

Understanding the What of Salvation

Jon Benzinger

Titus 3:5

April 26, 2020

Good evening. Good morning. Wherever you may be watching this broadcast. Thank you for joining us for Redeemer Live.

Grab your Bibles and open to Titus 3. That is Titus 3. If you have a Bible from the ones that we give out here at the church, that is page 1,100. Titus 3. And by the way, if you want one of the Bibles that we give away, just email us info@Redeemeraz.org. Before we get into our text, there's a little surprise. You might want to make sure that you are here with us next weekend for. That's all I'm going to say now, but you're not going to want to miss that.

Titus 3, drop down to verse four. And as you do, in your homes, please stand for the reading of God's Words. Kiddos, that that means you too. This is God's Word. That is why we stand. Titus 3, starting in verse four. It's one sentence from verse four to the end of verse seven. So we're going to read the whole sentence, even though our focus today is going to be on chapter... Verse five. Titus 3:4. "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy. By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us, richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior. So that being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

That's God's word for us today. Please join me in prayer. Father. I'm often reminded of Jesus' words, that apart from him, I can do nothing. And that includes any good thing in this message. So please do what only you can do. Bless the going out of this message. Use it, please, to help people align their lives more in line with your truth. And I don't just want that for me, Father. So I lift up Pastor Myron over at Compassion Church. I pray you would do the same thing with His series on the family. I pray that people's lives, their marriages, would be more aligned with your truth, because of the preaching that he's going to do, that's going to go out from Compassion Church this weekend. Bless him, help him, use him this weekend, I pray. For the glory of your name. Amen.

I was recently with someone that I dearly, dearly love. She may be watching, so I'm not going to say who it is, but there are few people in this world that I love more than this person. She is deceived in false religion, even though before the crisis hit, that we're all experiencing now. She was going to church every single day. The organization that she's trusting in, is a substitute for Jesus, even though they would say they are fully devoted followers of Jesus. I have an incredible burden for her salvation. I don't think, other than my kids, I don't think there is anyone that I have prayed for more to be saved, than her.

And if you look at Titus 3:5, the subject, the big idea, is salvation. What I want for her, is Paul's subject in Titus 3:5. So my goal today is to help you understand the "what" of salvation. In other words, what is it that actually saves people? Last week, we looked at the "why" of salvation. Why is anyone saved? And the answer is, people are saved because God is kind, God is compassionate, and because God alone saves people.

Instead of being kind and compassionate, God could have given justice to every human being that's ever lived. We've all defied him. We've all been rebels against him. He could have punished every single one of us, for every single one of our crimes. He could have done that, listen, and done nothing wrong. It wasn't wrong for guilty rebels to be punished. In fact, it's right for them to be punished. We hate it when guilty people go free. Unless of course, we are that guilty person. Then Hey, everybody deserves to go free. No we don't. God could have given us all justice, and He would've been right to do so. It would've been good for Him to do so. The breaking of His rules, the violation of His person, nothing is worse for us to do. And punishing us for each and every violation is good. It's right. But that is not the fate of every human being.

Human beings have the opportunity before they die, to avoid the punishment that we deserve for our rebellion. And ultimately, the reason that opportunity exists, is because God is kind. This is called salvation. Last week, we looked at why people are saved. Today we build on point number three from last week, that God alone saves people. If you're still in verse five, I want to do this by coming back to the opening words in verse five, that say, "He saved us." Unfortunately, the word "saved", or "salvation", has become like the word "literally". Once, the word "literally" meant taking words in their most basic sense. It spoke of exactness. It spoke of the avoidance of metaphor, or exaggeration. Today, "literally" is used in the very non-literal way for emphasis. Like when someone is hungry, and they say, "I'm literally starving to death." No, they aren't. "We literally died laughing." If you did, you wouldn't be here to tell me that, because you'd be dead from laughter.

