

who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Salvation belongs to God and that means the way to get it must come from God. Thus, God gives His grace, His Word and Sacraments which bestow faith. Faith trusts in the forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. Salvation only belongs to us by faith, and faith is a gift.

So, then, what does it mean *to do* the will of the Father? Since it pertains to receiving salvation, it cannot be anything we do. It must come from God. Remember the distinction between Laws and promises. And remember Scripture interprets itself. **John 6:40** teaches us: **“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

Thus, we have to make and keep this distinction. To do the will of the Father *according to the Law* is to keep His commandments. **1 Thessalonians 4:3**, **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”** But, to do the will of the Father *according to the Gospel* is to simply believe the Gospel; to trust it to be true. We believe, teach, and confess that “The chief worship of the Gospel is to desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness” (Apology V, 189). The distinction of Law, what we get to do as children of God, and Gospel, what God does for us, must abide forever just as the **“Word of the Lord endures forever” (Isa 40:8).**

Now, most of the sermon to this point has been demonstrating the truth of this distinction from elsewhere in Scripture, but we don’t even have to leave our pericope to see the proof. If “doing the will of my Father” was merely doing good works, then why would Jesus say in **v. 21**, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven?”** To use sort of a modern example, I’m quite certain that every single member of this Church – and members of every Christian Church for that matter – would check the box next to the word, “Christian” if you were doing a survey of your religious affiliation. Does merely checking off a box make you a Christian? Checking the “Christian” box is like merely *saying*, “Lord, Lord”.

To use another contemporary way of speaking, if you merely “identify” yourself as a Christian, does that make you one? I’m not sure what the latest PEW statistics are, but there are a heck of a lot more people that identify as Christians in this country than go to Church on Sunday. Everyone here who is old enough to speak can physically say the name of Jesus or even call upon it as we do in the Invocation. It is great lip service, but what is the confession of the heart? What do you actually believe? That’s what matters. Jesus isn’t interested in lip service.

We have to be careful, though, because when one speaks of lip service, usually that means we want to see actions. You know the phrase, “Actions speak louder than words.” But guess what? Jesus isn’t interested in actions either *as it pertains* to entering the kingdom of heaven. He says as much in **v. 22**, **“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’”** All those things are actions, not just lip service, as it were!

Prophesying in the name of Jesus means preaching, teaching, or simply speaking about God according to His Word. Let’s use me for an example. I do the best I can to faithfully preach and teach God’s Word. If I died right after I got done preaching today and stood before the judgment seat of Christ, I could say in good conscience, “Lord, Lord, did I not prophesy – preach – in your name today?” Preaching God’s Word is a noble task, one the Vicar is training to do full time! Why then or for what reason would Jesus say in our Gospel reading immediately after this, **“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’ (v. 23)?**

I think we’d all agree that preaching God’s Word in HIS name is not lawlessness, right? ...Apart from faith, there is no salvation. A pastor could be the best preacher the world has ever heard. A father could be the best catechizer of his children in the home the world has ever known. **Hebrews 11:6**, **“Without faith, it is impossible to please God.”** Apart from faith, even the loftiest, greatest works of philanthropy or vocation are utter lawlessness.

This doesn’t mean good works aren’t important. They are. We need to do them. God commands us to. We need to be in Church every week. Fathers need to teach their children God’s Word. Pastors need to preach faithful sermons. **James 2:17**, **“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”** Remember the distinctions. Works are important, but works don’t save. Works do not merit us entrance to the kingdom of heaven. Works demonstrate to our neighbors that we are saved. And the moment we think our lip service or our works are the means by which we could enter heaven may the judgment of Christ ring loudly in our ears as a stern warning: “I

never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” For it is by faith alone on account of Christ alone that we receive the **“Spirit of adoption as sons” (Rom 8:15)** as we heard in the Epistle. For **“the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16-17a)**. Thus by God’s grace through faith, we are heirs of the heavenly mansions that Christ has ascended into heaven to prepare for us (**Jn 14:2**).

So do the will of the Father. Obey the Gospel as Paul sometimes says in his epistles (**2 Thes 1:8, 1 Pet 4:17**). That is to say, trust the Good News of Jesus Christ that you are forgiven of your sins. And then, with the clear conscience that comes with trusting you are forgiven, do the will of the Father that He has given you in His Law. But always maintain the distinction. The Gospel alone saves. Doing the Law demonstrates to others that we have been saved. We never put our faith in our obedience to the Law. The Law cannot raise a single body from the dead in the resurrection. We only put our faith in the promises of the Gospel! For the **“Gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16)**. In Jesus’ name, Amen.