

Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us this evening
is found in Saint Peter's first epistle, the first
chapter beginning at the twenty-second verse:

*Since you have purified your souls in obeying
the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of
the brethren, love one another fervently with a
pure heart, ²³ having been born again, not of
corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the
word of God which lives and abides forever, ²⁴
because "All flesh is as grass, And all the
glory of man as the flower of the grass. The
grass withers, And its flower falls away, ²⁵ But
the word of the LORD endures forever." Now
this is the word which by the gospel was
preached to you.*

Heavenly Father these are Your words and
therefore they are the truth. We pray that You
would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Tonight we are continuing on with our
MidWeek Advent theme of what God would
want for Christmas. Last week, remember, we
found that God would like our hearts for
Christmas. He would like hearts that do not
hate our fellow man rather, He would have us
love our fellow man and bear no grudges, nor
seek vengeance... but help and befriend him in
everything.

This week we are going to see, from God's
Word, how and why God would want our souls
for Christmas. Remember the overarching verse
from Matthew 22, "Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and all your soul and all
your mind. This is the first and great
command." So this is the command that we will
be examining and trying to more fully
understand as we ponder how *God wants our
soul for Christmas.*

Let's start off with a few disclaimers. First, God
is not out collecting souls like we would collect
bottle caps or baseball cards. So it is not as if
God is going around and just willy nilly picking

up souls from the ground. Second, though God wants our soul, just like our heart, this is not something that we can simply give to Him. In the first place, who has ever seen his own soul? In the second place, how can you just give it to God? And in the third place our catechism tells us that, “I cannot be my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.” And we seriously need to bear these two thoughts in mind as we consider the notion of God wanting our soul for Christmas.

We need to remember them because there are those who teach and believe that God does, just willy nilly, decide who will be going to heaven and hell. It’s almost like God has nothing better to do than sit and play dice to decide who gets to see His heaven and who gets to see His hell. It is with a theology like this you can imagine God as a simple collector. “Ooh, I got a Clarence soul, now my set is almost complete. Ah, bad roll, I didn’t get a Carole soul, maybe next time.” It sounds silly and trivial and it really is.

In addition to this line of thinking, how could anyone fulfill the first and great commandment? To love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind... well if we don’t know if we’re going to heaven or hell, how can we love God? If we do not know if He is our Savior, how can we love Him? If we do not know that our soul is securely in His loving hands, how can we even begin to think of Him as God? If we get caught up in the notion that God is just randomly choosing those souls that He wants... well that is a dangerous road to walk down.

In addition, we know that we are not just merely choosing to give our souls to God because in our natural state, we cannot love God... so how could we want to give Him anything?

After our first parents sinned, and after the image of God was lost... they feared God. Just think of some of the first words from Adam to God after the fall into sin. God calling out for His children though He knew they had sinned... and they are hiding, something they

had never done before. When they were talking Adam tells God, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid...” Adam and Eve, after the first sin, were now afraid of God. How could they see Him as love and compassion, when they were terrified of Him. They knew that they had broken His Law and they were afraid of God.

And that too is our condition. We are so mired in sin that we spend the day, and our lifetime, afraid of God. Afraid that He might smite us. Afraid that He might “pay us back” for all the times we haven’t listened to Him. Afraid that He might not love us. We spend time afraid of God... afraid that He isn’t with me when I need Him, afraid that He has left me “out in the cold” when I could really use His help, afraid that I can no longer turn to Him because I have committed the same sin too many times. We, like Adam and Eve, now live in fear of God. We are afraid of Him and I think that if we look deep down in our hearts, there is still a certain amount of fear that we have... no matter how strong a Christian we are.

And though we are afraid of God... He still wants us. He wants us and He especially wants our souls. God is the creator of all people and all things... He not only gave you your body but He gave you your soul. He is the one who not only gave you your soul, but He has given you the ability to give it back to Him.

God sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world... He sent Him as a child the first time. He gave His Son a body. He gave His Son food, clothing, a family... He gave Jesus everything that He would need for this life. And when the time came, Jesus gave all that He had, for us. Jesus gave all His strength, His love, His heart for us. He lived and died so that we could be forgiven all of our sin. He lived and died, so that we could take a page from Him... As Jesus hung on the cross, near death, He uttered the words, “Father into Your hands I commit my spirit.” This is the last thing that Jesus Christ uttered during His earthly life, “Father into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

Jesus gave up His life for us. Jesus died for us to redeem us from all of our sin... but Jesus

gave up His spirit, His soul, to His Father in heaven. And thanks be to our Savior Jesus Christ we too can do the same.

During this life it is hard to give our soul to anyone because it is not the most tangible thing... however, we can give our souls to God when we obey Him and follow His commands. Look back on our text. Peter tells us, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.” When we listen to the Word of God, when we apply the Word of God to our lives, we purify our spirits...we get them ready for our God.

As Johann Gerhard says, “But then, God’s Word is the blessed means through which the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of men for their rebirth and salvation. Hence it follows that faith is worked in a person’s heart also through Baptism. Thereupon St. Paul states that through Baptism we put on (garb ourselves with) Christ.” This is how the church has viewed, not only baptism, but also God’s Word... and how we view it to this day. When we combine God’s Word with water, we are baptized, our hearts

are cleaned and we promise to live according to God’s new covenant... and we also promise Him our soul. We promise that we will be His both in this life and in the next. When we are baptized we ‘give’ our soul to God because He promises to take care of it.

In addition, in the Lord’s Supper, when we combine the Word of God with the bread and the wine, we receive the very body and blood of Christ which He gave up for us upon the cross. That body and blood of Christ is the very spiritual nourishment and food that we need not only to make it through this life but it also strengthens our faith in the life to come.

When we take and eat, take and drink, we are trusting Jesus’ words, we are trusting the Word of God for the salvation of our souls. We are putting our soul’s salvation and well-being in the hands of God. When we take communion we are giving our souls to God.

Dear friends in Christ, when we listen to and trust in the Word of God our text tells us that we are born again. We are born not of

corruptible and perishable seed but of incorruptible seed... the incorruptible seed that is the Word of God. When we put our hope, our faith, and our trust in Him and in His Word, then we are giving God our souls.

While God is still calling out for us through His Word, we need to remember two very important things: God is not a soul collector and we cannot give Him our souls on our own. God is the one who has given us our souls and He is the one who gives us the power to give it back to Him. God owns, possesses, has our souls... when we believe His Word and trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Thank God that giving our soul to Him is not dependent upon us. Thank God that He has provided, protected, loved, and cared for my soul. And thank God that through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, we can love the Lord our God with all of our soul.

Thanks be to God. Amen.