Literally is a word that is quickly losing its meaning, which is the same fate being experienced by the word "save" in Christian circles. Outside the church, we know what "save" means, but inside the church, we just kind of assume the definition. "When did you get saved?" We ask people, "Are you saved?" Or, "I was saved when I was in high school." But have you ever asked yourself, "Saved from what?" "Well, saved from my sins." "Yeah. But what about your sins? What about your sins did you need to be saved from?"

Outside of church, we know what saved implies. It implies what? It implies that people are saved, from like a burning building. They're saved from financial ruin. You saved me from being bankrupt. It's saved from a huge mistake. You saved me from ruining my life. Being saved, in other words, implies danger, peril, a threat to someone's safety. That's true in life. And listen, that's true in Christianity. To be saved is to be rescued, and to be rescued means people are in danger. There's a threat to their wellbeing. Well, what is the threat? And just how much danger are we in? And how easy is it to avoid that danger that we need saving from? All good questions.

Let me see if I can answer that with point #1) Let's start here. ***Accept the hopelessness of your condition. Accept the hopelessness of your condition.*** How easy is it for you to avoid the danger you need rescuing from? Answer: It's impossible to avoid it. How much danger are you in? Answer: The worst possible danger you could possibly imagine. Your condition is hopeless, especially, and your situation is hopeless if all you have to depend on is you.

So what is your condition? What is the problem? It is your sin. Yes, but it's more than that. You've elevated other gods before the one true God. You've turned things in the creation, you've turned those things into gods that you would rather live for, instead of Him. You've treated God like he's nothing. Like he's not worth much of your attention at all. Let alone your devotion, and certainly not your affection.

And that's just the first three commandments. In fact, His commandments, what He says, what He wants, that has very little meaning for us. Or we decide which rules we like, and we just kind of reject the other ones we don't like, without really thinking about it. We've done this so many thousands of times, that we barely notice it anymore. We may say we believe in some higher power, but that belief doesn't actually impact our lives at all. We do what we want, and we live as if God does not exist, and if God has no say over anything in our lives.

You seeing the hopelessness of your condition yet? It's hopeless because you have a record, not just of a few, but of millions of violations against this God. Your condition is hopeless because, as we're going to see in point number two, there is nothing at all that you can do to fix your condition. There's no scale to try to tip in your favor by adding the dust of your good works, to try and outweigh your bad deeds with your good deeds. Your condition is hopeless also, because God is good, and God always does what is right. Like I said before, it is good and right for Him to punish your sin.

Finally, our condition is hopeless, because once you die, there is no possibility of escaping the good and right punishment that is coming for your sins. At death, you will be amazed that you are still alive. Only you will have lost all semblance of control. You will be unstoppably propelled, forced against your will, into a place that is completely absent of any good thing.

Everything you see will be horrific darkness. Oh, how you long for sunsets, and butterflies, and beaches, and mountains, and rivers, and fine art. Everything you hear will be terrifying, weeping, screaming, agony. How you will long for music, and laughter, and a good conversation with those you love. Everything you smell will be noxious. Everything you feel inside of you will be regret. Everything you feel outside of you will be agony. No more comfort, no more satisfaction, no more peace, no more joy. Every emotion will be abject horror mixed with seething rage, and an overpowering sense of regret. You knew the truth and you didn't care. Every good desire you have. You will fully experience. You will fully experience the desire for good things, and you will never be able to satisfy those desires.

And maybe the worst part of all of it, is the absence of hope. Listen, this isn't my description of the hopelessness of your condition. This is just a summary of Jesus' description of it in Luke 16.

Listen, listen to His description. As He describes a person who is actually there. Starting in verse 22, "The rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue for, I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you, in your life, received your good things in Lazarus. And like manner, bad things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.' And besides all this, between us and you as a great chasm, it's been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."

