

**“I Will If You Will”**  
***I Will Rescue You***  
**October 9, 2016**

**PRELUDE – Come Ye Sinners**

**Worship Songs – Come Ye Sinners / Your Grace  
Is Enough**

**Feature – Promises Desperation Band**

**Ministry Moment Video**

**Feature – Forgiven & Loved / Offering**

Good morning everyone.

If there's one thing that contemporary American Christians understand, value, embrace and rejoice in these days, that one thing ... is *God's saving grace*: the undeserved, unearned, no-strings-attached favor of God that does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

- Because of God's saving grace in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (God in human flesh), all of our sin past,

present and future and all of our sin known and unknown – all of our sin is forgiven. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- Because of God’s saving grace in Christ, we know that God truly is love. Paul writes that God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- Because of God’s saving grace, we can be confident that we “measure up” – that there is nothing else we can ever do to make ourselves more acceptable to Him because “Jesus is our righteousness; Jesus is our holiness; Jesus is our redemption.” It’s all about Him and how good he is; not about us and how good we try to be.
- Because of God’s saving grace, the Christian faith is unique among all world religions.
- Because of God’s saving grace, Christianity

is more than just a good moral philosophy or a pathway to enlightenment.

- Because of God's saving grace, Christianity offers real hope that goes beyond this life because we are not left to stand on our own merit but on the merit of Jesus.

If there's one thing that contemporary American Christians understand, value, embrace and rejoice in these days, that one thing ... is *God's saving grace*.

And I say that because, in contemporary American Christianity, the one thing we hear about more than any other these days ... is *God's saving grace*.

Go into any contemporary church these days (like NHCC) and you'll hear lots of songs like the one we just heard. You'll sing songs like those we sang earlier:

- “Come ye sinners poor and needy”... why? Because “Jesus ready stands to save.” Because “the fitness we need he freely gives.”
- “Your grace is enough; I’m covered in your love.”

Turn on Christian radio these days and half of the songs you’ll hear are about ... *grace*. Just yesterday, I looked at the K-Love Top 10 playlist. Four of the top 8 songs are about the grace, love and acceptance God offers in Christ.

The number one and number two books last on last week’s N.Y. Times Bestseller list in the Religion, Spirituality and Faith category are about ... take a wild guess: *grace*.<sup>1</sup>

The other day, I was talking to a long-time member of this church and she said, “I remember that series you did a couple years ago. It was the best one you’ve ever done. The one on

... grace.” We spent three months talking about *Amazing Grace*. (The series is still out there on our app and our website if you missed it).

And people loved it – *I loved it!* – because if there’s one thing that contemporary American Christians understand, value, embrace and rejoice in these days, that one thing ... is *God’s saving grace*.

## **Something’s Missing**

Now, in saying all of that, I’m not at all intending to sound negative. God’s saving grace is at the heart of Christianity. Without it, Christianity really isn’t “all that” and neither is Jesus. He’s just one more in a long line of well-meaning moral and spiritual leaders and certainly not a savior.

So, grace is good. Our emphasis on it is good. Reminding ourselves of it weekly at church services or in small groups, if not daily in our

time alone with God, is more than good. *It's a fundamental necessity.* Without a sense of God's saving grace, those of us who are Christians will eventually lose our spiritual identity.

*However,* as I look at the people around me who know Jesus and who understand God's saving grace ... as I look at an entire subculture of people who know Jesus and who understand God's saving grace ... more importantly, as I look at myself ... I'm concerned. I'm concerned that we're missing something:

- Something huge.
- Something that is stealing the joy that God wants for us.
- Something that is robbing us of the life that God intends for us.

I say that because at the same time that there is such an emphasis in contemporary American Christianity on God's saving grace – the abundant and constant reminders that we who

are Christians are “forgiven and loved” and that “His grace is enough” – at the same time as all of that is taking place, there are so many ...

- Christians who are suffering from stress and anxiety.
- Christians who are unable to discern God’s direction in their life.
- Christians who are not growing and changing and becoming more like Jesus.
- Christians who are discouraged and defeated by the trials and tribulations they’re going through.
- Christians who are unhappy and unfulfilled.
- Christians who are in financial distress.

