Ephesians 2:8-10

The Gift of God

Sermon

I can't think of a better thing to do this morning than to preach grace to you! I can't think of a better text in Scripture to preach grace to you from! In the passage that we just read, we have two verses that are some of the most often quoted verses in the Bible. We remember them in the darkest nights of our soul. When we've tried and failed again and again, they are like a healing balm to the soul. If the Word of God is a sword, these verses are the sharpest tip of the blade. They have caused Reformation to happen. They have lifted countless saints out of the depths of despair.

A couple weeks back we learned the awful diagnosis that God makes of humanity in vv.1-3 – that we come into this world dead to God, that our passions, our will, our walk, are corrupt to the core. We are "by nature children of wrath" – we deserve the wrath of God because of our sin. This was a damning statement on all of humanity – everyone is included. But in vv.4-7, because of His great love, God has shown mercy on sinners, causing those who were once dead to be raised to life IN CHRIST. Now Paul closes this section by highlighting GRACE. Salvation in Jesus is totally owing to the grace of God.

Paul wants to stress that salvation is a gift of God to be received by faith in Jesus. So he writes:

> **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (2:8-9)**

These verses have the power to rescue from sin and death and hell. They are a dagger into the heart of the devil. For anyone who has ever been tempted to fix themselves through fleshly efforts or through the vain attempts of religion, these words have the power to lift them up and set them upon the safe and glorious heights of grace.

Three points for us this morning regarding the Gift of God…

1.God's gift of salvation (2:8)

2.God's gift is not of works (2:9)

3.God's gift of good works (2:10)

1. God's gift of salvation (2:8)

Look at v.8 – "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God".

There are four expressions of "grace" here in v.8:

First, God's gift is "by Grace". Χαρις, or "grace", is a gracious or favorable disposition towards someone even though it may be undeserved or unmerited. When God acts graciously, it is ALWAYS unmerited and undeserved, because fallen humanity doesn't deserve any favor from God. Paul opens

most of his letters with the common Greek greeting, "Grace to you" but then completes it with "from God" (1:1). ***This is God's posture towards His children***. In 1:6 Paul showed us that God's sovereign choice and adoption of His children is "to the praise of His ***glorious grace***". God's grace is to be praised! Therefore, grace must be kept pure…there can be no measure of "merit" on the part of the recipient, lest we rob God of the "praise of His glorious grace".

The *posture* of God is grace, and the *provision* is salvation – "by grace…*you have been saved*".

2,000 years, God sent His Son into the world to save sinners from the penalty they owe to Him. His death as a penalty for sin is given totally as a gift - grace. The gift of salvation now lies in a person – in Jesus. And we are united to Jesus through faith by grace.

The verb for "saved" (perfect passive participle – a strong verbal form) demonstrates that salvation has been completed in the past – 2000 years ago…before you were even born! But the "perfect" tense action has present abiding results. Also the passive voice shows that it has happened to you! You are not initiating this action, it has happened to you, and the action is complete. If I told you that Johnny was hit by the baseball, you would immediately understand that Johnny did not initiate the action…it's something that happened to Him, it's complete, and the massive knot is proof of it. Salvation is something that is provided outside of us, therefore, it is "by grace" – God's divine favor towards us initiated it.

Second, God's gift of salvation is received "through faith". God's *posture* is grace, God's *provision* is salvation, and the *means* to receive salvation is "faith". Again, it's not something you DO! It's something you receive! Now it's important to talk about what faith is and what faith is not. We use the word faith in our modern context in a very different way than what Paul means by faith. We tend to think of faith as merely agreeing with something – "I believe that Jupiter is the largest planet in our solar system" – as though faith is mere intellectual assent. Faith in Scripture is much stronger than that. A better word could be "trust". It's believing something in such a way that your life acts upon it. I can believe a chair will hold me up, but unless I am willing to sit in the chair I don't truly believe. ***Faith responds with obedience and trust***.

