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"Lutheran Words: 'Saved'"

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"I believe in Jesus. I read my Bible. I say my prayers, I love my wife, and I try hard to be a good neighbor. But how can I be sure that I'm saved?"

Are you saved? Are you absolutely certain that you are saved? If your time to stand before the judgment throne of God came today, came right now, would you be saved? Do you know? Are you sure?

Our Lutheran word for the day is the word 'saved.' And let me tell you, 'saved' is an important word to have straight. Am I 'saved'? Are you 'saved'?

Let's start by asking this question: 'saved' from what? Not saved from a car crash, or saved from an illness, or saved from a terrorist attack. When we use that word 'saved' here in church we're talking, of course, about sin.

When you and I sin, in our day-to-day lives – and we all do sin, don't we, prolifically, repeatedly, incessantly – when we break God's commandments and when we trespass into those places where children of God don't belong, our sins have consequences. My sins carry consequences. My sins cause me and others around me grief and angst in this world. But God makes it clear in his Word that my sins also have eternal consequences. My sins and imperfections separate me from God's holiness and perfection. And the penalty for my sins, and yours, is eternal separation, never-ending death, endless condemnation.

So when we use that sweet little word, 'saved,' here in church, we're talking about being rescued and delivered from the eternal consequences of our sins. That's a big deal, isn't it! 'Saved' is an important word to have straight.

But that little word, 'saved,' can be a divisive word within Christian circles. How do we get 'saved'? When are we 'saved'? What do we have to do to be 'saved'? Once you're 'saved,' are you always 'saved'? Some Christians have some pretty funny views on these topics, and we don't all agree on what that word 'saved' means. I don't want to come across as critical of my Christian brothers and sisters out there, but I think it's good to talk about this for a few minutes. I don't want anyone here to get twisted up or turned around when it comes to this word 'saved.' 'Saved' is an important word for us all to have straight.

Now, you may have heard it said like this, "You're 'saved' when you make a decision for Christ." As in, "Jimmy got 'saved' last Sunday. Jimmy knelt down at the altar, he prayed the Sinner's Prayer, and he made that verbal commitment to follow Christ in his life. Now Jimmy's been saved." Is that how it works?

Or, perhaps you've heard other Christians say something like this. "If you're 'saved,' your life will show it in certain ways." As in, "Sally says she's been 'saved,' but I'm not so sure. She still drinks, she smokes, she hangs around with a very loose crowd. Sally's not 'saved.'" Is that how it works?

Or maybe you've got that little voice in your own head, picking at you every so often: "Am you really good

enough to be 'saved'? Is your faith strong enough? Have you done enough, given and served and loved enough to be 'saved'? You don't really feel 'saved,' do you?"

All of those perspectives are focusing on what we do, on who we are, on what we decide. But the Bible never says that being 'saved' is up to us. The prophets didn't go around preaching, "Hey, judgment is coming. Save yourselves!" Jesus didn't go up to the tax collector and snarl, "Man, your life is a mess. You're in deep trouble. Save yourself!"

The message from God to his people, all through the centuries, and still today, is that he will save us. God will rescue us. Only God can deliver us from the eternal consequences of our sins.

And God has done that, hasn't he! God promised a Savior, a Messiah. And God sent his own Son to be the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for our sins. Jesus Christ paid the penalty I earned, and he paid in full for all your sins.

So we are 'saved' by God. 'Saved' means we are forgiven, justified, absolved, and declared righteous by God. We are 'saved' from sin by God.

'Saved' is such an important word to have straight. 'Saved' is what God does for us through Jesus Christ, by the grace of God alone. So I'm not 'saved' because I've decided to follow Jesus. That's a great thing to do, but that's not what saves me. You're not 'saved' because you cleaned up your act after coming to faith in Jesus. That's surely what God wants to happen in your life, but that's not what saves you. And we're not 'saved' only when we feel worthy enough or faithful enough. Those feelings

come and go, don't they? And those feelings are not what saves us, either.

We are 'saved' by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ. Once again, we are 'saved' by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ. Say it with me. "We are 'saved' by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ.

That's our Lutheran understanding, and it comes straight from the Bible. Christians are 'saved' by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Are you 'saved'? Can you be sure you're 'saved' today? You can! We all can! If you have faith in your heart that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for your sins – if you trust in Jesus alone, and not yourself, for your salvation – you are 'saved.' Thank God!

Let me close with these words from Psalm 116. We heard them before, but they say it all.

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice  
and my pleas for mercy. <sup>2</sup> Because he inclined his  
ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I  
live. <sup>3</sup> The snares of death encompassed me; the  
pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress  
and anguish. <sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of  
the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!"  
<sup>5</sup> Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God  
is merciful. <sup>6</sup> The Lord preserves the simple;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.

He saved me. He saved you. Amen.