

# *Martin Luther's Search for Salvation*

## *Sources*

See the literature on Luther in Church History II.

“How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4)

### I. Biblical Questions

#### A. Bildad's question was Luther's question

1. Job's comforters mixed truth w/ error
2. Contrasts
  - a. Bildad accused Job; Luther accused himself
  - b. Bildad saw no hope; Luther eventually found hope

#### B. Philippian jailer: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30)

1. What did the jailer mean?
2. Luther was caught up with “doing” → He had to trust in what Christ had *done*
3. Paul's response: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” → Luther had to come to understand what that meant

### II. Salvation in Common Perception

#### A. “Salvation by Rote”

1. Follow the formula
2. A practical salvation by works

#### B. Pattern

1. Be baptized—wash away original sin
2. Be confirmed—receive grace for Christian living
3. Receive the Eucharist (often as you can)—Receive Christ *physically*, not spiritually
4. Confess *at least* once a year & then do what the priest tells you—and you'll be safe
5. Receive last rites
6. Endure purgatory

#### C. Do what you're told and you will ultimately get to heaven

### III. Salvation According to Catholic Theology

#### A. Start with Christ's merit (saves from the eternal penalty of sin)

#### B. Add other sources of merit

1. Good works (*add* merit, not a fruit of justification)
2. Plead with Other Mediators
  - a. Mary, saints, etc.
  - b. Luther: “Saint Anne, help me, I will become a monk!”
3. Indulgences
  - a. “Nets to catch silver” or “gift certificates for sin”
  - b. Gain merits of others → Treasury of Merits
  - c. Even merits of Christ *but* by earning them
4. Luther reflecting on the *scala sancta*: “Who knows whether any of this is true?”

#### C. In short, exert yourself (Semi-Pelagian, “God helps those who help themselves”)

#### D. Add to Christ's merits and you'll get to heaven some day

### IV. Salvation Through Christ

#### A. Luther's Hopeless Situation

1. Awareness of sin

2. Angst (“I had a horrible fear of the Last Day, yet still wished from the depths of my heart to be saved.”)
  3. Felt the inadequacy of works
  4. Found no comfort in Scriptures he didn’t understand
    - a. “I hated that word, ‘justice [righteousness] of God,’ which ... I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, ... that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust.”
    - b. “I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn’t be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners.”
      - 1) “When I was a monk, I wearied myself greatly for almost fifteen years with the daily sacrifice, tortured myself with fastings, vigils, prayers, and other very rigorous works.”
      - 2) “I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I.”
  5. Felt the weight of original sin, the Ten Commandments, & even the gospel
- B. Luther’s Hope in Christ
1. A dawning with Ps. 22
    - a. Teaching the Psalms at Wittenberg
    - b. “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” The agony of the cross
    - c. Caught his attention: Christ experienced what Luther experienced & Christ was obviously loved & accepted by God
  2. Full light with Rom. 1
    - a. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (vv. 16-17)
    - b. Led to his “Tower Experience” (i.e., tower of the Augustinian cloister)
      - 1) Description of his salvation → Date uncertain
      - 2) On Romans 1: “I began to understand that this verse means that the justice [righteousness] of God is revealed through the Gospel ... by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: ‘The just person lives by faith.’ All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates.”
      - 3) Phrase “the justice of God” he said, “This phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise.”
  3. Brought not only salvation but also assurance
  4. Trust in Christ’s work alone, and you will join Him in heaven some day