsman redeemer buying us back out of Death and Hell. It is an opportunity like no other. It is the assurance of not going to Hell at the end of life, but instead of going to Heaven, and having eternal life with God. How do you like that? How is that for a good deal? Better than any sale you ever heard of.

Among other things, grace instills fear in you and shows you that your house is on fire. The fear of God is the fear of death and of the everlasting future. The fear of God is a gift of God. It is a gift because in the natural we are too dumb to be afraid. When you know your house is on fire you realize that your neighbour's house is also on fire. What would you do if your neighbour's house were on fire? You would call 9-1-1 and then run to the house to make sure everybody is safely out of there. How will they respond? Will they tell you, yeah, yeah, yeah, the house is on fire, I'm watching the game, I don't want to hear about it? Then, what would you do? Would you take them by the arm, and shout at them, don't you see your house is on fire, you're going to burn! You will pull one way, they will pull the other way. They will yank their arm away and reach for another potato chip, they will look you in the eye and say, hey, I'm watching the game right now, O.K.? I'll talk to you later.

You can get to be a real fanatic about this, you want to grab people by the hair, let alone the arm, and drag them outside the house. Shout in their faces, here is salvation from death! Here is eternal life! Here is the most important thing that could ever be! You will find the reluctance incomprehensible when they push you away. That's what I did to him for a long time.

So, what do you do with all that information? Is God going to save only those he chose from the foundation of the world, or is anybody and everybody eligible for salvation? I believe the latter. Not that I don't believe on election. I am convinced that God elects people and I am convinced that free will exists. We are elected by God from the beginning. The Book of Life doesn't say when our names were written

in, so, it is plausible that our names were written in when we were born. People are not *written in* the Book of Life, people are *blotted out* of the Book of Life. God writes us in the Book of Life (election) and we blot ourselves out with our rebellion (free will).

I tell you, free will can be a curse. Why did God give us free will with which we can resist him? Why did he make us able to resist him? Why did he make us so hard? Why did he make us so insensitive to him? I suppose he had to give us the ability to make a real choice, not one programmed into us. But, what other way was there? Robots. He should have made robots. It would have been much easier to make robots. He could have programmed us in some way that we would be unable to resist him. At some point in our lives we would get the urge for him and we would seek him with all our heart and, as he promised, we would find him. He would give us guidance by the Holy Spirit to understand everything about Christ, the sacrifice, the atonement, etc., and we would be saved. It would be like those temporary files you can download free to your computer but they expire in thirty days. The programming of God would be similar but in reverse, as we approached the end of life those files would kick in and we would go looking for him, and be saved, of course. That's what I think he should have done. Easier, doesn't kindle his wrath, everybody gets along, etc.

But the rebellion against God is not just outside the Church. Many in the Church don't think they need anybody's blood to pay for their sins. You carry your cross, do the work mandated, and that is the payment. I am paying for my own sins, by obeying the word of God. I tell you what, there are very few statements uttered by a human being, in the whole world, that could be more wrong. We don't know who we are, how can we make an assessment of our badness, and what it takes to pay for our sin? In fact, I think that even God marveled at the extent of our wickedness. Genesis 6:5 says: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the Earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart of man is desperately wicked, who can know it?" He appears a bit surprised by what making us in his image had wrought. Not that he couldn't handle it, but he did say in Genesis 6: 6, "And it repented the LORD that he had made man in the Earth, and it grieved him at his heart." From the beginning, it

grieved him that so many will be lost because of the ability he gave us to resist him.

What about the shortage of labourers for the harvest when put side by side with God's election from the foundation of the world? We don't have to do anything because God will get it done, anyway? He said he will lose none of his sheep, so, he'll do something, even at the last moment of a person's life. He will figure it out. He doesn't need me to do anything. He got along fine without me for a long time, all that time before I was born. Even now, he doesn't need me to push the planets. The fact is that when you know you are saved, and you know the means by which you are saved, the natural inclination is to tell it as broadly as you can. Shout it from the rooftops, the means of our salvation is the blood of Christ, the death of Christ, we are saved by the love of God who has given us the blood of the Lamb, Jesus. Jesus is our wonderful Sheppard, who paid with his life the debt that was ours for our wickedness, disobedience, mocking, despising, ridiculing, dismissing, forsaking him, our creator, the lover of our souls. Only the redeemed of the Lord can attest to what it is to be purchased out of Death and Hell.

There is yet another reason why the labourers are few. It is because many of the redeemed of the Lord are not sure they are redeemed. They want to believe, they want to be sure, they want to rest, really rest, in that promised rest. They work very hard at obeying God, but are never sure.

Guilt is a great motivator, but it can only go so far. Unless you are absolutely sure that Jesus' death is the total payment for your sins, there is no way you can communicate the Gospel with any solid authority. The experience has to be yours before you can pass it on. If not, that is, if you yourself are not sure of your salvation, your words are going to sound hollow. The safer you feel within the atonement, the more you will be able to express it.

This is simple, two verses can be connected: One is Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." The other is John 1:29, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." John was pointing to Jesus as being the Lamb that maketh an atonement for our souls. It is in the Law that we have the unmerited favour of a sacrifice done for us.

He has total control of events. His covenant can not be changed and our salvation is sure.