A man once walked across a tight rope pushing a wheelbarrow with 200 pounds of weight. He then asked someone, "do you believe I can do it again?", the man responded, "well yes!", to which he said, "Good! You get in the wheelbarrow!" That's the kind of faith we see in the Bible. By faith, Abraham left everything and journeyed to a distant land because God told him to…he didn't know where he was going, but he trusted God (Heb. 11:8). This is the ***quality*** of faith that saves.

Another way to think of faith is faith as "*allegiance*" to God. There are many passages that speak of our faith being put in Jesus as our Messiah or King or Lord. Rom. 10:9 says that we must confess with our mouths that "Jesus is Lord" in order to be saved. Is Jesus your LORD. Is He your King? Do you see yourself as His servant, ambassador, citizen…or do you simply live as you see fit?

John Piper describes faith as *"coming to Jesus so as to find your soul's satisfaction (thirst/hunger) found in Him*". He gets this from John 6:35:

> **I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)**

Notice that *coming* to Jesus corresponds to *believing* in Jesus in this verse, and *hunger* and *thirst* is speaking of our soul's hunger and thirst for God. So ***believing*** in Jesus is ***coming*** to Him ***as bread and as water that satisfies your soul hunger and thirst***. In order to believe in Jesus, you must recognize your spiritual starvation and thirst, and then come to Him for satisfaction.

Are…you…satisfied? If you're here this morning and you realize that you are hungry for something, thirsting for something, and you have tried everything to find peace and satisfaction – just know that only Jesus can fill and quench the spiritual void within.

Notice the third expression of grace in v.8 – "this is not your own doing". "This" here refers to the entirety of salvation. None of it, not one bit, is owing to anything you have done! From beginning to end, salvation is of grace and owing to nothing you have done! Now remember the condition from which we must be saved, "***dead in trespasses and sins***" (2:1). Do you know what dead people do? NOTHING! Up to this point in Ephesians, Paul has shown that all the blessings and benefits we have in Christ are not owing to anything we have done!

Last expression of grace – "it is the gift of God". Hence the title of this message. Salvation is a gift from God, and it is found in a person – Jesus Christ!

Imagine giving your child a gift on Christmas morning and after opening it they run upstairs and bring down their piggy bank to repay you?! First, you do not have the funds to repay God, and second, God doesn't want it! When you try to repay Him it RUINS the glory of the gift! In a world where everything is earned, worked for, bought and sold…where merit is the currency of all relationships…to have something simply given to you is a very foreign concept. This is not our default. If I want a gallon of milk, I work for that gallon of milk and I go and purchase that gallon of milk. If I want to pursue a relationship, I earn her trust, I win her hand in marriage. Her parents don't just give their consent unless I've first proven to them that I will take care of their daughter. God's gift is not like that! His gift is totally unconditional…all of the conditions are met by Jesus Christ! It only needs to be received by faith. There is no other love like it…no grace that is purer than God's!

Grace needs to be learned! It forces us to be humble and vulnerable, it shatters any measure of pride within, it destroys any measure of boasting, it must be trusted…because everything within me says, "I don't deserve to be loved like this! I am a wretch! Look at what I JUST DID!" And yet God says to us over and over and over, "my love and my gift are not based on you! I give them freely to you in Christ to the eternal glory and praise of my grace!" Remember in v.7 the ultimate purpose of raising us and seating us with Christ is "***so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace***." This is TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, in fact it's SO GOOD IT MUST BE TRUE…no man could conceive of a love like this, we are incapable of loving this way – we are indoctrinated by merit - incapable of conceiving of a love like this until we've first been trained by it! It's so hard for us to simply trust grace. We must become like a child that lays himself in the arms of God in total abandon of self-worth and merit. Like a child, will you come to Him this morning and simply receive pure, undiluted grace?