And this bothers me greatly as a pastor because this is not how it’s supposed to be.

**Jesus once said:**

*“I am the gate; whoever enters*

*through me will be saved.*

There it is again – God’s saving grace.

But Jesus goes on to say that not only will there be salvation ...

**He says ...**

*They will come in and go out, and  
find pasture.*

... which is a reference back to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not  
want (or be in need of anything).

He makes me to lie down in green  
pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters

He restores my soul

That’s the imagery that Jesus has in mind – a  
peaceful and satisfied life ...

**... which is why he goes on to say ...**

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*      *John 10:9-10 (NIV)*

See, the deal with Christianity isn't just “rejoice in God's saving grace and hang on until you die or Jesus comes back.” It's “God's saving grace” – the undeserved, unearned, no-strings-attached favor of God that does for us what we cannot do for ourselves in atoning for our sins ... “*and a life that is full.*”

That's the deal. That's the goal. That's God's intention for you and for me.

But I don't see a lot of Christians these days experiencing “the full.” And too many times, I myself don't experience “the full.”

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And I've been thinking about this a lot lately. In fact, I haven't been able to get it out of my mind and I think it's because of (at least, in part) the impending Presidential election and the unprecedented level of attention it has almost demanded. There's a daily shock and awe associated with both candidates and it's like an accident on the highway: you don't want to look but you just can't help yourself.

And a lot of Christians are caught up in this. I know a lot of Christians who think Hillary is of the devil. I know a lot who think Donald is, too.

And so there's a lot of internal angst in a lot of Christians these days over which one is going to win – “oh, Lord, don't let it be him or her” – and then we get into debates and arguments and even fights about it as *if everything depended on the outcome*. We get all stressed out while overlooking the simple fact that Jesus said, “I've come so that you can have life and have it to the full” regardless of whether – God forbid – he

wins, or – God forbid – she wins.

And one of them is going to win. And, in some way yet to be determined, our nation is probably going to be worse off for it. I wish it wasn't true, but I suspect that's the sad reality we are facing.

In spite of that, however, the campaign pledge of Jesus (so to speak) is still there: "I've come so that you can have an abundant life. I've come so that you can experience *more* than just God's saving grace."

## **Promises, Promises**

But if that's going to happen, those of us who are Christians need to get something straight. We've got to address what's missing in our thinking (and in our preaching and worship and music and books).

Specifically, we've got to understand that while grace alone is enough for salvation, the

experience of the joyful and full life God intends for us requires something more. We've got to understand that while grace is *unconditional* (God offers it freely with no strings attached), joy and fulfillment – the life Jesus wants for us as a result of that grace – is not. That is *conditional*.

Let me say that again: while God's grace is *unconditional*, the joyous and full life that God wants you and me to experience as a result of that grace is *conditional*. It *depends ...* on whether or not we're doing the kinds of things that He has promised to bless.

**In fact, a good way to think of it is this: The joy of *unconditional* grace depends on our alignment with God's *conditional* promises.**

And let me say *that* again. In fact, how about you all say it with me this time?

“The joy of unconditional grace depends on our alignment with God's conditional promises.”

See, God offers his grace unconditionally – with no strings attached (otherwise, grace wouldn't be grace) – but our joy and fulfillment is dependent on understanding and abiding by the conditional promises of God; the places where, in the scripture, He tells us “I will if you will;” places where He says, “I will do *this* if you will do *that*.”

**I think this is what the Apostle Peter was getting at (at least, in part) when he wrote:**

*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.*

In other words, it's all right there. It's waiting for us to tap into it.

**But then Peter adds:**

*And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great*

*and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*

In other words, “these promises are what allow you to experience the quality of life God himself lives instead of the kind of life we see everywhere in this world” ... a life that’s ...

