

Saved by Grace • Ephesians 2:8-10

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Luther*

1. It was the year 1505 and Martin Luther was 22 years of age
2. The young lawyer was riding his horse when a sudden lightening storm broke out
3. One nearby peel of thunder was so loud his horse reared and Luther was thrown to the ground
4. With the air literally alive with electricity, Luther cried out to St. Anne for protection -
5. Vowing that if she would preserve him - he would become a monk
6. The storm passed, and Luther made good on his promise
7. He joined an order of monks right at the time that he was establishing himself as one of the keenest legal minds of all Europe
8. As Luther studied the scriptures and understood the holiness of God, it began to torment the legal side of his mind -
9. Face to face with God's righteousness, he saw his own sinfulness
10. He was tormented night and day with the thought that God was ready to squash him flat in judgment
11. So Luther, following the pattern of millions at that time, gave himself to extreme acts of penance - trying diligently to expunge his soul of the sense of guilt that was tearing him apart
12. His friends were concerned for him as it seemed every week brought him closer to going insane
13. He fasted, kept long prayer vigils, beat himself, and walked for long distances on his knees
14. All in an attempt to gain some sense that he had paid for his sins and had finally gain God's favor
15. But the sense of guilt only grew
16. One day, while studying Romans, he read 1:17 -

For in it [meaning the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

- a. as he meditated on this verse, something happened inside him that all his many acts of penance had been unable to do
- b. he later wrote of this experience . . .
"Night and day I pondered until . . . I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Therefore I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. . . This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven."

B. *A Child Of The Times*

1. Luther was not alone in his feelings of guilt and terror at the thought of God's wrath
2. He was really a child of the times - multiple thousands of people felt the way he did
3. Because the only church in town, all over Europe was the Roman Catholic church
4. And Rome taught that salvation was a gift dispensed by the Church and bestowed on those who made appropriate devotion to and service of the Church
 - a. by confessing your sins to a priest, he could grant *spiritual* forgiveness to your sins
 - b. but in the *physical* world, you had to perform some act of penance that would "make up for" the sin
 - c. what tormented the souls of so many people like Luther was the question of whether they had done *enough* to merit complete forgiveness
5. But when the light of truth broke on Luther's heart in 1517, it not only set him free,
6. It birthed a spiritual revival that continues to set men and women free from guilt to this very day
7. Luther discovered something that had been lost to the church for 1200 years
8. It's the truth that our salvation is the result of what God does, not what we do

C. Why Begin Here

1. We start with this little bit of history this morning before reading Ephesians 2:8-10, because these are verses that we are so well acquainted with, there's a danger we might read them and say, "Yeah - Yeah - salvation by grace. Heard it! Know it! Tell me something new."
2. It comes as a shock to realize that what we read hear is the very heart of the gospel
3. This is what makes the message of Christ GOOD NEWS!
4. Without this, Christianity is just like every other religion and philosophy of man
5. And while this is what makes our Faith unique, it is also something that was lost to the Church for 1200 years till Luther re-discovered it
 - a. wrote it up
 - b. and posted it on the church door at Wittenburg
6. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit would write it on the tablets of every heart here this morning
7. That those who are already saved would come to kneel before the majesty of God in heartfelt thanks and praise
8. And that the lost would come to receive the gift of forgiveness Jesus offers

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 8-9

{8} For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is

the gift of God,

{9} not of works, lest anyone should boast.

1. The words are simple - but their meaning is staggering!
2. In 27 words, Paul tells us that salvation is not the result of our efforts but is a gift!
3. Salvation is not a wage paid to those who rack up so many brownie points with God
4. It isn't doled out as a reward to the goodie two-shoes
5. It isn't bestowed on those who have lived a life of good works
6. Salvation is by grace through faith
7. The word "grace" means "gift"
 - a. it looks for it's *cause* to the Giver, not the givee
 - b. it is unearned, unmerited favor
8. If I tell my 13 year old son Tyrell I'll give him \$10 to mow the yard,
 - a. when he's done he comes to me to get paid
 - b. I pull out my wallet and give him the money
 - c. that's not grace because it isn't a gift
 - d. I *owe* him because of the work he performed
9. But let's say on the way home one night I decide to take Tyrell out to the store to buy a new BMX bike
 - a. I pick him up and we go to the bike shop
 - b. he picks out a bike, and I buy it
 - c. that's grace because the bike is a *gift*
 - d. the cause of the gift arose out of my own heart because I love my son
 - e. and the gift is a way to show him my love
 - f. I want him to experience the blessing of my love, so I freely chose to give him something
10. Salvation comes to us as a gift! It is not, nor can it ever be a reward or a wage paid for good works
11. Why? So that no one may boast! [v.9]
12. Imagine what heaven would be like if salvation were the result of our works and what kind of lives we lived
 - a. it would be one big brag-fest
 - b. and because Heaven is the place of total justice, God would have to have various levels of reward in heaven
 - c. those who did more would sit higher
 - d. and those who did just the minimum would be at the bottom
 - e. in an attempt to be *just*, heaven would be filled with *inequity* with super rich saints elevated far above the saints in spiritual poverty
 - f. I don't know about you, but that is not a heaven I want to live forever in
13. Because salvation is a gift, there will be no room for boasting in heaven
14. There will only be room for praise and adoration as we give eternal thanks to God for saving us

I dreamt death came the other night
And Heaven's gate swung wide;
An angel with a halo bright

Ushered me inside.
And there to my astonishment,
Stood folks I'd judged and labeled
As quite unfit, of little worth, and spiritually disabled.
Indignant words rose to my lips,
But never were set free
For every face showed stunned surprise
Not one expected me!

