

## "GRACE, FAITH AND GOOD WORKS"

When we do these race day picnic messages, I try to keep it brief lest you are distracted by frisbee throwers, dog walkers, and who knows what else. I also want to stay in our larger series on *The Story of God*. We're in the prison epistles now, and we've come to one of the most famous passages in Ephesians. **Ephesians 2:1-10**. This passage talks directly and clearly about the great theme of salvation.

**Verse 8** says,

### **I. WE ARE SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.**

What is grace? *Grace* is favor or blessing given to someone who deserves the opposite: someone who deserves judgment.

*Grace is beautiful, stunning, life-giving and breathtaking because*

#### **A. We absolutely and without exception need to be saved.**

We don't shy away from the word "saved." We celebrate the fact that Jesus is our Savior. We worship him for that. We need saving.

**1. We need salvation because verse 4 says we are dead in our trespasses.** The word **trespasses** pictures the idea of a boundary that you step across willfully. We trespass against God's boundaries in thought, word, and deed deliberately and repeatedly. We deserve judgment.

**2. And it's not just that we have committed trespasses, but until we receive God's saving grace, we are dead in our trespasses.** **Verse 4-5** says, *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. What does it mean to say we are or were spiritually dead.* At one point in my life, I went to a church where the congregation loved to sing a song titled: "Love Lifted Me." it was a gospel song that was fun to sing, and the words went like this:

I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore  
Very deeply stained within Sinking to rise no more,  
But the master of the sea heard my despairing cry.

From the waters lifted me now safe am I.  
Love lifted me, love lifted me,  
When nothing else could help, love lifted me.

It was a fun song, and love indeed lifts us. But what Scripture is saying is we weren't sinking we were sunk. I wasn't struggling on the surface; I was lying dead on the bottom. I wasn't crying out for help. I was dead to God and my need of God. I was indifferent, cold, unresponsive, and uninterested. That is the natural state of the human heart. Jesus said, *"You have to be born again to see the kingdom of God."*

*We all need to be saved by grace. And as clearly as this passage teaches, it also tells us that...*

**B. We all can be saved by grace through faith but  
only by grace through faith.**

**Verses 8-9** tell us we are saved by grace through faith and then uses four key statements to clarify what that means. 1.) *And this is not your own doing* 2.) *it is the gift of God,* 3.) *Not a result of works,* 4.) *So that no one may boast.*

Take to heart the truth that salvation is a gift. What is a gift? It is something someone else pays for and then offers freely. In **Ephesians 1:7**, Paul said, *In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.* Do you know what the word "redemption" literally means? In our culture, this word is used in a way that is the opposite of what it means in the Bible. You are losing over and over one game after another, and then you win one, and with a fist pump, you say, "Yes, redemption at last!" That's a comeback, but that's not redemption. In the Bible, the word "redemption" means to be rescued from slavery because someone else paid the price for you. You don't redeem yourself - you are powerless to do that. But Christ is your redeemer.

In a culture that is pretty much obsessed with an extreme tolerance of all things and the rationale that all our bad behavior can be explained away as a result of our victimization so that nothing is ever our fault. It's hard to face the seriousness of God's judgment and to feel your need for redemption. But the Bible insists on it. The reason we call Jesus our Savior is because he did for us what we could not do ourselves. He lived the life we should have lived for us. He died to pay for our sins, *in our place, for us.* He rose again to be our Savior *for us.*

That's why salvation is a gift, *not a result of works, so that no one may boast*. No one may boast! Jesus told the story of two men who were worshipping, and one said, *"God, I thank you that I am not a sinner like other people."* The other one said, *"God, be merciful to me because I am a sinner."* Jesus said the one who admitted that he was a sinner is the one who went home right with God. So what about you? Have you ever, like that man, confessed to God that you are a sinner and that you need to be saved by his grace? If so, that in itself is a gift of grace.

*We are saved by grace through faith. But here's the second truth...*

## **II. THE GRACE THAT SAVES US ALSO CHANGES US.**

**Verse 10** says, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

### **A. The salvation God offers us through faith in Christ involves a deep transforming work of God's grace in our lives.**

The Bible *condemns* our attempt to earn salvation by good works. But the Bible *questions* any claim to have salvation if we have no works. There are three aspects to the salvation spoken of in **Ephesians 2**: grace, faith, and good works. The order is essential. It is grace that leads to faith and faith that leads to good works. The evidence of God's grace at work is not always immediately or consistently dramatic change. True Christians experience struggles in many ways and can fall into all kinds of sins. The evidence of God's saving grace in one's life is not perfection, but there is life where there used to be death. There is a desire for God and good works where there used to be apathy and indifference. Is there any evidence of God's grace at work in your life? Are you growing? When you fall or fail, do you get up and deal with that, confessing your sins and renewing your obedience. Do you want to love, obey and follow Christ?

### **B. The faith that receives salvation is faith that turns to Jesus, to receive from Him not only forgiveness but also this changed life.**

Imagine this, Jesus comes to you personally and offers you salvation using this passage from Ephesians to explain what salvation is. He says, *"The way you are living now, you may be fine with it, but it is spiritually dead. I will give you salvation, I will give you new life, and you become my workmanship created for good works. You don't earn this. You have to want it and trust in me for it? Do you?"* And you say

to him, *“Well, I want forgiveness. And I would like to go to heaven. But I don't want you to start telling me what to do. I don't want you messing with the way I want to live my life.”* What is his response? With sadness, he looks at you and says, *“What you are asking for is a kind of salvation I don't offer - I'm not that kind of Savior.”* If I save you, I will you will go to heaven, but I will also come into your life now to work in you so that you do good works. Will you turn to me to receive that? Salvation only comes bundled with multiple gifts of grace that include not only forgiveness but new life, new patterns of life, and a new relationship with God in the here and now. The salvation God offers changes lives. Is that salvation you want? Take that....

## Conclusion

Let me come back to the phrase in **verse 10**, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.* The word workmanship is the Greek word *poiema*, from which we get the word *poem*. It describes a work of art, something carefully crafted with skill and thoughtful artistry.

That's a stunning thing to think about! There's a place where C.S. Lewis says, and I'm paraphrasing, You wanted a loving God: you have one. But his love is not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way but the consuming fire as persistent as the artist's love for his work.<sup>1</sup> Think of that. God's love is awesome in the literal sense. It is more than unconditional it is counter-conditional. He loves you as you are, not some future improved version of yourself. And yet he will not leave you as you are. He goes to work in you and on you, and he has the power to make you better, stronger more beautiful. Every brushstroke of grace, every hammer of the chisel, both the good things and the terribly hard things, are tools in his hands to shape you. And he is at work within you to continually grow you into the best version of your truest self.

That work will not be completed until he brings you forward into a blessed eternal life with him, but that day will come, and the here and now matters. Fully surrender yourself into his hands. See his love and grace in all of that. Give yourself fully to his good purposes of grace. Rely on grace, live by faith, do good works.

**Amen**

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Touchstone: New York, 1996), pp. 41-43.