2. God's gift is not of works (2:9)

If you work for salvation, salvation then becomes merit. You become prideful, you boast…why? Because you earned this. You are a good person who does good things and therefore you deserve the

merit of a good outcome. So many people think that Christianity is all about you becoming a good person that earns your way to Heaven…and ironically it is the very opposite of that! Work for salvation is depicted in Scripture as the antithesis of grace. It's an anathema to Paul! Listen to the way Paul compares and contrasts the nature of grace and works to show they are polar opposites:

> **Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. (**that seems pretty easy to understand…if you work for it, you earn it! God doesn't want salvation to be earned**) 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness (**We are ungodly, and God justifies the ungodly, it is not our due, works cannot produce this, it's faith that produces this!) **(Rom. 4:4-5)**
>
> **Listen to Romans 11:6, Paul makes it very plain here:**
>
> **But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace (**the moment you add a "work" or ANY bit of merit…it's no longer grace! It's now something else.) **(Rom. 11:6)**

I heard somewhere that a single drop of oil will contaminate the entire drinking water supply on a submarine. One drop of works, "Believe in Jesus….AND"…you have contaminated grace! "Believe in Jesus…and be baptized". "Believe in Jesus…and be circumcised (that's Galatians)." "Believe in Jesus, and take communion." "Believe in Jesus, and the pope." Believe in Jesus…and be a better person." "Believe in Jesus…and pray for your loved ones in purgatory." "Believe in Jesus…and give to the church." There is no AND….it's faith alone!

During the Reformation period of the 16th century it was "believe in Jesus, and give indulgences". An indulgence was a way to eliminate or reduce punishment owing to sin through payment to the church. The Reformers came on the scene and quoting verses like the ones we are reading they said, "NO! Faith in Christ alone forgives sin." They popularized 5 Latin sola statements that captured the essence of the Reformation movement. "Sola Scriptura" – Scripture alone. "Sola Fide" – Faith alone. "Sola Gratia" – Grace alone. "Sola Christo" – Christ alone. "Sola Deo Gloria" - to the glory of God alone. This is what makes us "Protestant"….we protest any notion that salvation and eternal life can come from any other source but faith in Jesus Christ by the grace of God found in the Scriptures unto the glory of God alone!

Five phrases just in v.8-9 alone, not to mention all that we've read in Ephesians thus far: "By grace, through faith, God's gift, not from you, not of works". These phrases TOTALLY shatter any notion of boasting or pride or merit…They eliminate the idea that the "dead", "sons of disobedience" who are "by nature a children of wrath" (2:1-3) can do ANYTHING to rescue themselves. Paul would say, "I hope this is clear by now…salvation originates with God and is found only IN CHRIST.

3. God's gift of good works (2:10)

Look at v.10 – "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." The NT is clear that Christians should walk in good works, but the NT argues for Christians working in many different ways.

In the book of James, for example, ***James talks about Christian work by closely examining the nature of saving faith.*** His question is essentially, "what is faith"? He asks the question, what kind of faith do you have if you don't actually obey God? Do you have faith to get in the wheelbarrow…so faith alone saves, but what type of faith do you have? That's the way that James argues that Christians ought to walk in good works – true faith works and "faith without works is demonic, dead faith".

It's not faith PLUS works. Nor is it faith WITHOUT works. It's faith THAT works.

In Romans, Paul approaches Christian works by asks the question, "how should we respond to grace received?" Romans 12:1 – *I **appeal to you*** therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (or reasonable worship). Paul ***appeals*** to the Romans to lay down their lives for Christ ***in response*** to God's mercies displayed in the gospel in Romans 1-11. He is going to make a similar appeal in Ephesians later in 4:1 – "I…***urge you*** to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called…" In answer to the question, "how shall we respond to grace received?", Paul in Romans says we are to lay down our lives as living sacrifices.

How does Paul argue for good works HERE in Ephesians 2:10? Paul argues for good works here by once again talking about who we ARE in Christ Jesus. He has talked at great length of who we are in Christ Jesus - chosen, adopted, forgiven, redeemed, inherited, raised, seated, regenerated, saved! - now Paul shows that IN CHRIST we ARE "created for good works".

