

May 9, 2021

Acts 10:34-38:

“Yes, Jesus Loves Me?”

- I. No Partiality.
- II. Fears and Does What Is Right.
- III. Peace.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

Acts 10:34-38

Dear Friends in Christ,

Jesus said:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Mt. 7:21-23)

The following analogy and ones similar to it have been around awhile, but still worth the hearing. If a father of power and authority gave his son to pay for the crimes of one hundred people with the promise that the charges would be dropped if they accepted the son's payment, and then 90 of the 100 rejected and scorned and mocked the son....well....what do you think the father would do with the 90? What would you do? I can't imagine anyone saying "Well, if the father is love then he would...." what? What!?

And then there's the thinking that God should love us because we're lovable and do good things. Too bad the thousands of years of wars, violence and corruption say otherwise. Granted, there are "good" moments, but decay, destruction and death say otherwise. The fact is, God is not impressed! Never has been. So, how can we sing . . .

YES, JESUS LOVES ME?

I. No Partiality.

Our text states, "So Peter opened his mouth and said, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality..." (v.34) He's referring to the fact that the Holy Spirit sent him to the home of a Roman centurion by the name of Cornelius who is described as "a devout man who feared God with all his household..." (Acts 10:2a) Cornelius was a Gentile; considered unclean by Jews such as Peter and off limits in-so-far as being in their homes. Ultimately, Peter would say to Cornelius and the large number of people Cornelius had gathered together, "...God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean." (Acts 10:28b) Thus, the opening words of our text: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality."

There was that moment when Samuel was sent by God to anoint a king over Israel. When Samuel saw Eliab, the brother of David, he said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." (1 Sm. 16:6) And God said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees (And we've got to keep that straight!): man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Sm. 16:7)

Then there's James who confronts us with any self-righteous judging of others:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (Jms. 2:1-5)

With that in front of us, we want to remember Jesus' warning against self-righteous judging of others, which is the result of partiality:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Mt. 7:1-3)

Keep in mind that Jesus is not talking about the absolute imperative of judging false teaching. That's a must! That is always necessary! He's talking about self-righteous, hypocritical judging of others. After all, "While we were sinners Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8) We're still battling. He's still forgiving!

II. Fears and Does What Is Right.

As a consequence of the love of God Peter says, "but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable." (v. 35) This fear is called **filial fear** which is the **fear of a child** in relation to his or her father. We need to keep in mind this statement from our Lutheran Confessions:

Filial fear can be defined as an anxiety joined with faith, where faith consoles and sustains the anxious heart, whereas in **servile fear** faith does not sustain the anxious heart. (Theodore G. Tappert, The Book of Concord, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 187.38)

The "Formula of Concord" of the Lutheran Church magnifies this:

It is indeed a well deserved punishment for sin when God so severely punishes a land or a people for contempt of his Word that the punishment extends also to their posterity (That is, the generations that follow. That's deserving of serious thought at this moment, isn't it?)...Thus in the history of some nations and some persons God shows his own people what all of us would rightfully have deserved, earned, and merited because we misbehave over against God's Word and often sorely grieve the Holy Spirit. This will lead us to live in fear of God and to recognize and glorify God's goodness to us without and contrary to our deserving, to whom he gives and preserves his Word and whom he does not harden and reject. (Ibid, pp. 625-626)

We would do well to have these familiar words of the Psalmist in front of us: "My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments." (Ps. 119:120) We honor, respect and stand in awe of the Triune God when we come to terms with the fact that He is over all people and things. **If we truly fear Him, there is nothing else to fear.** The Lord said, "...this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." (Is. 66:2)

Next, the question that will be asked is, "What does Peter mean when he says, 'but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable'? How can we consistently do what is right since sin is still there and, consequently, the on-going struggle with sin?" The answer to that takes us to the sixth chapter of St. John when Jesus said to a crowd that had chased after Him, "Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you... Then they said to him, 'what must we do, to be doing the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'" (Jn. 6:27-29) As Jesus taught, *whoever believes should not perish but have eternal life.* (Jn.3:16) It is the Holy Spirit who works and sustains faith in us. Our work, with the help of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, is to cling to that faith. As the Holy Spirit had Paul write, "*The righteous shall live by faith*"; believing that Christ has earned our forgiveness.

III. Peace.

And that brings us to the these words of our text:

As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching the good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord over all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (vv. 36-38)

The word that stands out and ties together everything Jesus did is that word **peace**. Because of our sin we were at war with God. We were His enemies. And, as Scriptures teach, we were not only condemned to earthly death because of sin, but dreadfully condemned to eternal death, which is incomprehensible. Christ entered our lives and saved us.

I find my sinful self consistently running to the words, "In this is love, not that we have loved God (Because we didn't, and even now it is very imperfect!) but that he loved us and gave his son to be the propitiation for our sin." (I Jn. 4:10) To be the gift that would gain His favor! And though we so often stumble and fail, for the sake of Jesus, God forgives the repentant heart and remains at peace with us.

Our Confessions put it this way: "In Rom. 5:1 (Paul) says, 'Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God,' that is, our consciences are tranquil and joyful before God...". (Tappert, p. 120.91) I pray we all see it that way; that we can each say, without question, "Yes, Jesus loves me!"

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott