

Are You There God, Part 4

Welcome to MC3 today, we are so glad that you are here. We started a new sermon series this month, where many of you submitted some really deep and thought provoking theological questions last month. Today we are going to tackle some questions pertaining to salvation and the existence of hell. But before we jump in, we wanted to remind you of the goals of this series: **1. We want to lead you to the Truth. 2. We want to lead you to seek God. 3. We want you to be satisfied with Jesus.** Remember the only question we really need to have nailed down in this life, is the question of what to do with Jesus. So our hope is that at the end of the day, you will be satisfied with Him. So with that here's our first question . . .

Does God know everything that is going to happen? Does He know if someone will choose to follow Christ or not? If He does, it seems as there's really no free will and we're all predestined for heaven or hell?

This is a great question, and the answer is "Yes." We know from scripture that God is Omniscient or All-knowing. Psalm 139:1-6 NLT, "**O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. 2 You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. 3 You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. 4 You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. 5 You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!**" Psalm 147:5 NIV says, "**Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.**" So God does know what is going to happen. We see that simply from the Book of Revelation.

And I believe God does know who will choose to accept and who will choose to reject based on their choices. If you remember, we read Revelation 19 last week that talked about the books being opened, and our deeds, good and bad being recorded. God knows our tendencies (better than we do), God knows our patterns (better than we do), God knows our hearts (better than we know our own hearts). Which is why we should pray, as David prayed in Psalm 139:23-24 NIV, "**Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**"

But I want you to hear this very clearly . . . God's knowing does NOT affect our choosing! His knowing does NOT affect our choosing! Just because God knows something doesn't mean that He predetermined it. There is a scene in the mountain man movie "Jeremiah Johnson" where Jeremiah Johnson is new to the mountains, and he runs into a seasoned veteran trapper. The

old trapper teaches him how to dig in the snow and dirt, put hot coals in that hole, and how to cover it up with dirt in order to sleep on top of those hot coals to stay warm at night, without an open fire. In the middle of the night, Jeremiah Johnson wakes up and his pants are on-fire, and so he jumps up and starts putting out the fire . . . and the old trapper says, “Yep, didn’t put enough dirt down, saw it right off.” He knew what would happen, but didn’t step in and, here, used it as a teaching moment.

The scriptures clearly teach that God has given us a choice: we see it from Genesis 2 in the Garden. In Deuteronomy 30:19 NIV, we are told, “**This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.**” Jesus clearly says in Mark 16:16 NIV, “**Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.**” In Matthew 23:37-39 NIV, Jesus pleads with the city of Jerusalem, looking forward into the near future and says, “**Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”** And in 70 AD the city was destroyed.

This is hard for us, but we have to separate God’s Knowledge from the Free-will that He gives to us. Does God woo, does God intervene to a point, does God call and send and reveal Himself? Absolutely, but ultimately He gives us a choice whether or not we will follow Him.

I love the illustration that Minister and Author, Bob Russell uses to help us unpack this. He says, “**Let’s say the New England Patriots draft an outstanding college football player. The Patriots honor that player by selecting him to be a part of their team and offering him a significant financial package. However, the drafted player still has a choice to accept or reject the offer. He’s not automatically a Patriot until he chooses to sign the contract.**” God has elected us to hear the gospel. What a privilege! Not everyone is so blessed — many never hear about Jesus. Once we hear the gospel, we have a choice to accept God’s grace or reject it. The Hebrew writer asked, “**How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?**” (Hebrews 2:3).

What does the Bible, “the Church” and/or our church say about losing one’s salvation?

So let me give you the short answer, and then I’ll give you a longer explanation. The short answer, as I read scripture is that **you CAN’T lose your salvation, but I believe, you CAN give it away.** I believe this question and the question of committing the “Unpardonable Sin” are linked . . . they are one in the same. First we know that when we accept Christ, our sins are removed,

as far as the east is from the west. In Acts 2:38 when the people asked, “what must we do?” “Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But remember, Jesus says in Matthew 12:30-32 NIV, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. **31** And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, **but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven**. **32** Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, **but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven**, either in this age or in the age to come.”

