WHY ME?
ROMANS 9:14-29

Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn.

M.I. THINKING ABOUT OUR SALVATION SHOULD HUMBLE US, CAUSE US TO FALL MORE IN LOVE WITH GOD, CAUSE US TO LOVE AND RESPECT ONE ANOTHER, AND GIVE US A SENSE OF DESTINY AND PURPOSE.

I. WRONG PERSPECTIVE #1 (Vs. 14-18)

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A. FROM A GENTILE PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 25-26)

B. FROM A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 27-28)

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WHY ME?
ROMANS 9:14-29

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I have already stated that chapters 9-11 deal with the topic of predestination. But again, I want to remind us that I think what Paul is doing here is leveling the playing field between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. At the birth of the Christian Church, Gentiles were treated as second-class citizens. The dominant issue that occupied church leaders was whether or not Gentiles first needed to become Jews before becoming Christians.

However, due to several circumstances, the make up of the church changed rather quickly. The church became primarily Gentile, and Jewish Christians became the second-class citizens. Since the Jews were kicked out of Rome for a period of time, and had only started returning by trickles when the Apostle writes this letter to the church at Rome, the Jewish believers are probably in the minority.

So here is the tension we must keep in mind lest we try to make these chapters mean more than they mean to say. There was the temptation by Jewish Christians to feel superior to Gentile Christians since Jesus, the Messiah, was a Jew and since the Christian Church was birthed out of Judaism.

On the other hand, since God ordained the Apostle Paul, a very prominent Jewish leader, to gear his mission to the Gentiles, and since the Gentile Christians are probably in the majority at this time, it would be tempting for them to look down on the Jewish believers.

By the time Paul gets through talking about God's predestination, mercy, and compassion, there will be absolutely no basis for anyone to look down on anyone.

But there is also another nice little twist here. As we study through this doctrine of predestination, we come away with a sense of destiny in our lives. In other words, as Paul gives

examples of people who experienced God's predestination in their lives, we come away with a sense of purpose. Not only did God predestine us for salvation, He has predestined us for service. So one of the questions we must ask ourselves is, "If God has saved us for a purpose, then what is my destiny? What does God have for me to accomplish?"

You know that we pastors have a strong sense of destiny and purpose in our lives. I'd like to say that this happened at that church that was so tough. But no, it happened right here at Devon. When I came here about 13 years ago, I did a little research. I wondered what kind of relationship the board and congregation had with their previous pastors. I became a little apprehensive as I read through the notes.

It seems as if relations between the congregation and the pastor had deteriorated to the point that the relationship had become adversarial. The pastor was looking for a way out. Luckily, his denomination had an opening at the state prison for a chaplain. Immediately he jumped on it.

Since he had become so disliked, and since so many people were happy to get rid of him, they turned out in great numbers to hear his farewell sermon.

I looked up the archived bulletins to see what the service looked like. The pastor chose as his text, John 14:3, and titled the message, "I go to prepare a place for you … that where I am, you may be also."

This guy had a strong sense of destiny and purpose.

Again, let me remind you that if you are expecting me to give you the definitive answer on predestination or for me to define it clearly for you, you will be disappointed. First of all, if scholars have debated this throughout the centuries and have not convinced each other, then

certainly my little mind has absolutely no chance of understanding it, let alone explaining it. Secondly, I am going to try and understand this passage from the Church in Rome's perspective. Keep in mind. Their church was a lot like ours. It was a city church; it was multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and interdenominational. They had a lot of issues to deal with.

Paul has spent a large portion of this letter reminding them that they have all been saved by grace through faith, that the road ahead of them was a life-long battle with sin, that they were chosen by God, and that God would see them safely through the journey of life.

