

Saved By Grace

Ephesians 2:4-10

4 . . . God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4-10)

Of the most-often-quoted verses in all of scripture, two among these, verses 8 and 9, are surely near the top of the list . . .

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. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

But may we begin our study today by first considering some of these lesser quoted verses, verses 4-7 and then verse 10, because in these words, we find the real reason “why” God has divinely decided to give us this wonderful gift. Listen again to those words!

4 . . . God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

And verse 10,

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

For all of the millennia that philosophical minds have been pondering the plans and the purposes of God, many answers have been put forward for the reasons “why” God created mankind and why He shows such great favor towards us. One of the most prominent explanations is that God created mankind as a kind of “grand experiment” brought about as a response to the rebellious path that Lucifer and the other fallen angels chose to take, an experiment to see if, after a season of separation from God and after much vain searching for the elusive perfect existence that satan tries to sell to

us, man would eventually turn back from our sinful ways and once again seek to find favor from God.

I don't personally subscribe to that reasoning, but some parts of it do have a kind of merit. Following after the ways of the world, the flesh and the devil is truly a dead-end street, a kind of living death. And the misery of it does cause us to seek other answers. And for those of us who choose to find those answers in God, we can clearly see satan's deceptive countermoves of influencing us in the wrong directions of self-effort and good works as our means of earning back God's favor. And clearly, by these words, we can know that such is not the way of God and the pathway of "good works" can never bring us salvation. But thanks be to God, real answers and real truth are only as far away as these words before us today.

Here, in the simplest of terms we are told how we can find our way back to God. And it is not by working real hard to earn His favor, and neither is it because He looked ahead in history and saw that we were going to choose Him that causes God to then save us.

The reason behind all that God does can be found within the simple, but yet unexplainable, complex mysteries of His Amazing Grace. And it is His grace that we should seek after and that our hearts should hunger and thirst for. And it is in His grace that we will find the favor that we are looking for. Read with me again, these words in verses 4 and 5 . . .

4 . . . God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (Ephesians 2:4-5)

When we studied these words last week, we mentioned that within God's great love, "mercy" must come before "grace". The reason being that our sin must first be dealt with and removed from our souls before "grace" can be applied to our lives. And "mercy", bought by the shed blood of Christ, is God's way of removing our sins from us. But though mercy must first be applied to our sinful souls, the reality is, "Grace" is actually always present and is the source and the well-spring of all that God does in the salvation of our souls.

It is His "Grace" that resurrects the dead souls within us and restores us back to that divine condition that God envisioned when He first created us back there in the Garden of Eden, that place where we were once fully alive and in loving fellowship with Him. In my imagination, I ponder the thoughts of the Lord Jesus, as He, in those first days, knelt down and picked us that dust from the earth and with great love began to form the flesh of the man Adam. Those words in Genesis 2

7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, (Genesis 2:7 (NKJV))

And yes, the “LORD God” spoken about here was the Lord Jesus. We are told that very clearly in John chapter 1 and in Colossians chapter 1. And then, as Jesus finished forming Adam out of the dust of the ground, He lovingly held Adam’s face up next to His own and with divine hope, breathed into Adam the breath of life.

7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground . . . and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
(Genesis 2:7 (NKJV))

And when Jesus breathed life into the body and soul of Adam, it was not just human life. It was also divine life, life filled with the precious presence of God’s Holy Spirit. And there in the Garden, both Adam and Eve lived a blessed and holy life, for how long we don’t know, walking daily in those pleasant conditions, enjoying the comfort of the presence of God. But unfortunately, it was there also that God’s grace became even more complex and unexplainable. It was there that God permitted satan, the evil one, that serpent of hell to have entrance into Adam and Eve’s life.

Again, “grace” takes on many faces and this is one that I still do not comprehend. But because we know that God is always good and always does good, we know also that this was some form of “grace”.

And there, through the temptations of satan, Adam and Eve made their wrong and fatal choices and both of them died. Yes, they knew better. They had been told clearly that they would die. And though they had the wisdom of the Holy Spirit residing within them, they still chose to turn against God and to sin. And as they did, they died! And their death is so well described for us here in these words of Ephesians 2 . . . Verse 1, listen!

1 . . . who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

This is that slow agonizing death that we talked about in last week’s message, the kind of death written about in the Book of Isaiah, the kind of death that will be suffered in hell where . . .