Jesus describes the hopelessness, using feelings people will feel there. Using words like "torment", and "anguish", and "agony in flames". He describes this hopelessness with the realization that there is no escape. And He describes this hopelessness with the fact that it is a place of no mercy, no kindness, and no compassion. Just justice for sin, and justice for every sin. Each of which is an eternal act that makes you guilty and deserving of eternal punishment for your sins against God. In the end, what are you saved from? It's not your sin, and it's not just the punishment for your sins. It's not even punishment in Hell for your sins. In the end, you are saved from God. You are saved from His just, and good, and always doing right justice, who will sentence you to eternal death as punishment for every one of your sins.

Ultimately, you are saved from Him, and you are saved from Him, by Him. Here's my point. Do you accept all of that willingly, as a fact about you? I'm not talking about begrudgingly accepting it, but willingly, freely accepting it. None of that, "I disagree." None of that, "What abouts?" None of that. The, "Yeah, but." Do you receive this as truth about you? Every one of your sins has put you into a hopeless condition that you cannot save yourself from. This is what it means to be saved in the Bible. This is what God saves people from: Eternal, conscious, agonizing, inescapable, torment for their sins. Accept this as the most true thing about you.

Accept this as your future. If you don't, salvation will not mean to you what it actually means in the Bible. And oh God forbid, if you don't accept, this is true about you. Then salvation will mean nothing to you. Those words in Titus 3:5, "He saved us," will mean nothing, unless you accept point number one, that your condition is hopeless. Salvation will be a very minor thing to you unless you see in that man in Luke 16, that conscious, inescapable, eternal torment is coming for you.

Well, the good news is that this hopeless condition has a remedy. It has a remedy. There is escape. People can be saved from all of that. But the question then, is what is it that actually saves? What is it that actually rescues people from that hopeless future? Look back at Titus 3:5. Let's start with what does not save people. Verse five. "He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness." What is it that has the ability to actually put a person into a state of salvation that they can never be removed from?

Paul starts with what can't save anyone. In Greek, word order shows what the author is emphasizing. So look at this opening phrase in verse five. What word do you think is being

emphasized here? Is it the word "works"? Is it the word "done"? Is it the word "us"? Is it the word "righteousness"? All of those are good words, but the Greek is clear. You don't have to guess. The Greek is absolutely clear, and the ESV does a great job of bringing this emphasis out in English. The word Paul made sure that we would understand, is the most significant word in this phrase, is the word "not". What is it that saves people? Not works. This is an absolute negation. The word allows for no exceptions. Salvation does not come out of, it is not caused by, our works. Paul could not have been more clear than he is right here.

That good deeds that you do with the hope of using them to be right with God, do not, cannot, and will never save anybody. And if that's true, then there's no salvation from your hopeless condition until you, point #2) ***reject any contribution to your salvation. Reject any, and all, contributions that you could make to your salvation.*** Good works make no contribution whatsoever to your salvation. They don't achieve salvation. They don't even contribute a tiny bit to your salvation. We do not, we cannot, we will not experience salvation from our hopeless condition by our own efforts. In fact, this text is saying good works that even earn salvation did not even exist before God saved. Good works did not influence. They did not predispose God to save. God saved in spite of, not because of, good works.

Titus 3:5 may be the clearest text on this subject, but it's not the only one. Romans 3:20, quote, "By works. No human being will be justified in God's sight." Romans 9:16, "Salvation does not depend on human will or exertion." In other words, salvation does not depend on your choice or your works. Galatians 2:16, "By grace, no one will be justified." 2 Timothy 1:9, God saves people, quote, "Not because of their works." You hear that emphasis again? Not. Absolute negation, not possible, never can ever happen.

So recently, when I was with this person that I told you about earlier, this person that I dearly love, I steered the conversation, so that I could tell her the Gospel, so I could tell her about Jesus. She's older, so I asked her, "What is your only hope in life and in death?" And she said, her good works. And I asked her, "What is it that you're trusting in to save you? What is it that you're trusting in for Heaven when you die?" And again, it was her good works. Well, my heart just sank in that moment. I thought that's what she would say.