But now, Paul wants to emphasize to them that they are a community, a community gathered together by God, with purpose and destiny. This concept of predestination should cause us to think about our salvation. Here is the main idea of today's text. **THINKING ABOUT OUR SALVATION SHOULD HUMBLE US, CAUSE US TO FALL MORE IN LOVE WITH GOD, CAUSE US TO LOVE AND RESPECT ONE ANOTHER, AND GIVE US A SENSE OF DESTINY AND PURPOSE.**

For me, there is no other religious book that comes closer to describing human nature as it really is. Paul anticipates two faulty perspectives concerning the doctrine of predestination. As I read through the chapter, it seems as if Paul is reading my mind.

I. WRONG PERSPECTIVE #1 (Vs. 14-18)

IF WE ONLY TOOK TIME TO THINK CAREFULLY, WE WOULD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT WE WANT GOD'S MERCY AND COMPASSION, NOT HIS JUSTICE.

Wrong perspective #1 is described in verses 14-18. The proper perspective we are to get in these verses is this. **IF WE ONLY TOOK TIME TO THINK CAREFULLY, WE WOULD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT WE WANT GOD'S MERCY AND COMPASSION, NOT HIS JUSTICE.** In verses 1-17, Paul laid out the doctrine of election. We ended up by saying that from our perspective, God had no rhyme nor reason in the way He

chose people to accomplish His tasks on earth. He said, "Before these twin boys had even been born, before they had a chance to do good or evil, I chose Jacob to love over Esau." Actually the text read, "Jacob I loved while Esau I hated."

A. A WRONG QUESTION (V. 14)

As I read that, I immediately wanted to say, "That's not fair. That's wrong. God is unjust." Look at verse 14 because Paul tells me that I am asking the wrong question. It feels a little freaky if you read the Bible thoughtfully. I am reading along saying, "God's not fair," and then I immediately read Paul saying, "What then shall we say? Is God unjust?" Then he goes on to say, "No, not at all!" Now I'm stunned. Sure it's unfair. For no apparent reason, God arbitrarily chose Jacob over Esau to bless. How can that be fair?

Now here is where we have to bring balance to the doctrine of predestination. Remember, Paul is writing this letter to Christians. This letter is not written to unbelievers. Jesus said to unbelievers, "Whosoever will … may come." Paul invited unbelievers to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, repent and receive salvation by faith. In fact the very mission of the Christian Church is to invite sinners to receive salvation. Please don't forget that as we study through this section. Paul is writing to believers, people who have received salvation by grace through faith, people who have given their lives to Christ.

I think it is very interesting that Paul chooses two examples, Moses and Pharaoh, who are contemporaries that find themselves on opposite sides of a war. You will immediately recognize these two men as the key players in Exodus, where God delivers the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. And watch carefully who is behind both of these two men.

B. THE RIGHT QUESTION (Vs. 15-16)

In verses 15-16 Paul points out the right question we should be asking. The question we should ask when we say God is not fair is, "Do we want justice and fairness or mercy and compassion?" As believers, I want us to think about this concept very carefully. Moses asked God to reveal Himself to him. He wanted to see God's glory. Moses didn't deserve a thing. Yet God passed by, showed Moses His goodness and called out His Name, Jehovah. As a baby, Moses was supposed to be killed with the other Israeli babies. His mother and sister hid him in a basket and floated him down the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter discovered him, and Moses was raised in the palace. Later, Moses murdered an Egyptian soldier and was forced to flee from Egypt and live in the desert. In the desert, at 80 years old, God chose Moses to be the leader of Israel and to lead His people to the Promised Land. Moses hadn't done anything great that God should notice him. Yet from birth, God had His eye and hand on Moses. He chose Moses to lead the people to freedom.

Here is the perspective we must start from. I am a sinner from birth. Paul has hammered home this concept. In my natural state, I have no interest in finding or serving God. My natural bent is toward rebellion and evil. I am naturally self-centered and selfish. There is nothing good about me. In this state my destiny was to live a life separated from God and then to spend an eternity separated from God in hell. Paul made it clear that no one is good. If in anyway, even to the smallest degree we think we are going to go to heaven because we are good or because we have done good things, then we are still lost. We are not saved.