- Full of stress and anxiety
- Lacking in direction
- Lacking in growth and development
- Discouraged and defeated
- Unhappy and unfulfilled

**“Therefore,” Peter says to the Christ-followers under his care:**

*In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. 2  
Peter 1:3-5 (NLT)*

Again, God’s saving grace is always available to

anyone, anywhere, anytime no matter what. He's already done what is necessary in Christ and *that's that*. The work of grace is finished, regardless of how anyone might respond to Him. That's what we mean when we say His grace is unconditional.

*But ...* there are other things God offers to do that will only happen if we act in response to His promises. And that's what this series, "I Will If You Will," is all about.

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And I know I've taken about half my time this morning in explaining that, but I want you to understand the burden I feel and also the hope I have. I want you to understand where this is coming from.

If you're a Christian, your experience with God can be so much more than just His saving grace, as amazing as that is. Grace is what provides the

gate into the pasture (to use Jesus' metaphor). And in that pasture you will find life and find it abundantly ... *if ...* you make (as Peter says) every effort to *respond* to God's promises.

So, what promises, specifically, are we talking about?

Well, there are so many that we could probably fill up a year's worth of messages with them! But, I felt like it would be good to focus on just seven (between now and Thanksgiving) which I think are likely to have the greatest leverage in moving us towards the joy and fulfillment God offers.

**So, here they are.**

10-09 I Will Rescue You

10-16 I Will Relieve Your Stress (and Anxiety)

10-23 I Will Direct You

10-30 I Will Change You

11-06 I Will Redeem Your Suffering

11-13 I Will Fulfill Your Desires

11-20 I Will Give to You

All of these are conditional promises; areas of life in which God says “I will if you will.” For example, God says, “I will relieve your stress and anxiety if you will <fill in the blank>.” And we will fill in that blank and all the others over the next seven weeks.

And my hope and prayer is that you will be present for each of these messages and, if not, you’ll take the time to watch, listen to, or read it later on our website or our app. And I say that because, for some of you, this will be transformational. This will be the difference between a lukewarm, nebulous experience of God and one in which you will see His hand actively moving in your life.

## **The Primary Promise**

Now, in the time that we have left, let’s look at

the conditional promise for today, “I will rescue you” – which I am going to call “the primary promise.” There’s no order to the list I just gave you other than this one needs to come first. This one is primary – foundational – because this is the one on which all the others depend.

And I say that because unless and until you have been rescued by God, all of the other ones not only don’t apply, they are of little value to you.

But I also put this one first because I think it’s necessary to address some confusion about the unconditional nature of grace. In my experience as a pastor over the years, I’ve come to realize there are so many people who simply do not understand what that is and how it works. And I’m talking about people who have been in church for years and years – maybe even for *their whole life*: their parents were church members and they were in church the Sunday after they came home from the hospital!

So before we look into God's promises concerning alleviating stress or finding direction or redeeming our suffering, I want to be sure that all of us are clear in our understanding of "God's saving grace" and what it means to be "rescued by God" because, as we'll see, the two are intimately related.

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Now, at this point, I'm going to ask you to do something very unusual before we continue because what I am about to say in the next 10 to 15 minutes might be the single most important thing some of you ever hear me or any other preacher say. And I want you to be fully engaged and mentally with me. So, I'm going to ask you to stand up for 30 seconds and stretch and then have a seat.

Ready, here we go. Stand and stretch. <count to 30>

Ok, you can be seated.

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First of all, let me explain what I do *not* mean when I say “rescued by God.”

- I don’t mean that God somehow gets us out of a temporary jam or a bad situation – like, you’re driving down the road and you’re about to get stuck in traffic or be in an accident and God miraculously signals you to turn off onto another road so you’ll avoid the tie up or the danger.
- And I don’t mean, for example, that you’ve done or said something really stupid and perverse in the past and when everyone sees the video it will ruin your reputation if not your life, but God magically steps in to stop it.

That’s not the kind of “rescue” I’m talking about, though sometimes those things do happen.