24 . . . their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched.” (Isaiah 66:24 (NKJV))

With this kind of death, our bodies are alive enough to walk around, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, that spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, conducting our lives in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, children of wrath.

And though Adam and Eve did not know it at the time, their choices and their death, became the choices and the death of their children and all of the other children that would come after them, forevermore, including yours and mine . . . that same “living death” where the “worm does not die and the fire is never quenched”.

And we can clearly see those same choices being made today as men and women, mothers and fathers, for whatever reason, and they are many, are right at this moment choosing other activities, other than church, other than God, for their children, and in so doing, they are setting them on the “course of this world” spoken about here, that “broad path” that leads to destruction.

But again, with all that being true, it was never God’s plan or purpose that such things would take place. He simply gave man the “ability to make choices”. And man did! And his choices brought immediate death to him and then consequently to all his descendants.

But thanks be to God, He has not left us to squirm in our never-ending death. In His great love for us, He has lovingly provided us His great mercy and grace. And that is the message that I bring to you today.

And the unction of God’s Spirit compels me to stop and ask you, personally . . . “What about you, personally? Are you perhaps still in that old condition of ‘living death’, each day squirming though the miseries of the course of this world, desperately searching for that elusive answer that will bring relief and peace to your troubled soul?”

And has your search led you down the pathway spoken about here, the one of trying to earn God’s favor by doing good things, good works? Folks, that kind of futile search is the essence of what God is warning us about here in verse 9, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Recall that it was this very kind of thinking that was at the core of the first sin that took place with Adam and Eve. With them, it was the “subtly of self”, similar to a disobedient child whose first learned word is “mine”, and who demands “me do it”.

Did Adam and Eve not also say to God, their Father, “No, Daddy, me do it”. And so then, forevermore since, we have followed their lead and incessantly insisted, “me do it”.

And then also, with great pride, we cry out for our Daddy, the LORD God, to look at us and to approve of us. That is why God put these words for us here in verse 9 again, “not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Praise be to God, He has generously brought all of these things out into the light and has told us plainly within these words that “though your sins be as scarlet”, let me guide you to the perfect relief. And He will!

First, He gives us the presence of His Holy Spirit so that we can begin to hear and understand His words. Then He tells us that yes, left in our old condition, we are dead, completely dead, utterly dead, and utterly incapable of doing anything of goodness or value or worth. And in simple terms like those, and by the power of God’s Spirit, we begin to truly understand.

And folks, please know that it must take place this way, because just as a dead person can do nothing to work their way back to life, neither can we who are dead in our trespasses and sin, do anything at all to bring ourselves back to life. It is ever and always by the gracious hand of God.

Verse 8,

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. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

This is an absolute, unchangeable truth. Salvation and eternal life begins with grace! But not only does it begin with grace, grace is the power and the provision at work throughout each and every step that follows after, even into eternity.

And may I say that yes, as the words of the song tell us, “Grace” truly is “Amazing”. Why is it so amazing? It’s because if we stop to consider “grace” within the context of God’s “Holiness” and of His “justice”, “grace” simply should not take place. “Grace” really seems to be completely inconsistent with “Holiness”.

But thanks be to God, it isn’t! Thanks be to God, “Grace” is simply one of those unexplainable parts of His “holiness”.

But the question that often confuses our evangelical doctrine is, “If not by good works, does man, do you and I, have any part at all that we must play in our receiving His grace. And the answer to that question is “yes”. Just as man took a crucial part with his trespasses and sin, so also in this change back from death unto life, man must also have a part.

And I know that some would take strong argument to my words and say that for grace to be grace, all parts of it must be of God and God alone. And I agree with those words, but here God intentionally and purposefully interjects the requirement for “faith” within us. And yes, I do know that even faith itself is a gift from God.

But these words are plain to understand. Man has a part! We must believe! And not just believe, but believe with such conviction that we place our whole existence within the balance.

Salvation of our souls comes “by grace” “through our faith”. Now, how that eventually works its way out within the doctrines that we profess, arguments will continue until the end of days of this earth about it, whether it was through “predestination” or through “freewill choice”. But undeniably, both “grace” and “faith” are required elements before salvation and eternal life can take place.

And so for today, though we may not fully comprehend the unexplainable grace of God, may we simply and humbly, by faith, open our hands and our hearts and receive His blessed gift of eternal life, this “generous, free and totally unexpected . . . undeserved divine favor, love, clemency, and a share in the divine life of God.”

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. (Ephesians 2:8-9)