15. If salvation is a gift, does that mean everyone will be saved?
a. after all, we know God loves all people
b. does that then mean all will be saved?
16. No - because like every gift, in order to attain it, it has to be *taken*
17. That's why Paul writes,

By grace you have been saved through faith

18. While God extends the gift to all, not all take it
19. You see, the way we lay hold of the gift of salvation is by faith
- a. not merely religious faith
- b. this faith is not merely getting yourself into some kind of a super spiritual vibe
- c. it is faith with specific content and has a definite object
- d. the faith Paul is speaking of here is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ
- e. it's *belief* in Him as the Son of God and God the Son
- f. it is the *firm conviction* that when He died on the cross, He died in my place and paid for the penalty and guilt of my sins - all of them, past present and future
- g. and it is the *trust* that just as Jesus rose from the dead to new life, I now by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit have new life too.
20. This faith is the hand that reaches to lay hold of the gift of salvation
21. To use the illustration of the bike and Tyrell once more;
- a. let say I get home and say to Tyrell, "Let's go get you a bike."
b. all he has to do is respond to the offer and it's his
c. but what if he looks at me and says, "You're kidding!" and goes back to watching TV?
d. what if he ignores me?
e. what if the offer just seems too good to be true so he refuses to go?
f. what if earlier that day he broke my brand new Snap On bench grinder and feels so guilty about it that he feels himself unworthy of such a gift?
22. If any of these get in the way of his simple trust in me and my offer, then the gift will not become his
23. He has got to simply take me at my word and respond
24. Friends - this is how you and I are saved
- a. we simply take God at his word
b. and we lay hold of it
c. and by doing so, it becomes ours

B. Technical

1. Now, before we go on, let me take just a minute to elaborate on something critical here
 2. Look at v. 8 again . . .
- {8} For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**
3. This may sound a little technical so bear with me because it's vital we understand what Paul is saying
 4. Many people read this and think that the phrase "and that not of yourselves" refers to *faith*
 - a. it doesn't
 - b. it refers to the whole previous phrase - "By grace you have been saved through faith"
 - c. we know this because while both the words grace and faith are feminine,
 - d. the word "that" is neuter
 - e. the rules of grammar dictate that we understand the phrase "and that not of yourselves" as referring to the whole issue of salvation by grace through faith
 5. So the point is - this is the way God opens heaven to us - and it is the ONLY way
 6. This is a set of keys - they open many doors
 7. But I could try every one of them on the front door of your house and not a single one would work because they are the wrong key
 8. There is only one key that opens Heaven - Jesus
 9. And God is giving that key to all who will take it
 10. So the critical issue is this: have you taken the gift God is offering you?

C. The Difference

1. Stop and think for a moment on how what Paul writes here separates the Christian faith from every other religion and philosophy of man
2. Some years ago the following headline appeared in the paper "Conversation to Hindu Faith Is Tortuous."
 - a. the article stated, "A West German businessman has completed his conversion to the Hindu faith by piercing himself through the cheeks with a 1/4-inch thick, 4- foot-long steel rod, and pulling a chariot for 2 miles by ropes attached to his back and chest by steel hooks. Others walk through 20- foot-long pits of fire, don shoes with soles made of nails, or hang in the air spread-eagle from hooks embedded in their backs."
 - b. the Muslim is not saved by grace - he or she is saved by works
 - 1) they have to say "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the prophet of God,"
 - 2) they have to say prayers, fast, and make the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca
 - c. Buddhists of course aren't seeking to go to heaven - their idea of the afterlife is the state of nirvana - nothingness
 - 1) the way to attain it is to spend their lives contemplating nothing

- 2) they must think about nothing, do nothing, be nothing
- 3) gee- maybe weekly evening network TV programming is actually a Buddhist conspiracy
- d. closer to home - the Roman Catholic believes attendance at Mass and observing the sacraments will merit him or her salvation
- e. the JW's find solace and promise of reward by going door to door and showing blind allegiance to the dictates of the Watchtower leaders
- f. Mormons are promised eternal life by careful and exacting observance of temple rituals and devoted service to the local bishop and stake
 - 1) family home evening isn't merely a good idea meant to strengthen the family
 - 2) it's a necessary step to attain godhood over some distant planet in the next life
- 3. What a contrast all of this is to Christianity.
- 4. And it's why the Message of Christ is called the gospel - *Good News!*
- 5. Otherwise it would be *old news*

D. V. 10

- 1. So a question arises: If we are saved by grace through faith, and not by works -
- 2. What about works?
- 3. Do they have no place in the Christian life and faith?
- 4. And the answer to that is: Certainly they have a place - we see what it is in v. 10 . . .