**When I say “rescued by God,” I mean what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote:**

*He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

*Colossians 1:13-14 (NIV)*

When I say “rescued by God,” I’m talking about God getting us out of the ultimate and eternal jam; the ultimate and eternal bad situation; the ultimate and eternal ruination of our lives – which is exactly what is going to happen to us as long as we remain in what Paul calls “the dominion of darkness.”

And this is where part of the confusion is – so don’t miss this! – because what many of us don’t understand is *that every human being, by default, is born into the dominion of darkness.*

Instead, what many of us think is that we’re all born with a clean slate (so to speak) and only if

we do something bad enough (like “the unpardonable sin” – whatever that might be); only if we’re really bad will God cast us out into the kingdom of darkness.

In other words, many of us think that, by default, people belong to God and then they somehow do something which crosses the point of no return and they end up in Hell, where they will spend eternity.

But that’s *not* what the Bible tells us or what Christianity teaches. Instead, the Bible and Christianity teach us that reality is exactly *the opposite* of that picture; that you and I are born as slaves to sin and to Satan. It’s true that we’re all created in the image of God and that even the worst of humanity still reflects some of His glory in our being but, in nature and in practice, we belong to the kingdom of darkness. And unless something happens – unless we are rescued, that’s where we will remain.

**In his letter to the church at Ephesus – to those who had been rescued by God – the Apostle Paul describes it like this:**

*You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*  
*Ephesians 2:1-3 (NIV)*

It's very important that we understand this or we will never understand God's saving grace and what it does for us.

So, just to be clear, when we talk about being rescued by God, we're talking about God pulling us out of "the dominion of darkness" into which all of us are born and bringing us into "the

kingdom of the Son he loves” which is where we find the forgiveness of sins and redemption (which is just another way of saying “being saved from a really bad fate”).

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Now, the question is ... what does the grace of God have to do with rescuing us from the dominion of darkness?

Well, lucky for us, Paul goes on to explain that in the very next sentence.

**“By nature you were deserving of wrath,” he wrote ...**

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.  
Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV)*

I think that’s pretty clear – it’s *because of His grace*

that God is willing to rescue spiritually dead people from the dominion of darkness and make them alive and put them into the kingdom of His son. Grace is what makes it possible for us to be saved.

And that grace, as we have said, is *unconditional* ... which means that even though no one deserves it and no one can earn it, this “rescue” is offered to anyone, anywhere – no matter who they are or what they’ve done – free of charge with no-strings-attached.

- There is no requirement that we promise to try and live a better life.
- Or that we will somehow try to make it up to God or anyone else we may have injured.
- Or that we will in some way “pay it back” by “paying it forward.”

That’s because Jesus has already lived the better life we should be living and, on the cross, Jesus has already made it up to God and has already

paid it all.

And, I know that, at this point, some of you are thinking “*we get this, Rick. As you said at the beginning, we talk about it all the time. So, what’s your point?*”

**Simply this: while God’s grace is unconditional, His promise of rescue is not.**

It’s conditional. It depends.

And this is what confuses a lot of people because *it seems like* being rescued from the dominion of darkness – salvation, forgiveness of sins, redemption, whatever you want to call it – *it seems like* being rescued from the dominion of darkness, since it is the result of grace, ought to be *unconditional*. Everyone, everywhere should be saved. No one should ever have to do anything in response. It should just “be.”

And a lot of people – even a lot of church people – go through life believing that to be true and

thereby putting themselves in great eternal danger because the truth is ... *while the grace of God is unconditional, His promise of rescue is not.* It's because of His unconditional grace that God does the work required to make the rescue possible but *that rescue itself* – our rescue – is conditional. It depends. It's one of those areas where God says "I will if you will. I will rescue you if you will ..."

Well, instead of me telling you, let me show you from the scripture because this will be so helpful to you.

In chapter 10 of Paul's letter to the Christians at Rome, he starts talking about his spiritual heritage. Paul was Jewish.

**He writes:**

*My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.*

**And then he explains what he means by that.**

*Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*

*Romans 10:1-3 (NIV)*

In other words, “instead of following the plan God has laid out in this matter, they’re trying hard to earn forgiveness and salvation by their own efforts. They don’t understand grace. They think salvation is a difficult thing.”

