

## What Am I Here For?

Getting older makes people in to good philosophers. There was a grandma who was knitting in her favorite room. And she was getting thirsty. So, she said to herself: “I think I’ll go downstairs and get some iced tea.” She got up and went down the stairs. She walked into the kitchen, stopped and asked herself: “Now, what am I here for?” What am I here for? It’s the question we ask when we go from one room into another and forget what we are looking for. But, it’s also a huge question to ask. All the great thinkers throughout the ages have asked that question: what am I here for? Not, ‘here in the kitchen’, but ‘here on this earth.’ Why am I here? What is the point of my life?

In the words we look at this morning we have the answer to that question. The question that thousands of philosophers asked and never found an answer to, we find an answer to from God’s word this morning. Paul tells us: *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.”*<sup>1</sup>

What am I here for? I am here purely out of God’s grace. Now, it is very important that we pay attention to this word. We are Lutherans. We use this word almost every Sunday. And the danger in that is that, since we hear it so very often, we might overlook its weight and comfort and beauty.

Paul tells us: “you have been saved by grace.”<sup>2</sup> What is grace? Paul goes out of his way to explain very clearly what grace is in the words which follow. He says: *“and this not from yourselves”*. What is grace. Well, first of all, it’s not out of you<sup>3</sup>. There’s no room for ‘me’ in grace. When I ask the question ‘why did God love me, why did God save me’, if the word ‘I’ is in the answer, you can be sure you don’t understand what grace is. If I say ‘God loves me because I earned him, I chose him, I...am worth it. Grace is not from us.

Paul has more to say about what grace is. Grace is not from us. What then is grace? Paul tells us: *“it is the gift of God”*. Grace is a gift<sup>4</sup>. And to make very clear what sort of gift it is, Paul then tells us: *“not by works, so that no one can boast.”* It is a gift from God. But it’s not the sort of gift many of us are used to. There are many people out there who give gifts not to give—but to get. “you scratch my back...I’ll scratch yours,” right? That is *not* the sort of gift Paul is talking about here. It is a real, true and beautiful gift that Jesus gives to us. He rescues us out of punishment in hell not because we had anything to ever give him. There is nothing we could give him that would make up for this gift of eternal life. In fact, when we try to get on God’s good side by giving him gifts in this way, he hates them. He despises them. He loathes them because they are gifts which make us think that in a small way we can earn heaven for ourselves. No. Paul tells us: *“not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

There is no room for ‘me’ in grace. And yet, as soon as I say that, I need to realize that my sinful nature needs to make room for me. And our sinful nature shows it in a number of ways. We ask ourselves: why does God love me? The answer should be: ‘by grace’. But, so very often, the answer is something else. God should love me because I mow the lawn. God should love me because I served as an elder or as a council member. God should love me because I prepared the altar for communion. God should love me because I cleaned those annoying little bugs off of the window sills. Notice the word popping up in all those statements: ‘I’. There is no ‘I’ grace.

We see our sinful nature when it comes to our relationship with God. And we see it when it comes to how we relate to each other as well. We show that we despise that little word, grace when we take our stands in areas of God’s word where God’s word does not take a stand. We say: “We need to have the common cup because that’s what I want. We need to have individual cups because that’s what I want. We need to have green carpet because that’s what I want. You need to vote for this political party or that political party because that’s what I want.” And the final way we see our sinful nature ruling against grace is when we say “or else.” You need to do it *my* way, or else, I’ll leave this church.”

That one word, grace is a dead, lead weight to our sinful nature. It shows us that he loves us because he loves

<sup>1</sup>(Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV)

<sup>2</sup>χάρτι ἔστε σεσωσμένοι

<sup>3</sup>καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν

<sup>4</sup>θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον

us, not because of that other little word, ‘me.’ It drowns our sinful nature. But, to our new nature, to that Christian inside of us that is drowning in a salty ocean of sin and guilt, it is a buoy, a beacon a rescue boat. How amazing is that word, grace! How amazing it is to know that since I could do nothing to save myself, Jesus did it for me, in my place. How amazing it is to know, that for the many times I have drowned that word grace by shouting out ‘me’, Jesus lifts up that word from under the waves and saves us with it. How amazing it is for us to see grace, God’s undeserved love here at this baptismal font. Here God connected water with his saving word and rescued us from our sins. How amazing it is for us to see God’s grace here for us in the LORD’s Supper. Here, at this rail, week after week, Jesus offers and gives to us forgiveness of sins—not because he owes it to us, but because his great love for us moves him to give it to us as a free gift.

You see, there’s one answer to the question. What am I here for? God has placed you in this pew, in this congregation, in this town and in this state so that you would have the great privilege of pondering that one word, grace all the days of your life. And what a great privilege that is! There is no place for ‘me’ in grace. And that gives me all the hope, forgiveness and confidence I need.

What am I here for? I am here to marvel at God’s grace. But God’s word also gives us another answer to that question. In verse ten we read: *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*<sup>5</sup>

Note very clearly what Paul is saying here. Jesus created you. Now, here in this verse we are not talking about your physical birth. We are not talking about the fact that Jesus gave you your bones, joints, sinew and flesh. It’s true. But that’s not what Paul is talking about here. Jesus brought us to life *spiritually*. At the beginning of this chapter, Paul tells us: *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins”*<sup>6</sup>. We were dead. And Jesus gave us new life by grace, through faith.

Now, you might be saying to yourself: “pastor, that’s nice. I used to be dead, and now I’m a Christian and now I’m alive. But, how does this answer the question? How does this help me understand what I’m here for?” Let me answer your question. Paul says that Jesus created us *for* good works<sup>7</sup>.

Now, before you rush off to the ‘good works’ part, please pause for a moment. For there is importance, weight, purpose and meaning in that one word, ‘for.’ Take note of this fact. Jesus brought you to faith for a purpose. This is a fact that the world does not know. For, the wisest philosophers didn’t find answers to that one question, what am I here for? Movies teach us that we are here either for our own enjoyment or for our own despair. Evolution teaches us that we are not really here *for* anything at all. No, they teach that we’re here like a dumb animal, driven by instinct, but destined to die. Notice how God’s word *does* answer the question. We are here to marvel at God’s grace. But we are also here for good works.

Now, let’s talk about good works. We do not do them in order to get heaven. No, Paul has just told us we have heaven as a free gift, by grace. Well, what sort of good works are these? Paul answers our question by telling us that God prepared them in advance for us to do. Think about this point. Ponder this fact. God knows all the good works you are going to do. And even more than that, he planned them out.

You see, we spend so very much of our time as Christians trying to make the right choice instead of the wrong choice. But, if that’s our only view of good works, then we are missing out. For God has a whole lifetime of works which are choices between good and...good. Just think about that! I have a world and a lifetime of choices that, because I am a new creation in Christ, they are choices between good and good—not good and bad.

And, in fact, I’ll give a whole week to think about that question. For, here is where we end for today. Next week we will flesh out this idea of choices between good and good. But, it is enough food for us to chew on to know that there is an answer to the question: “what am I here for?” I am here to marvel at God’s grace. And I am here for good works. Amen.

<sup>5</sup>(Ephesians 2:10 NIV)

<sup>6</sup>(Ephesians 2:1 NIV)

<sup>7</sup>“ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς” (Ephesians 2:10 GNT-T)