So good works are not in response to the gift here, good works are a part of the gift in Christ.
Good works are not a means for salvation, but they are integral to the gift received.

Think of a cruise. When you board a cruise everything on board is all-inclusive (so they tell me). When you go to the buffet table it isn't just the salad, and the sides, and the main course that is included…the dessert at the end of the table is included as well. Works are included in the gift! They do not precede the gift, but they are much like the dessert that is included!

So Paul closely ties good works with who we ARE in Christ Jesus. Look carefully with me…

Notice that our good works are the result of God uniting us to Jesus. - "created in Christ Jesus for good works". Who is the actor and who is the recipient of good works here? God is once again the actor here and we are the recipients. God creates, we are those who are created. The ***result*** is that we "walk in good works" but the ***cause*** is "created in Christ Jesus". Formerly we walked according to the world (v.2), now we walk in good works (v.10).

Notice also that we are described as God's "workmanship". The Greek word here for "workmanship" is used in classical Greek to speak of craftmanship – we are HIS CRAFTMANSHIP or WORKMANSHIP. In Rom. 1:20 Paul uses this word to speak of God's creation. Just as God crafted the physical world, so too He has crafted us spiritually in Christ Jesus for good works. We are created by God, and we are crafted by God – the result is…"good works that God created and crafted us for in Christ Jesus". Do you see how good works are a part of the gift?

Notice also that God Himself has "prepared beforehand" the good works that we walk in. So we walk in works…but they are works that God "prepared beforehand"…yet another strong statement of God's sovereignty and providence.

God has created us in Christ Jesus. We are His workmanship/craftmanship. And He is the one who has "prepared beforehand" the works that we walk in.

Works do not earn the gift, they are integral to the gift. Works do not dispense the gift, but works are indispensable to the gift. Works are unnecessary to receive the gift, but works are necessarily included with the gift received. Works are not a prerequisite to the gift, but works are requisite to the gift! The essence of salvation by grace is ruined if we add works – grace is no longer grace (Rom. 11:6). However, Paul talks of the relationship of grace and works AFTER we have been saved:

> **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was *not in vain*. On the contrary, *I worked harder* than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)**

Paul received grace, and it changed him. How do you ensure that grace received is "not in vain"… you work hard for God! For Paul, grace carried with it something important – good works. "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that was with me." God's grace not only saves, God's grace works hard…if God's grace doesn't work hard, God's grace isn't truly received – it's a "vain grace", it's an "empty grace."

> ***To Paul, a Christian who has received the gift and yet does not walk in good works is a FOREIGN CONCEPT. The Holy Spirit that has regenerated you now empowers you to walk in good works!***

Have you received the gift? It's offered to you freely…will you trust in Christ this morning? If you want to receive grace this morning know there is nothing you could do to earn it. But you must put your trust in Him – you have to get into the wheelbarrow. You must confess that "Jesus is Lord". You must come to Him as someone who is hungry, thirsty, and looking to find their souls satisfaction. Are you hungry? Are you empty? Are you thirsty? Do you need His forgiveness? Then you qualify!

What should you do? While we take communion in a moment, ask yourself if you're ready to make this commitment to God. Then say a simple prayer. Confess to Him that you are a sinner and that you need what Jesus has provided on the cross for your sins. Confess that He is Lord and that you are ready to surrender your life to Him.

It's as simple as that…if it were more difficult – grace would not be grace!

COMMUNION

Communion is a celebration and a time of remembrance that we have received a gift – the Lord Jesus Christ. The bread reminds us of His life given as a gift for us. The cup reminds us of the gift of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for our sins. Through His life and through His death we have forgiveness of sins, we have the righteousness of Christ given for us…we have the gift.

If you have received this gift we invite you to take communion with us this morning in celebration of the gift. If you have not yet received the gift, while we sing this next song would you just think of this great offer of grace that God is offering. What is holding you back from receiving this gift? We'd love for you to consider receiving this gift this morning and taking communion with us in celebration of the gift.

(Give instructions for communion and pray)