The starting point is that we are all sinners. The wages of sin is death, eternal separation from God in hell for eternity. Justice demands that end. It's a pretty simple, straightforward equation. Those who sin deserve hell. All of us sin. Therefore, justice, fairness, demands that we all go to hell for eternity. I deserve hell, you deserve hell, all the heroes of the faith,

including the Apostle Paul, deserves hell. That's justice, plain and simple. The next time the words, "That's not fair," come out of your mouth, take time to think about what's fair.

So the right question is not why God doesn't save everybody, the right question is why God chooses to save anyone at all. To make it more personal, we should ask, "Why did God choose to save a wretched worm like me?" I know this is not popular theology and psychology today, but I want to state it in the strongest terms possible. We are so wretched, dirty, evil and useless, that we should stand there in His presence, stunned, speechless, amazed that God saved us. When we come into the presence of God, and He welcomes us with open arms, we should be totally blown away in wonder.

When God says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion," and directs that towards us to whom He has extended mercy and compassion, our eyes should widen, our breathing should stop, our hands should cover our mouths as we say, "Why me?"

Verse 16 sums it up nicely, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." It does not depend on our desire. There are sincere people, who say they are looking for God and trying to be good. Paul says it doesn't matter how sincere you are, that won't bring you salvation or get you to heaven.

And the word for effort in the Greek actually means running. No amount of effort you spend in being good or doing good will help you get to heaven. I know there are a lot of sincere people who do a lot of good things and appear to be very gentle, kind and good.

But the Bible says that no amount of sincerity or good deeds will ever bridge the gap between God and us left by sin. It is only by God's compassion, His grace, and His mercy that anyone can be saved.

So God plucked Moses, a baby destined for death, from the water, saved him, and turned him into a great leader who delivered the entire Israelite nation from the slavery of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land as a free nation.

C. PUTTING THINGS INTO PROPER PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 17-18)

Let's continue putting things into proper perspective as we look at the other side in verses 17-18. Here it says that God handpicked Pharaoh as well. Out of all the Egyptian babies, God put Pharaoh on the fast track to leadership. It was God Who raised Pharaoh to his position as leader of all Egypt. God raised Pharaoh to this position for two reasons. Number 1: That God might display His power in Pharaoh, and number 2: That God's Name by proclaimed in all the earth. It goes on to infer that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. If you take time to go back and read the Exodus account, you will notice that it says, "Pharaoh hardened his heart and God hardened Pharaoh's heart." Both seem to be equally true and have equal weight.

Let me point this out. Both Pharaoh and Moses were the same. Both were sinners by birth and both deserved death. God raised both of them to be leaders. Further, all the Egyptians and all the Israelites were sinners and deserved death. There is no difference. Further, it seems as if all the agents are free to make up their own minds.

A similar situation takes place over a thousand years later. The Israelites again find themselves in captivity, only this time to the Medo-Persian Empire. King Cyrus was faced with the same decision as Pharaoh. God told Pharaoh, "Let my people go." Pharaoh responded, "Over my dead body," to which God said, "So be it."

On the other hand, God said to King Cyrus, "Let my people go." King Cyrus responded, "With my blessing," and God said, "So be it." God's power was displayed in King Cyrus and God's name was proclaimed throughout the empire and the earth as a result of Cyrus' decree.

God's power was demonstrated through Pharaoh and God's name was proclaimed throughout the whole earth when God left Pharaoh and Egypt in ashes, totally destroyed.

Maybe another question we should broach is this, whether or not we are Christians. God places us in particular places in life. Whether we are teachers, business owners, pastors, lawyers, doctors, janitors, or even retired. If God's intent is to display His power in us, and to have His name proclaimed in all the earth, then what are we doing with our calling? We will address that more in the next section. But for now I would say, **IF WE ONLY TOOK TIME TO THINK CAREFULLY, WE WOULD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT WE WANT GOD'S MERCY AND COMPASSION, NOT HIS JUSTICE.**

II. WRONG PERSPECTIVE #2 (Vs. 19-24)

IF WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD, THEN PERHAPS WE OUGHT TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE PLANS HE HAS FOR US TO FULFILL.