So what is this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Commentator Henry Alford defines blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by saying it is a, “**state [of] willful, determined opposition to the present power of the Holy Spirit.**” And so those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit are those that have become hard-hearted, cynical toward righteousness, and addicted to sin. And so if you are worried that you have committed the Unpardonable Sin, then you haven’t. Because those that do commit that sin, don’t care or worry about it.

I like the way Bob Russell puts it. He says, “Some believers who have fallen into gross or habitual sin worry that they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit because they have willingly, defiantly, continuously disobeyed God’s will. Now they are **concerned** that they have grieved the Holy Spirit to the extent that they have committed the, “unpardonable sin.” They fear they have lost their salvation and can’t reclaim it.

Keep in mind two Biblical truths. First, the Bible promises all sin can be forgiven through the blood of Christ. 1 John 1:9 states clearly, “**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**” Underscore the word, “all.” If God forgave Noah’s drunkenness, David’s adultery, Moses’ murder, Peter’s denial of Christ and the Apostle Paul’s persecution of Christians when they repented, there is no sin that you have committed that He can’t forgive.

I think a passage to keep in mind that can help us with this question is found in 2 Timothy 2:12-13, where Paul says, “**if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; **13** if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.**” So salvation cannot be “lost” through one sin, or even a series of sins. But if we are not careful we can rebel to the point where we end up committing the unpardonable sin, and our conscience becomes so seared that we stop caring about forgiveness and repentance. Or as the writer of Hebrews put it in Hebrews 10:26, “**If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.**”

Once saved, always saved is not God's idea. What is the Spiritual guidance for true conversion?

Conversion or Salvation as I like to call it is a process that we all go through. Some, hear the Gospel and go through the process more slowly and deliberately; others when they hear the message are ready and go through the process more quickly, and neither one is more right than the other. But the process we see in scripture goes like this.

Belief or Faith: There is a point where we believe the truth about Jesus, rely on Him to save us, and trust Him with our lives. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Repentance: Repentance is having a godly sorrow for our sins, and willingly turning from those sins and living a different life. Acts 2:38

Confession: This is acknowledging Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Matthew 10:32-33

Baptism: Becoming a disciple includes a willingness to be baptized. In Matthew 3:13-15 we are told, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. **14** But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" **15** Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

So are you saying that baptism saves us? No, but I am saying, as we read scripture and see the early church practices, it is an important part of the whole. And if someone absolutely does not want to be baptized, quite frankly I draw into question their sincerity.

What is cheap grace, what is costly grace?

First, this idea of "cheap grace" vs "costly grace" comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote in his book **The Cost of Discipleship**: in that book he wrote, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." And what Bonhoeffer was getting at was that we can't receive Christ and then live however we want. Bonhoeffer's idea of "Cheap Grace" was a call to discipleship. With that I agree.

But the phraseology of "Cheap Grace" is really no grace at all. First of all, Grace is a Free Gift. It is unmerited favor. We can't do anything to win or earn salvation. So grace isn't just "cheap" for all people, it is "**downright free**" AND freely given to EVERYONE who will come to Christ. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." So when we use the term "Cheap Grace" we imply that there is some sort of cost attached to salvation, much like a cheap car or a cheap pizza.

And so when Bonhoeffer talked about “Costly Grace” he was highlighting the fact that we should treasure Jesus and what He has done for us at the cross and at the tomb. That we shouldn’t cheapen it by our actions, but that we should “seek His Kingdom and His righteousness.” All of which again I agree with, Jesus should be everything to us.

Again, though, the phraseology can be confusing to those who do not fully understand what Bonhoeffer was saying or who have never heard of Bonhoeffer. Because, while grace is free for us, it was costly for Jesus. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says that we were “bought with a price.” 1 Timothy 2:6 says that Jesus gave Himself as a “Ransom for all people.” The cost of our salvation was heavy, much too high of a price for us to pay. But Jesus, because of His great love for us, willingly went to the cross and paid our debt.

For us, grace is free; for Jesus it was costly, but a cost He was more than willing to pay. And we come face to face with that grace every Sunday as we take communion and are reminded of His great sacrifice for us. So as we partake today, let us do so with thankful and grateful hearts.

Prayer