

# How To Tell If You Have Been Saved

October 13, 2019

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Grace to you, and peace, from God Our Creator and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

When I was growing up on our small farm in North Carolina, we lived on a hill overlooking Pine Ridge Baptist Church. Next door to us lived Mrs. Ballard, who was a member of that Church. Occasionally we would go to church with Mrs. Ballard on Sunday evenings.

The worship in Pine Ridge Baptist Church was very lively. Always lots of singing. And always testimonies. Testimonies were when people would get up and spontaneously tell their personal stories of how they had been saved.

Also there was always a very dynamic, loud, Bible-waving sermon. One time the preacher actually walked from the front of the church to the back on the top of the pews, exhorting his congregation to give their lives to Christ and get saved!

By the time I left home to go to college at age 18, our neighbor Mrs. Ballard had been “saved” 17 times.

As I got older and studied the Lutheran catechism and learned about Baptism and The Apostles’ Creed, I would argue with Mrs. Ballard and joke with her. Saved? I didn’t know I was lost. Saved? Jesus saves ... green stamps! Saved? Yes, I have been saved. It happened when I was baptized as an infant. God did it before I knew anything about it. Do you have altar calls in the Lutheran church? Why, yes, it’s called Holy Communion. Do you have revivals? Why, yes, we call it Lent.

Mrs. Ballard died at 102. She is in heaven now, I am sure, because she told us once that she was ready to die because she “had her ticket bought and paid for.” She finally reached the point where she believed she was saved, without any doubt!

Have you ever wondered if you are saved? Maybe it never dawned on you that there is a

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chance you are lost. We're talking theology now. Theology has its own language. And the language varies from church to church and from denomination to denomination. When we talk theology and throw around the word "saved", we can generally be accurate in defining "saved" either as meaning what God did for us in Christ, or, as many outside the Lutheran church use the term, what the Holy Spirit does to the heart of a believer in giving a new birth, that is, transforming a person so that he or she lives a new life, dedicated to living out the Christian way of life.

So, if you ever wonder how you can tell if you have been saved, today's Gospel has the answer. And it is not obvious by reading the English translation.

In today's Gospel, the story of the healing of the 10 lepers, with the spotlight being on the Samaritan outcast who returned to give thanks and to praise God, the last verse in English quotes Jesus as saying, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." Has made you well is more accurately translated has saved you.

How can you tell if you have been saved? It's all in whether you have faith that exudes an attitude of gratitude.

Jesus cleansed or cured ten lepers. He healed or saved only one of the ten. The difference was in the Samaritan's attitude of gratitude. The Samaritan turned back, when he saw that he was healed, and returned to Jesus, falling at his feet, and giving him thanks.

How can you tell if you have been saved? Can it be said of you that you are a person with an attitude of gratitude?

Martin Luther taught us in explaining the First Article of The Apostles' Creed:

*I believe that God has created me and all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. God provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this God does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey God. This is most certainly true.*

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century there lived a Pastor Rinkhart. He was pastor of a congregation in Prussia for thirty years. From 1619 to 1649, during the Thirty Years' War. Pastor Rinkhart's church was in a walled city. Many of the refugees from the Thirty Years' War flocked into this city to find safety inside the city walls as the battles raged around them. The town was overrun with poverty, the plague, and all the perils of war. It was awful. It was hell on earth. It wasn't like

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Lutheran Church



being a pastor in Pasadena. By the end of the Thirty Years' War, Pastor Rinkhart was the only pastor left alive in the town; so he alone had to bury the plagued villagers and casualties from war. Sometime about 6 years after all that suffering, he wrote a hymn, which is perhaps the second greatest hymn of the Reformation era. We know it well and sing it at least once a year in the fall.

***“Now, thank we all our God; with hearts and hands and voices; who wondrous things hath done; in whom this world rejoices. Who from our mother’s arms, has blessed us on our way, with countless gifts of love and still is ours today.”***

What an incredible attitude of gratitude in the human heart. How beautiful are hearts filled with genuine thanksgiving.