That brings us to wrong perspective #2 in verses 19-24. As I just said, **IF WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD, THEN PERHAPS WE OUGHT TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE PLANS HE HAS FOR US TO FULFILL.** In other words, if we are Christian, then it is clear that we have been chosen by God. If we have been chosen by God, then we have purpose and destiny. Our purpose is to proclaim God to the entire earth. Our destiny is to have God's power demonstrated through us. Our choice is do we want to be like Pharaoh or Moses? In other words, do we want God's power and reputation demonstrated through us positively or negatively?

A. ANOTHER WRONG PERSPECTIVE (V. 19)

Verse 19 illustrates another wrong perspective on the situation. God raised Moses up to free Israel from Egypt. He used Pharaoh to punish Egypt. Each time Pharaoh refused to listen to

God and Moses, God would send another plague. Because of Pharaoh's hard headedness, God left Egypt in total ruin, with each first-born child in each Egyptian household, … dead.

So we want to say, "If that was Pharaoh's destiny, then how can we or God fault him? He did what he was destined to do." Since God condemns and judges Pharaoh for his hardness of heart, which God hardened, we want to accuse God of being unfair. Have you ever accused God of being unfair?

B. THE RIGHT QUESTION (Vs. 20-21)

If you have, and I think most of us can safely say we have, verses 20-21 give us some insight into the right question we should ask. Paul very graphically puts all of us in our place. We act as if we have a choice in whether or not we will serve God. The question is not whether or not we will accept God; the question is whether or not God will accept us. He is God. Sometimes I think we forget that. Job had all sorts of things to say about God, … until God showed up in person. When He did, Job covered his mouth with his hand and said, "Shut my mouth."

Think about this. The Bible says that someday, at the very pronunciation of the name Jesus, Every knee in heaven, on earth, and below the earth will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Did you hear that? There is no option. God is the master. He is the creator. He is the King. He is the Judge. There is no higher court. Think about the potter. He can make a fine glass that will sit on the king's table. And out of the same lump of clay, he can make a public toilet for peasants to sit on and do their business.

God is God. He can make us for any purpose He chooses. To be sure, there is a lot of difference between a lump of clay and us, but the point is, that God is sovereign and we are not. I think the best attitude we can come before God and one another with is humility. Our attitude

should be one bent towards giving and receiving mercy and compassion. When a soldier enters the U.S. military, she gives up many of her constitutional rights. When we enter the Kingdom of God, we give up our rights in order to serve God and one another. We are handpicked, chosen soldiers. What a privilege. What a responsibility. So the right question to ask God is, "Where do you want me to serve? What's Your plan, Your purpose, Your destiny for me?" Paul will certainly address this more in detail starting in chapter 12.

C. PUTTING THINGS INTO PROPER PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 22-24)

Verses 22-24 help us in putting things into proper perspective. Again, there is a nice corrective and balance here in verse 22 as it deals with our hand in our own destinies. It seems from the biblical account of the Exodus that Pharaoh could have gotten with the program at any time. Further, it seemed as if during each plague, he was ready to repent and agree to let the Hebrews go. He had 10 chances to submit to God's request. God demonstrated great patience with Pharaoh. After all, He could have simply wiped him and the entire Egyptian nation out with one attempt. Keep in mind what we said before. God chooses people for the specific purpose of making His Name know in all the earth, and demonstrating His power through them. If you find yourself in a state of rebellion against God, and are presuming too much on His patience, look carefully at verse 22. This is how He does this in the life of unbelievers. His patience allows the rebellious unbelievers to destroy their own lives and the lives around them. In the end, God allows the extent of His wrath to be manifest and His power to be displayed in a horrific way. Look what God's patience did to Pharaoh and Egypt. If Pharaoh had submitted to God in the beginning, Egypt would have remained completely in tact. It would have been a beautiful, wealthy, and prosperous country. However, because Pharaoh refused to go along with the program, all the crops and livestock were destroyed, their wealth was plundered, in fact they

gave the Hebrews their wealth willingly in the end, the firstborn in every Egyptian family was killed, and the entire Egyptian army was drowned in the Red Sea. Egypt was desolate. It was left in a heap of ashes. People who go around making up their own rules for life will experience this same sort of devastation. The message to the unbeliever is repent, turn to God before you destroy your life and the lives of those around you.

