

Abide – Hands, Feet and Voice of God

3/31/24

Ephesians 2:1-10

Sunday AM

Growing up, there was a show on TV I enjoyed watching that for a young kid was likely a bit unusual. While I watched *Leave it to Beaver*, *Andy Griffith*, *Gilligan's Island*, and the *Addam's Family* – I was mesmerized by Bob Ross. Who remembers Bob Ross? W/ his soft, soothing voice and easy to learn paint strokes, he taught any want-to-be artist how to create a working masterpiece. Every week, he'd take a blank, white canvas – and w/ a mixing palette in one hand and a paint brush in the other, he'd go to work – and w/in minutes – w/ what appeared to be an ugly smudge here, and a dab/smear there – he'd create a work of art out of nothing.

In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul shares w/ us how Jesus has taken poor smudges like you/me – and w/ a dab of grace here, and a touch of mercy there – can create incredible works of art out of our nothingness.

You've seen a painter w/ his palette on his finger and he has ugly little daubs of paint on the palette. What can he do w/ those spots? Go see the picture. What a splendid painting! In an even wiser way does Jesus act toward us. He takes us, poor smudges of paint, and He makes the blessed pictures of His grace out of us. It's neither the brush nor the paint He uses, but it's the skill of His own hand which does it all. *Spurgeon*

If you're just joining us, we're in a series about what it means to **abide** in Christ. We've been looking at the essential spiritual activities God has offered us to help us live plugged into and empowered by the H.S. so we can live *connected w/ and aligned under Him*.

The WITH-God life – *Dallas Willard*

All of us are abiding in something/someone to meet our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs – to attempt to fill the void in our hearts that only God can truly fill – and whatever it is can most often be identified by what we're putting into our lives to satisfy our *ambitions, appetites, attitudes, and actions*.

Today, I want to speak to the elements of God's grace not only for our *salvation* but also for our *service* – that is, *we're saved by grace to serve by grace* so that by the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus we can become His hands, feet, and voice to the world around us.

I The **PROBLEM** of Sin

Once you were dead b/c of your disobedience and sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil – the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our nature, we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

Paul begins w/ our shared spiritual dilemma – that is, *we're all sinners in need of a Savior*. Meaning – not one of us is perfect or w/out sin – *all of us like sheep have gone astray, each has turned to our own way...*

In Ephesians 2, Paul breaks the bad news telling us that b/c of our willful **disobedience** and **sin** – we're all dead people walking subject to the schemes of Satan, the patterns of this world, and the desires of the flesh.

To **disobey** means to intentionally deviate from God by going in the opposite direction from Him – it's the willful choice to defy God's plan for your own plan – and this is what Adam did. As a result, we've all been infected w/ sin leading to our separation from God causing us all to miss the mark of God's perfection.

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away... For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Romans 3:10, 23

Talk about an indictment. B/c of Adam's decision, we now all share a common malady – we've all been infected w/ a fatal condition/disease called SIN that on our own, we're incapable of solving or providing a remedy – we're sinners in need of a Savior!

The only thing a man can contribute to his redemption is the sin from which he needs to be redeemed. *Temple*
So, to help us when we were helpless, in Jesus, God provided a single solution to cure our problem w/ sin.

II The **SOLUTION** of Grace

But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead b/c of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Jesus from the dead – it is only by God's grace you have been saved! For He raised us from the dead along w/ Christ and seated us w/ Him in the heavenly realms b/c we are united w/ Christ. So, God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united w/ Christ. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a free gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

In this passage, we find the most important **BUT** in the Bible. When we were dead in our trespasses/sins – and incapable of doing anything about it, God did for us the miraculously unimaginable – he died for us.

Paul explains that b/c of God's unfathomable love for you/me, Jesus ***graciously*** laid down His life on an old rugged cross to rescue us from the power of sin.

grace – God freely offering us something we don't deserve and can't earn to save us from what condemns us. *It's a gift that cost Him everything and us nothing!*

Whenever I read this text, I think of an excerpt from an Alister Begg sermon about the thief on the cross.

I love this! The one/only solution to the problem of sin has nothing to do w/ you/me and everything to do w/ God – as He provided Jesus to become sin for us.

God made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us, so that we could be right w/ God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Here's what you can't miss. Whereas GRACE is the objective basis for salvation, FAITH is the subjective means by which it is received. Meaning, Jesus death on the cross is the only provision or solution to the problem of sin, but it's not universal in its application. No one just gets it – they have to receive it by faith.

That is, while salvation is ***available*** to all – it's not ***automatic***. Just b/c Jesus was crucified, buried, and on the 3rd day arose from the dead, it doesn't mean that it automatically gets applied to your account. To be rescued from the wages of sin required our individual response and belief in the sacrifice of Jesus!