{10} For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

- 5. While we are not saved BY works, we are saved FOR them
- 6. From the beginning it was God's plan to save us so that we might live saved lives
- 7. But notice *where* the good works come in our lives
- 8. Observe the order of things Paul reveals here . . .
- 9. He begins . . .

{10} For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works

- 10. It all begins with God's work IN us - in fact, we are His work
- 11. The word "workmanship" is the Greek word 'poema' from which we get our word *poem*
 - a. it means a finely crafted work of art
 - b. it speaks of consummate skill and craftsmanship
 - c. *poema* refers to something that is a reflection of lasting and classical beauty
 - d. far from the fads that are here today and gone tomorrow, this speaks of that which is timeless and always a thing of beauty
- 12. Driving up Highway 33 toward Ojai, you pass a little intersection where there is a guy on the weekends who sets up large logs he's sculpted with a chainsaw
 - a. they're rough and sometimes almost crude in the hurried manner he's cut them

- b. but when you consider the tool he's used, a chainsaw - they're not so bad
 - c. I guess they would make good outdoor art, but you probably wouldn't put on on the glass coffee table in the living room
13. Contrast such chainsaw sculpting with a piece by Michelangelo and the differences are obvious to even a 2 year old
 - a. the master's skill is clearly superior to the guy in Ojai
 - b. and obviously, Michelangelo used better tools
 14. As God works in our lives, he works with the Master's skill
 - a. and he doesn't use a chainsaw
 - b. it is the slow, patient sculpting of just the right tools to make us into our own unique picture of Jesus Christ
 - c. some times God uses a mallet and chisel
 - d. other times a file or a piece of fine sandpaper
 - e. and then, there are the times when He simple breaths on us to blow away the last layer of dust
 - f. but then he moves to some other area of our lives and picks up the mallet and chisel again
 15. You are God's finely crafted work of art - His poem - and each day writes anew line revealing His grace and glory
 16. What His workmanship effects in us is good works
 17. The work He does is translated into our words and actions so that the inner work of the Spirit becomes the outer work of our lives
 18. Rather than good works being something we do to merit God's favor, they simply become the response of our thankful hearts *to* His favor
 19. To return to the previous illustration
 - a. when we are leaving the bike shop and Tyrell is wheeling out his new bike,
 - b. what kind of attitude does he have toward me?
 - c. he is thankful - in fact, he is telling me so
 - d. we load the bike in the back of the Taurus and we head home
 - e. an hour later, after he returns the bike to the garage after riding it all over the place to show it to his friends -
 - f. he comes in the house and offers to mow the yard
 - g. why? Because he wants to show me sincere appreciation for the gift of the bike
 - h. and as he does the yard, his heart is filled with a sense of joy rather than duty because he is doing the yard out of a desire simply to give thanks and bless me
 20. You can always tell the difference between the Christian who is serving out of a sense of duty and the one who is serving out of gratitude
 - a. duty rarely smiles and does the minimum
 - b. gratitude serves with joy and aims at excellence

E. Unique

1. When Paul says at the end of v. 10 that God has "**ordained *beforehand* that we should walk in them**" meaning good works, he implies that there are good works that are unique to each and every one of us

2. Each of us has a unique role to play in the overarching plan and purpose of God
3. Discovering *your* unique place is part of the fun and adventure of the Christian life

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Balance*

1. This passage gives us the perfect balance and understanding of the relationship between salvation, grace, and works
2. We aren't saved *by* good works, but we are saved *for* them
3. While we cannot *earn* salvation, once we have it, it *will be* evidenced by a changed life
4. God has ordained that the life of the saved be a life of goodness and faithfulness
5. Martin Luther, the Father of the Reformation which rediscovered this truth after having been lost for nearly 1200 years remarked, "We are saved by faith alone, but not a faith that *is* alone"
6. Faith and works are linked, and to sever the bond is to do damage to both
 - a. an illustration of this is found in the life of a tree
 - b. leaves use up nutrients in the process of photosynthesis
 - c. as the leaves consume these nutrients, they create an internal suction in the tree that draws up sap from the roots
 - d. without the sap, the leaves and branches would die
 - e. but the continual flow of sap comes only as it is used up by the work of the leaf
 - f. likewise, through faith, we draw life from Christ
 - g. but a continual supply of fresh spiritual nutrients depends on our willingness to consume the old supply through our acts of obedience
 - h. faith feeds works, and works feed faith

B. *Receive The Gift*

1. End with an invitation to receive the gift of salvation God offers
2. Here's how you receive it - by faith
3. And that means to believe in Jesus! [elaborate]