On the other hand, we get the proper perspective from the believer's side. Think about the Exodus from the Israelite's perspective. From the time Moses showed up on the scene as God's chosen leader, things started to deteriorate for the Hebrews. The Egyptian taskmasters beat them and forced them to work harder. They went through many of the plagues as well. But in the end, God delivered them with a mighty hand. There could be no doubt in their minds how powerful this God they worshipped was. As we read through the Old Testament, we should catch the great plan of salvation history, how God uses faithful and unfaithful people and nations to accomplish His purposes. If you are a believer, then think about how we want to fit into God's history books. If we submit to Him, and embrace His plan for our lives, He will manifest in us, now look at verse 23, the riches of His glory to us. Don't miss that. We have a chance to stand in that great line of salvation history with Abraham, Moses, David, and all the other heroes of the faith. Life is not about success, about money, prestige, power, status, or accomplishments. It is allowing God to manifest His power, love, mercy, and compassion through us. Know this, if we are believers, then God hand-picked us, He chose us, He predestined us to accomplish great things for Him. It doesn't matter if you work at Mc Donalds, or if you are a doctor, if you are a janitor or a teacher, a carpenter or an accountant, or even a pastor. God places us in particular positions not so we can achieve personal success, but to reach the lost wherever we are. That's who we are as Christians.

And please don't miss verse 24. God now includes Gentiles together with Jews to be His chosen people. If we are not winning people for Christ, if we are not ministers of His mercy and compassion, if we are not serving, then basically, we are useless. Here we must exercise our free will. Which piece of clay you want the potter to make you into, the beautiful glass that sits on the king's table, … or the toilet that peasants sit on and do their business? The choice is ours, either we will be useful or useless. **IF WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD, THEN PERHAPS WE OUGHT TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE PLANS HE HAS FOR US TO FULFILL.**

III. THE CORRECT PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 25-29)

SINCE WE HAVE ALL BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD THROUGH HIS MERCY AND COMPASSION, AND SINCE WE ALL HAVE DESTINIES TO FULFILL IN HIS KINGDOM, THERE IS NO ROOM FOR PRIDE, PREJUDICE, OR ARROGANCE.

Now we know that we want God to show us mercy and compassion instead of justice. Further we know that we have destiny and purpose, plans to fulfill. And now in verses 25-29 Paul is going to give us a correct perspective on our attitudes as a church, the people of God. **SINCE WE HAVE ALL BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD THROUGH HIS MERCY AND COMPASSION, AND SINCE WE ALL HAVE DESTINIES TO FULFILL IN HIS KINGDOM, THERE IS NO ROOM FOR PRIDE, PREJUDICE, OR ARROGANCE.** Here is what I think this predestination section is all about. God has chosen for Himself a people from every tribe, nation, culture, every economic group, and gender. He has gathered together a blended family. Remember, Paul is addressing a very diverse church body in Rome.

A. FROM A GENTILE PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 25-26)

In verses 25-26 he looks at election from a Gentile perspective. Those of you who read your bibles regularly will know the background of these verses Paul quotes from Hosea. Those of you who don't, it is a relatively short book worth reading in the context of studying through

this section of Romans. God instructed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. She was unfaithful to her husband Hosea just like the nation of Israel had been unfaithful to God. God instructed Hosea to name his second child "not loved" and his third child, "not my people." This was to demonstrate His rejection of Israel. However, there is redemption and restoration in the book of Hosea. God promises that after a time, those people whom He once called "not loved and not my people" would someday once again be called my people, loved by God, sons of the living God." Now in the Hosea passage, God was referring to the 10 Northern Tribes of Israel that were defeated and conquered by the Assyrians.