But in that moment, I knew. So I took out my phone, and I read Titus 3 to her. "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us. Not by works done by us in righteousness." And right there, she stopped me. And she said, "That's not true. You have to do something." She went on this little bit of an explanation. "You have to do your part. Jesus did His part on the cross. Now we do ours. He made salvation possible. We have to go get it. He opened the door. We have to walk through the door with our good works. The scales must tip in our favors. Our good deeds must outweigh our bad deeds."

And so I reread Titus 3:5 to her. And I said to her very gently, but firmly, "Well, either you and your religion is right, which means the Bible is wrong, or the Bible is right, which means you and your priest are wrong." Sadly, she's not alone though. Most people believe that a good afterlife depends on the contribution, in whole or in part, of their good works to their salvation.

Most religions believe in salvation by good works. Most people that would say they're Christians believe in salvation by good works. Many people in churches like Redeemer, that reject any contribution of your good works to your salvation, still believe in salvation by their good works. So I want to help you think through this. I want to help you think through what it would look like to trust in your contribution. And I also want to equip you to help somebody else think through this idea, are they trusting in their own contribution by their good works to save them?

Now listen, I don't want you, and I don't want the people that you love, to be part of the many of Matthew 7, who believed with all of their heart, for all of their lives, that they were going to Heaven until the moment they stood before Jesus, and went straight to Hell. I don't want that for you. And I don't want that for those you love. So I have a handful of questions to ask you, to help you diagnose your heart on this, and to equip you to help other people, to help you diagnose the heart of those you love. If these questions get uncomfortable, it may be because your hope is in your good works.

Question one, do you think that God is impressed enough with your good works so that He will accept you into Heaven because of them? If so, you must reject this contribution of your good works for salvation.

When you think about why you'll go to heaven someday, is the reason the good things that you do? Is that really your hope, in life and in death, your works? If so, you must reject this contribution to your salvation.

Do you think belief in God is all it takes? Like that is the good work that saves. You believe in God. If so, you must reject this contribution to your salvation.

Do you think belief that Jesus died for your sins? Do you think belief that He rose from the dead? Do you believe that is the good work that saves you? If so, you must reject this contribution to your salvation.

Do you think that praying a prayer is where your hope rests? "Hey, when I was a kid, I was with my parents and I prayed this prayer, and that's how I know I'm saved. That's what I'm hoping. And that's where my hope rest is in my prayer." If so, you must reject that contribution to your salvation.

Do you think right theology is what it takes to save you? "Hey, I can read the Bible. What I believe. I see it right there. All those weak people out there, they don't believe the Bible like I do." If you think that saves you, then you must reject that contribution to your salvation.

Do you think church attendance, baptism, church membership, serving, pastoring, witnessing, giving, do you think any of that makes you acceptable to God? If so, it is that contribution that you must reject for your salvation.

Do you think that God is obligated to give you Heaven because of your good works? Like, you did your part, so God has to do His, by saving you. If so, you must reject that contribution to your salvation.

Do you think that for God to be loving, to be gracious, to be merciful, like the Bible says that He is, that He must give you salvation or else He won't be true to His word? He won't be any of those things because of who you are, what you've done. If so, if you're going to try to use God's word to force Him to save you, it is that contribution that must be rejected.

Do you think it is only right for God, it's only the decent thing for Him to do, to honor you for your good works? If so, you must reject that attempt to contribute to your salvation.

Do you think the Bible teaches that we save ourselves by our good works, that God is obligated to save people for their good works? If that is you, you are completely misreading the Bible, and you must reject that idea. And you must reject all of that, as a contribution to your salvation.

Do you think God likes you, or God loves you? That he's pleased with you? That you somehow did God a favor by some or all of your good works? If so, then you must reject all of those good works, as contributions to your salvation.

Do you Harbor bitterness towards God because He didn't bless you with something that you think that you deserve for your good works? You were devoted. Everybody else was doing all that sinful stuff, but you stayed true to Him, but He didn't come in with His side of the bargain. If that is you, you must reject that idea for your salvation.