I know what some of you are thinking – surely it can't that easy? There must be something else I have to do like be good or go to church... Is it really as simple as putting my faith in Jesus? YES! But understand this – true belief is more than *acknowledging* Jesus existed, true belief leads to a life of surrendered *dependence* built upon the work of Jesus on the cross ALONE.

A man dies and goes to heaven where he's met at the pearly gates by St. Peter. But to his surprise, Peter informs him that to get into heaven, he needs to earn 100 pts based on the good things he's done. Peter said, "Here's how it works. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I'll arbitrarily give you points for each item, depending

on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in.” The man agreed and said, “First, I was married to the same woman for 50 yrs and never cheated on her.” Peter said, “That’s great – 2 pts! The man replied, “Only 2 pts – that’s it?” Then he said, “I attended church all my life and supported it w/ my tithe/service.” Peter said, “Great – 1 pt! The man replied, “Just 1 pt? Well, how about this: I started a soup kitchen/shelter for the homeless.” Peter said, “Cool. that’s 2 pts more. To which the man said, “At this rate, the only way I’ll get into heaven is by the grace of God!” To which Peter said, “Exactly!”

Simple – if there was any other way for a person to have their sins forgiven so they could go to heaven other than the cross – like going to church or being a good person – then why the cross? B/c there is no other way. Jesus is God’s only solution to sin – and the cross is only mechanism God has provided for forgiveness.

There is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved – JESUS! Acts 4:12

And this brings us to the final truth about grace – and that is – *we’re saved by grace to serve by grace.*

III The **COMMISSION** to Serve

For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.

masterpiece – His poem or work of art. From start to finish God is doing His work in us and thru us.

Notice – (1) when we were nothing but a blob of sin, dead in our trespasses – thru our faith response to the cross, God has transformed our lives into an amazing, priceless work of art. And (2) as His work of art, He now wants to put our lives on full display for others to see what He can do w/ them if they’ll trust in Him too.

What does this mean? It means we were saved w/ a divine purpose in mind. We’re saved by God’s grace to serve God by grace. It means God has a calling on your life just as much as He has a calling on my life.

IOW – when we by faith receive God’s grace and God saves us – He doesn’t save us to become *sensations* but *servants*. He calls/gifts us to serve His kingdom.

God created us to be contributors – not consumers; givers – not takers. We’ve been created to make a difference. It doesn’t matter how long you live, but how you live. It’s not the duration of your life but the donation of your life that truly matters. *unknown*

LWF – each of the Gospel tell us that Jesus Himself didn’t come to be serve but to serve, by giving His life as a ransom for you and me.

In the upper room before heading to the cross, John 13 records when Jesus humbled Himself to wash the disciple’s feet to model true service. It wasn’t just for the (12) but for all who trust in Him as Savior. He taught us that service isn’t **serve us** – but laying down our lives to put others before us to point them to Jesus.

This is what it means to be His workmanship. It means putting on full display for others to see what God can do in a life fully surrendered to Him.

He’s the wisest man in the church, there’s nothing he can’t do. If you turn down your ministry, He’ll be there to do it for you. He’s also a faithful member, and shows up right on time; if you don’t honor your commitment, he’ll cover you every time. He’s obviously quite wealthy, b/c the plate is always passed his way; and should you choose not to give, he’ll all the expenses pay. Who is he? You may ask, this one w/ such acclaim? Thank God he’s in every church, “Somebody Else” is his name.

God isn't looking for somebody else. He's not looking for the professional Christian alone to serve Him – He is looking for those who've been saved by grace to serve Him by grace. **God is looking for you.**

Have you ever heard of a sculptor by the name of Gutzon Borglum? No. Well, while you might not know His name, I'm certain you know of his work. For b/w 1927-1941, Gutzon, along w/ 400 other men, sculpted the faces of (4) George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt in what we know today as Mt. Rushmore. For 14 yrs, Borglum and his crew suspended on ropes some 500 feet above the valley floor using everything from chisels to dynamite to create the 5-story masterpiece. One day during the work, Borglum's housekeeper asked, "How Mr. Borglum knew that Mr. Lincoln was in that rock?" He said that it was b/c he saw w/ his artist's eye what he could be out of the raw material w/ which he had to work.

And so, it is w/ God. W/ His artistic eye, He sees the potential in even the hardest of hearts. He sees not only who you are but who you can be by His saving grace. And when you by faith open your heart to His mercy for you, w/ loving, gentle hands, the Master artist, will begin to shape/mold your life into a beautiful work of art to be put on display for His glory.