As someone has put it, “... the greatest miracle is not to be healed of leprosy or cancer or coronaries; the greatest miracle is when my human heart is healed of ingratitude, so my human heart is then filled with daily thanksgiving .....to God and others..... for God’s countless gifts of love.”<sup>1</sup>

So, in today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches us more of what it means to be a Christian steward. Very simply, after we are saved-healed-made whole, the rest of our lives are to be ones of gratitude. And it begins with our attitudes. And it is shown with our attitudes.

Can we see: the real issue is not whether we give all the money and the time and the talents needed to do everything that needs doing as Christ’s servants in and through Hill Avenue Grace. The real issue is how grateful we are.

Stop to think about it, think with your heart. Your life itself. The ones who raised you and nurtured you and cared for you. The ones who taught the faith to you. Your ability to enjoy life. Hugs. Music. Friends. Modern medicine. Beautiful memories. A comfortable chair. A warm bed. A good book to read. The sound of rain. A purring cat. The words, “I love you,” “I forgive you,” and “Dinner is ready.” Your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Your spouse. Forgiveness. Eternal salvation.

Pastor Richard Fairchild tells about a person with an attitude of gratitude. A 92-year-old lady who was a paraplegic. She was confined to a hospital's extended care ward ....and there she lived all her days between her bed and her wheel chair. She had diabetes and several other problems - and over the previous five years she had first one foot, then the other, then a leg,

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<sup>1</sup> Edward F. Marquart

[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_where\\_are\\_the\\_other\\_nine.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_where_are_the_other_nine.htm)

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**Hill Ave Grace**  
Lutheran Church



and then another, amputated so that she might be able to go on living. She had considerable pain, most days she was very uncomfortable - and there was for her no family to come in and visit - she had simply outlived most of them. What this lady did during her days was quite wonderful - when she was able - she wheeled her chair up and down the corridors of the place and popped in and visited all the other folk in the place. She learned their birthdays and sent them cards, she checked when they seemed depressed and listened to them talk of it and gave their hand a squeeze and prayed with them if they were willing. She went to the recreation room and took part in the games - often helping the staff help others. She was a light in a dark place - full of joy and peace despite her own troubles and woes. I always prayed with her on my visits - I would pray for her and she would pray for those around her and she would always give thanks to God at the end of each prayer for his goodness and his love - for how he worked his will - and helped her each day - even in the days of pain. This woman's beauty - her ability to help others - her faith and love and compassion was rooted in her thanksgiving - thanksgiving that was made even when it might seem crazy to other people to make it.<sup>2</sup>

Pastor Fairchild concludes, "A marriage counselor has suggested that one of the problems with our society is that we work mainly on our feelings - on whether or not we **feel** like doing something. When we've lost a feeling for something we discard it. For example, we believe that **if I feel love for you I will act in a loving way**. The counselor's premise is the opposite - it is this - if I act in a loving way, my love feeling will grow. And so he recommends to his clients various **caring exercises** to do each day - one of which is of course - the expression of appreciation and gratitude - of thanksgiving. God asks us for our thanksgiving - whether we feel like making it or not - so that we might experience the blessings it brings - blessings it brings to us, and blessings it brings to others. Look around you - find that which is good and thank God for it - find that which is caring and thank God and the person who is doing it - look around - look inside - look outside - and think on that which is noble and true and beautiful and express your praise for it - express it no matter what the bad or the ugly may be up to. God is hid in the ordinary routine events of our lives - our practice of thanks-giving ... bring[s] God to our sight and in so doing bring[s] to others and ourselves a better world."

Have you been saved? If you haven't thought about it lately, think about with your heart. And answer with your attitude. I pray it will be, as was the saved Samaritan's, one of perpetual, effusive gratitude.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Fairchild  
<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/c-thansesn.php>

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