Then finally, do you think you will never receive pardon, and you will never receive forgiveness, or mercy, or kindness from God because you've committed some great sin, because you are such a great sinner? Do you think God can save other people, but not you, because you are just so bad. You don't have enough goodness in you for Him to save you. Are you trying to make up for your great sin with your good works? If so, listen, you must reject. You must reject your contribution to your salvation.

Listen, God is so far from ever being obligated to save anyone for anything they have ever thought, they've ever said, or they've ever done. The only obligation that God has, by the way, is to punish us for everything we've ever thought, everything we've ever said, and everything we've ever done, because He is good and we are evil. It would actually diminish God. It would un-God God, for Him to save us for our good works, because He would be defying His justice, defying His holiness, and defying His goodness to do so.

No judge would ever trade feeding the homeless for theft, but God is supposed to? Never. For God to save you, you must willingly accept the hopelessness of your condition, and you must decisively, adamantly reject any contribution that you think you could possibly make to your salvation with your good works. Not partially reject, not mostly reject. Decisively, entirely, totally reject the idea that you contribute to your salvation with your good works.

Not only does Isaiah 64:6 compare all good works for salvation, even our very best works. Not only does that text compare our good works to used tampons. That's the Hebrew translated, polluted garments, or filthy rags. But Romans 3:12 says something even worse. It says no one does good. Not even one.

There is no such thing as a good work. Good works do not exist, if those works are done with the motive of making yourself acceptable to God. Your good works, your good intentions, even your good thoughts about yourself, are weights that will drag you to Hell if you trust in them to save you. You might be thinking, "Why are you making such a big deal about this? Why are you getting all sweaty about all this? It's just a theological nuance, a minor point of disagreement. Like, calm down preacher. Like, it's a little much." Well, why is salvation by our work so powerless to save, and really such a heinous mistake? Galatians 2:21 tells us why, when it says, quote, "If righteousness were through the law, if you could make yourself acceptable to God through your obedience," the verse continues, quote, "Then Christ died for nothing."

Listen, if you save yourself with your good works, then Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter are nothing. They are pointless. They were optional. They were not necessary. Jesus didn't need to save you by living a sinless life, dying a substitutionary death, conquering death by rising from the dead. If you can save yourself with your good works, all of that was unnecessary. No, actually what it does is, it says to Jesus, "Hey, I got this. Like, you didn't need to do any of that. I can take care of this myself." No you can't. That is arrogance. We'll see that later.

Salvation by contributing your works is also so utterly heinous, because like I just said, it actually produces pride. Listen to Ephesians 2:8, it says quote, "By grace, you've been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing it is the gift of God. Not as a result of works," listen, "So that no one may boast." Think about it. If you contribute something to your salvation, then you deserve credit for your salvation. If your good works save you completely, then you deserve all the credit for your salvation. And if your good works save you partially, like you do your part, and God does his. Even if God does 99.999, and you do 0.001. If that's the case, if your good works save you partially, even infinitesimally, then you deserve some credit for your salvation.

Works salvation, therefore, robs God of the glory, and the credit, and listen, the worship that He alone deserves for salvation. Works salvation takes that credit, that glory, that worship, and takes it for ourselves. We become these rivals to the God of the universe in that moment. No person, listen, no person, no angel, God himself, will never clap for you for your obedience. Heaven is not a reward for a job well done. God will never allow anybody to rob Him of the glory that He alone deserves for saving sinners like us.

He alone gets the credit. He alone gets the glory for your salvation, because Titus 3:5 says, what? Look at the text. "He saved us according to His own mercy." So what is it that saves you? If it's not good works that saves you, what is it that saves you? Answer: God. The God of verse four, who is good and loving. The God of verse four, who is kind and compassionate. The God of verse five, who is merciful. Mercy is God's kindness, His compassion to those in a dangerous situation. They cannot escape that dangerous situation unless they are rescued from it. The danger is inescapable.