But Paul is making the comparison to the Gentiles. God had chosen the Jews to be His people. By comparison, the Gentiles were people that were not His people and not loved by Him. But now, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and His rejection by the Jewish leaders, God turned to gather His chosen people from the Gentile nations as well. The Gentile believers in the church at Rome must understand that it is by grace through faith that God saved them. It is a direct result of God's mercy and compassion that He chose them. They have nothing to be proud or arrogant about. They have done nothing good or honorable to deserve this status.

B. FROM A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 27-28)

Then Paul quickly turns the predestination issue towards the Jewish believers in Rome. He describes it from their perspective in verses 27-28. We are reminded that not all Gentiles are saved, only those who have been saved by grace through faith. Likewise, Paul brings the Jews to the book of Isaiah where the prophet predicts the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews by the Babylonians. However, he also prophesies of Israel's restoration. God preserved a remnant of faithful Jews to carry on His work of salvation, grace, compassion, and mercy. Even though the majority of religious leaders rejected Jesus, many Jews placed their

faith in Jesus as the Promised Messiah. So Jews are part of this chosen group. They too are saved by grace through faith. They had done nothing good or honorable to deserve salvation as well.

C. FROM A BELIEVER'S PERSPECTIVE (V. 29)

I hope we are starting to get Paul's drift in this issue of predestination. Verse 29 describes it from a believer's perspective. Here is the bottom line. Everybody deserves nothing but eternal destruction. We all deserve to suffer the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah. We deserve to be smoked by God on the spot. If the thought ever crosses our mind that we are somehow good, successful, or righteous, then we need to quickly remind ourselves that is a lie. I don't care what popular theology and psychology say. I think they are flat out wrong. There is nothing good in me. For some strange reason, God chose me for salvation. He chose me to be His child. He changed my eternal destiny from death to life, from shame to glory. The simple truth is this. I'm a moron. … But I'm God's moron. I don't know why, but He loves me, He manifests His power and glory in me, and He makes His nature and character known to the world through me. He could have done it through a jackass, but He chose me. Actually there may be a strong resemblance there. But I want you to understand that if we are believers, then we are God's chosen people with destinies and missions to fulfill.

Just take a look around you. Look at the person on either side of you. Look at the person in front of you and in back of you. They have been chosen, … hand-picked by God. In Christ there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, free nor slave. There is no status, class, economic, or race distinction. We all got here the same way, by grace through faith, … and we will accomplish what God has for us to accomplish the same way, … by grace through faith. **SINCE WE HAVE ALL BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD THROUGH HIS MERCY AND**

COMPASSION, AND SINCE WE ALL HAVE DESTINIES TO FULFILL IN HIS KINGDOM, THERE IS NO ROOM FOR PRIDE, PREJUDICE, OR ARROGANCE.

This doctrine of predestination is meant to both humble us and motivate us to accomplish all that God has for us to accomplish. **THINKING ABOUT OUR SALVATION SHOULD HUMBLE US, CAUSE US TO FALL MORE IN LOVE WITH GOD, CAUSE US TO LOVE AND RESPECT ONE ANOTHER, AND GIVE US A SENSE OF DESTINY AND PURPOSE.**

If you are a believer, and if we would be able to see the whole story of our lives, I'm sure they would be as dramatic as the story I am about to read you from Ira Sankey's life.