In fact, in the next couple of verses, Paul says that they believe they have to work their way up to heaven or work their way out of Hell.<sup>ii</sup> They think that is the message of the scripture.

Sounds like a lot of church people. Sounds like a lot of non-church people who don’t understand the Gospel.

But that’s *not* the message, Paul writes.

*But what does it say? (He asks rhetorically)*

**It says ...**

*“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:8-9 (NIV)*

*For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved ... for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:10,13 (NIV)*

And that’s the promise – the conditional promise.

**“I will rescue you – I will save you, *if ... you will call on Me.*”**

“Not just understand Me. Not just know about Me. Not just believe in Me. Not even work hard to try and please Me.”

God says, “I will rescue you from the dominion of darkness – I will save you – on the day that you believe that Jesus is who he says he is and did what he said he would do *and* you turn to me in humility and call on Me to save you.”

That’s the condition. That’s the promise.

## **Call on The Lord**

Now, here’s the deal.

Some of you have been here for a short while and some for a long time and you have never called on the name of the Lord for your rescue and salvation. Oh, you’ve prayed from time to time about issues that are of concern to you. You’ve talked to God. But you have never called on the

Lord to save you. You've assumed that his grace just sort of covers you like it just sort of covers everyone.

But it doesn't, for God says, "I will rescue you *if* you will call on me."

And it's not hard to do that, He says, because the belief is already in your heart and the words are already in your mouth. You know the truth. You believe the truth. So you're that close to being saved. You just need to call on him.

So, how do you do that? How do you call on the Lord for salvation?

There are no magic words, but when you come to the point where you believe Jesus is who He said He was and you are ready to receive Him ... that's what you put into words. You say something (aloud or silently in your heart) like this:

Jesus, I believe that You are who you claimed

to be.

I believe You are God in the flesh.

I believe You died on a cross.

I believe You rose from the dead.

You know, I'll bet some of you believe that but have never said it directly to Jesus. If you want to, you can say it to Him silently in your heart right now. I'll wait.

<pause>

**And then you might say something like this:**

I agree with you that I am a sinner

Even though I might be better than some,

I am not totally righteous in Your sight.

I am unable to atone for my sin.

And I'll bet that some of you believe that, too, but you've never said it directly to Jesus. If you want to, you can say it to Him silently in your heart right now. I'll wait.

<pause>

Finally, once you have declared that you believe in Jesus and admitted that you need Him, you open your heart and life to Him.

**You might say something like this:**

I accept what you did for me.

Please save me from my sin.

Come into my life and bring me into Yours.

Help me become who You want me to be.

And I'll bet that some of you want that but have never said it directly to Jesus before. If you'd like, you can say it to Him silently in your heart right now.

<pause>

Closing Prayer

- Jesus thank you so much for your Word that leads and guides us into salvation.
- Thank you so much for the people here this morning who are not only understanding, but who are calling out to you for salvation.
- <pray for them>

Amen.

A lot of churches, they ask people to walk the aisle to publicly declare their faith. That's cool. That's what I did as a teenager. But we don't do that here.

Why? Because in the NT the public declaration of faith was baptism. We have one coming up in three weeks on Sunday Oct 30<sup>th</sup>. Watch for details and sign up. You will be so glad you did. More about that in coming weeks.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Before we leave ...

1. Report on Impact Partner giving - \$7,716 which is great but, I think that number could have been almost twice that. We have about 500 adults at \$30 per.
  - a. People missed the service. It's posted online. Please watch.
  - b. People weren't ready to give.
  - c. People planned to do it later and forgot
  - d. You can still do it today at kiosks set up at the tables in the commons or online.
  
2. See you next Sunday when we'll talk about God's promise to alleviate stress and anxiety if we will ... see you then!

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<sup>i</sup> UNINVITED, by Lysa TerKeurst; PRESENT OVER PERFECT by Shauna Niequist

<sup>ii</sup> Romans 10:6-7