Listen, what does that look like? It looks like this. He has the charges. He has the evidence. He has the verdict of guilty. He has the right to punish. He has the obligation to punish. He has the

power to punish. However, in this hopeless situation, in our distress, deserving no good thing from Him at all, God gives mercy, God shows kindness, God grants compassion, and saves.

For salvation to be based on God's mercy, it cannot be based on your good works. As soon as works become the basis for salvation, salvation stops being a matter of mercy. It starts being something that you are owed rather than something that you are showed. What does verse five say about this? Look at the text. God wasn't forced against His will to be merciful. Notice, it says, "He saved us, according to His mercy." Translation, His act of mercy is in line with, it is because God is merciful. He shows mercy, because in His very nature, He is a God who shows mercy. He's a God who sees people in distress, who sees people in danger, and goes to them to rescue them.

Salvation depends completely, utterly, 100% on God's mercy to sinners. He alone does the saving. We receive the salvation, and all the benefits that come from it. We are the recipients. He alone is the giver. And listen, after points one and two, isn't that the greatest news imaginable? Think about that. God saves people from the hopeless condition of their sins against Him, and the eternal punishment that we deserve based exclusively and only, not on our works, but on His mercy.

If you've rejected the idea that your good works make even the slightest contribution to your salvation, then you are ready for point #3) ***Welcome God's unassisted mercy as your only hope of salvation. Welcome it.*** Embrace it. Smile, and be amazed that the God of the universe would show you mercy, unassisted by you. That is your only hope of salvation. He doesn't need your assistance. He doesn't want your assistance. He doesn't accept your assistance, but He actually completely rejects your assistance. The arrogance of thinking that we assist Him in our salvation, like we're some kind of co-saviors with the God of the universe. That's just insane.

Most people on the planet today suffer from that insanity. And you, Christian, you have the message to free them from that insanity, right here. God saves according to His mercy. Mercy means we give God absolutely no good reason to show Him mercy. We don't even have any good reasons. We can't even give any good reasons to God to save us, but He shows mercy anyway. Why? The text says He shows mercy because that's who He is. He wants to. Ephesians 2:4, "He is rich in mercy." Ephesians 2:5, again, says quote, "By grace you have been saved." Titus 2:11, quote, "The grace of God appeared." And whenever God's grace appeared, it actually brings salvation to anybody. This is why God's grace is called a gift, in Romans 3:24. It's called a gift from God in Ephesians 2:8. And it's called a free gift in Romans 5:15. And listen to 2 Corinthians 9:15. This passage is amazing. It calls God's grace, quote, "His inexpressible gift."

God's grace is so good. His mercy is so free. It's so amazing. That words can't even express how good it actually is. And again, if it is a gift, that means what? It means it's not something that you can earn. Romans 4:4, quote, "To the one who works," to the one who seeks to earn His salvation, by His good works. Quote, "His wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due." As I said before, though, God owes you, me, every human being that's ever lived, He owes us nothing. We can never be put in His debt. Ever.

But if it's a gift, "If it's a gift, preacher, then I can live however I want." No. Why would you continue to sin when you've been treated so mercifully by The One that you've sinned against? "But if it's a gift, it just doesn't feel right to not give anything in return." Your feeling that you have to pay God back for His mercy is another contribution that you must reject. You cannot pay God back. If you try to pay God back, it's another way that people try to take a piece. They try to taste the glory that God deserves alone, for saving sinners.

See, what if this crisis got really bad? Like many people thought, a month, month and a half ago. What if it got so bad and you had no food, you were in dire, desperate, overwhelming need. You were on the brink of death. You didn't have food for weeks and weeks. There's no way to get to it. You have no money. You have no car. You're disabled. You can't even walk. And there's nobody there. You all alone. You are hopeless. You are going to die. And what if one day, somebody knocks on the door, and gives you a month worth of food? What would you think? What would you feel? How would you respond? If salvation is a gift, then the response is gratitude. The response is worship. The response is love. It's obedience. Good works, obedience, following Jesus, all of that is important. It's crucial. It's critical. But it's critical as a result of salvation.