Sankey's Song
The stocky, mustached man nervously paced the deck of a Delaware River steamer, unbuttoning his frock coat, and regularly removing his derby to wipe his brow. He looked much older than his thirty-five years.
It was unseasonably worm for a Christmas Eve.
The man stared at the passing Pennsylvania shoreline, thinking of his family in Newcastle, some three hundred miles to the west, whom he might not see this Christmas, unless he made his train connection in Philadelphia. Christmas 1875.
"Pardon me, sir."
"Aren't you Ira Sankey, the gospel singer?"
He smiled at the lady and her husband… He thought he was gracious to acknowledge that he was, indeed, Ira D. Sankey.
"We've seen your pictures in the newspapers."
He had not wanted to be recognized: Not today, not tonight. He was tired and fretful and warm. Fact of the matter was, he was angry and provoked with Mr. Moody.
"We thought you were still in England!" said the lady.
"We returned last week, Madam," Mr. Sankey replied in his resonant baritone voice. And If Mr. Moody hadn't insisted on more conferences and meetings, he thought, he would have been home by now for Christmas with his family. Instead he was a prisoner on a river steamer.
"Mr. Sankey, would you sing for us? It is Christmas Eve, and we'd love to hear you."
Mr. Sankey said he would sing and his presence was announced loudly across the deck. As the people gathered, he pondered what he might sing. He wished he had his portable pump organ which had become an integral counterpart to his singing. But no matter. He would sing a Christmas carol or two, unaccompanied. Perhaps he would get the passengers to sing along with him.

He tried to shed his melancholy. He was a famous person, whether he liked it or not, and he was not normally shy about his gifts. He was known on two continents as the gospel singer, the song leader and soloist working with Dwight L. Moody, who was surely the greatest evangelist of the day. Perhaps God had intended it this way --- for him to be in this place, on this boat, at this particular time.
"I thought I would sing a carol or two." Then he added, "But somehow I feel I should sing another song."
"Sing one of your own songs!" shouted someone unseen. "Sing 'The Ninety-And-Nine'!" commanded another.
"No, thank you very much, but I know what I must sing." He was smiling broadly now, feeling much better about himself and the situation, enjoying his congregation.
"I shall sing a song by William Bradbury. And if you know it, as I'm sure many of you do, hum along with me."
Sankey began to sing.

"Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tender care;
In thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use Thy folds prepare:
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou has bought us, Thine we are."

He sang all three verses. There was uncommon silence, and Ira Sankey felt it would be inappropriate to sing anything else. So he simply wished everyone a Merry Christmas, and the people murmured a greeting in return. The silence returned, and he was alone.
"Your name is Ira Sankey?"
"Yes." He recognized neither the voice nor the man.
The man came out of the shadows. He was about his own age, with a beard beginning to turn gray, and comfortably but not fastidiously dressed. Perhaps he was in sales….
"Were you ever in the Army, Mr. Sankey?"
"Yes, I was. I joined up in 1860."
"I wonder if you can remember back to 1862. Did you ever do guard duty, at night in Maryland?"
"Yes, I did!" Sankey felt a stab of memory and excitement. "It might have been at Sharpsburg."
"I was in the Army, too. The Confederate Amy. And I saw you that night."
Sankey looked at him warily.
"You were parading in your blue uniform. Had you in my sights, you standing there in the light of the full moon, which was right foolish of you, you know." The man paused. "Then you began to sing."
Amazingly, Sankey remembered.
"You sang the same song you sang tonight, "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us.'"
"I remember."
"My mother sang that song a lot, but I never expected no soldier to be singing it at midnight on guard duty. Especially a Union soldier." The man sighed. "Obviously I didn't shoot you."

"And obviously I am grateful." Sankey smiled.
"I always wondered who you were. Who it was I didn't kill that night, on account of his singing an old Sunday school song."
Sankey just shook his head.
"Frankly, up until tonight, the name of Ira Sankey wouldn't have meant much to me. Guess I don't read the paper like I should. I didn't know you'd turn out to be so famous!" The man smiled for the first time. "But I reckon I would have recognized the voice and the song anyplace."
Sankey reflected on what might have been.
"Do you think we could talk a mite?" asked the man. "I think you owe it to me. Very little has gone right for me. Not before the war. Not during it. And not since."
Ira Sankey put an arm around his former enemy. They found a place in a quiet corner of the deck to sit and chat. Sankey's impatience and anger had passed. He no longer fretted that he might be delayed in seeing his family. Christmas would soon be here. It always came but sometimes in the strangest of ways.
The night was still warm but it seemed filled with brighter stars. Sankey even thought he heard the sound of angels' voice: singing of course, and singing the Good News.

John Gillies, Christian Herald.