Good works reflect a salvation that's already happened. Good works are never, ever the cause of salvation. They're always the result. And in the context of Titus 3, good works will be done for the good of the ungodly world around us. God uses our lips. He uses our lives. He uses the godliness, and the goodness, and the holiness that comes out of us, as ways, in the words of John 12:32, to lift up Jesus. Our lives, our lips, they lift up Christ. They lift up who He is. They lift up what He did and, they lift up our words. Our lives lift up what He can do in their lives too.

When our lives are lived in holiness and obedience to him. Our good works don't have the power to save, only God does. And He shows us His mercy, he shows us His kindness, he shows us His compassion, by giving us a person. When you accept the hopelessness of your condition, and when you reject any contribution that you make to your salvation, the only hope that's left to you is what? It's Jesus. It's Jesus. Matthew 1:21, "Call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Acts 15:11, "We will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus." 1 Timothy 1:15, "Jesus came into the world to save sinners." So, Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." All your hope, all your trust, all your faith, must be in Him, and in Him alone.

And listen. Faith, trust in Jesus is not a work that God rewards either. We don't have faith in our faith. Faith is a gift from God, as we saw in Ephesians 2:8. Faith is a gift of God's grace to those that He shows mercy to. Why? Romans 4:5, "To the one who does not work, to the one who is not trying to earn His salvation by His good works, but instead believes in God who justifies, who rescues, who saves the ungodly." So, just let me pause there, and just think about that. God does not save the good. God does not save the godly. Go look at Romans 4:5. Press pause and look at it. He saves the ungodly. Those who do not deserve mercy. Those who deserve punishment. He rescues, he saves, he delivers the ungodly.

How does He do that? He believed in a God who saves the ungodly, and knew that his faith is counted as righteousness. He saves ungodly people, people who are hopelessly lost, and condemned in their sins. People who refuse to allow their good works to be a substitute for Jesus. People whose only hope in life and death is in Jesus. Those are the ones that God saves.

And that's how I left the conversation with that person that's so dear to me, I said, I said to her, "Good works to earn salvation is not good news, because it's impossible. You can never do enough. And you can never know if you've done enough." However, unassisted salvation, where Jesus does every single thing you need to be saved. That is good news. That is great news. That is the best news of all. Can there possibly be better news than that? It is possible. Think about it. Is there a sound that it is possible, that could possibly be better to ring in your ears, than the answer to the question, "What saves?" God saves. God saves, and He saves sinners by His mercy. And He saves sinners by His mercy, which He shows, which He gives freely, to all who will trust in Jesus alone as their Savior.

And it's hard for me to end this message, but I'm going to end with the words of a hymn, because I hope that if you have experienced this salvation, that these words will match the overflow of your heart right now, as you think about the mercy of God. Charles Wesley wrote these words many, many years ago, but they are still applicable today. "And can it be, that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood. Died He, for me, who caused His pain?" My sin caused His pain. Why in the world is He dying for me? How in the world do I have any say, any stake in the blood of Christ? For me, who him to death pursued. Amazing love, incredible love. "How can it be, that you, my God should die for me?"

I'll close with the last words of this hymn. "No condemnation now I dread. Jesus and all in Him is mine. Alive in him, my living head en clothed with righteousness divine." "Oh, because you are such a good boy, and did a whole bunch of good works?" No, no. He made you alive. He clothed you in His righteousness. So, bold I approached the eternal throne. It's not eternal Hell. It's the eternal throne in Heaven, and claimed the crown through Christ my own. Let's pray.

Jesus, a passage like this deserves the lips of an angel to preach it, and the people watching got my lips. These are the most profound, important truths that anybody will ever hear about salvation. Please, please use these words from Titus 3:5 to save, and to sanctify the people watching, for the glory of your name. Amen.