Sermon Series: What Does It Mean to Be Saved?
Sermon Title: By the Grace of God

Text: **Psalm 145:13b-16 -- The Lord can be trusted in all that he says. He is loyal in all that he does. 14 The Lord lifts up people who have fallen. He helps those who are in trouble. 15 All living things look to you for their food, and you give them their food at the right time. 16 You open your hands and give every living thing all that it needs.**

Introduction: His name meant "**Mohammed is the Greatest**," but today, ***Mohammed Akbar*** doesn't follow the teachings of Islam. Instead, he has become a follower of Jesus Christ. When **the Soviet Union** attacked Afghanistan in 1979, Akbar fled to Iran. However, he didn't find peace there. You see, that was the same year that the **Shah of Iran** abandoned his throne and the **Ayatollah Khomeini** began his reign. By December of that year, the revolutionary police were patrolling the streets to enforce the "***accepted code of behavior***." It was in that environment that Akbar ducked into a movie theater one night. On the screen and in his own language was ***The Jesus Film,*** and it changed his life. As the story climaxed, Akbar thought, "***This Jesus is going to call down fire and destroy all these people who are hurting him***." WHEN JESUS FORGAVE THEM INSTEAD OF DESTROYING THEM, SOMETHING HAPPENED TO AKBAR. "***At that instant, I said in my heart, that's for me,***" he said. From that point on, his life went in a completely new direction. **God changed his life, and Akbar changed his name**. Now he is ***Akbar al-Masiih,*** which means "**The Messiah is Greatest**."

I really love to hear stories of people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. The fact that God can and does redeem sinners who want nothing to do with Him is truly miraculous and DEMANDS THAT WE MARVEL AT HIS GRACE (*undeserved favor*). Knowing that the Bible says in **Romans 3:23** that **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (*i.e. which includes His moral perfection*), we cannot help but be humbled by the words that follow: **and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus** (**Romans 3:24**). The word "**redemption"** means "**to be ransomed in full". The term was used especially of purchasing a slave in order to set him free. *So, Christ has ransomed or redeemed us from slavery to the curse of the Law, which refers to the impossible burden of trying to live up to the standards established by God's holy laws and the penalty which results which is DEATH*** (**Galatians 3:13-14 -- Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith**). ***He has done this for no other reason than because He loves us and is graciously inclined to do so***.

This morning, we're going to begin a new preaching series that will take us through October that I'm calling "**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SAVED**." ***We'll be looking at how Christ's redemption applies to our world and the church***. **We'll consider the doctrines of election, the gospel call, what it means to be born again, and a number of other very important topics**. Today, I want to begin by addressing what theologians refer to as **God's common grace**. **Why start here**? Well, I suspect that for virtually all of us, this is the very first way that we encounter God. Let me explain what I mean by addressing three questions: **(1)** What is common grace? **(2)** What are the evidences of common grace? And **(3)** what are the reasons for common grace?

WHAT IS COMMON GRACE? Very simply, it refers to **the blessings of God that are common to EVERYONE, believers and unbelievers alike.** By way of background, you may remember that when **Adam and Eve** rebelled, their relationship with God was corrupted and they earned eternal death (**Genesis 2:17 -- but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die; Genesis 3:14 -- By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return**). Because mankind has inherited this sinful disposition from Adam (**Romans 5:12 -- Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned**), the same can be said of us today. We are alienated from God and subject to death (**Romans 6:23a – For the wages of sin is death**). **This means that once people sin, God's justice requires that we be cut off from experiencing any good from Him and condemned to Hell** (**See 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9**). In fact, this is what happened to the angels who turned against Him (**2 Peter 2:4 -- … God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment**).

As we read the Scriptures, however, we discover that Adam and Eve did not die immediately and neither have billions of their descendants to this very day. ***Instead, mankind has enjoyed countless blessings in this world and for no other reason than that in it is in God's nature to be gracious***! Here's an example for you to think about. **Back in 1928, a Scottish scientist named Alexander Fleming was working with bacteria—messy, dangerous work. He went on vacation and left some petri dishes out.** When he returned, he noticed something strange: a mold had grown, and around that mold, the bacteria had died. That mold was penicillin—the world's first antibiotic. **Think about that for a second: SOMETHING THAT COULD HEAL INFECTIONS, THAT COULD STOP DEATH IN ITS TRACKS WAS DISCOVERED COMPLETELY BY ACCIDENT, AT LEAST FROM MAN'S PERSPECTIVE, BUT NOT FROM GOD'S. HE WORKS ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF HIS WILL ACCORDING TO EPHESIANS 1:11**. ***Penicillin was a gift from God to mankind***. And when it was finally produced and distributed, it didn't matter who the patient was—rich or poor, kind or cruel, moral or immoral. Penicillin *healed without asking for credentials. That's common grace*

Now, one more thing, before we continue. **Common grace** is distinct from what we have come to call "**saving grace,**" or the undeserved favor of God that is applied exclusively to believers, resulting in their salvation. That grace is mentioned in **Ephesians 2:8-9,** where we're told, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast**." **While everyone benefits from God's common grace, not everyone benefits from God's saving grace**! Now let's look for some additional evidence of God's common grace.

WHAT ARE THE EVIDENCES OF COMMON GRACE? When we consider the world in which we live and contrast it with the Hell we deserve, it isn't difficult to see evidence of God's common grace. Here are a few for you to consider:

- **In the Physical Realm** – **The mere fact that we continue to exist when the wages of sin is death** (**See Romans 6:23**) **and that Christ holds the universe together in its current state** (**Colossians 1:17 -- And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together**) **is evidence of common grace**. **Moreover, the earth does not produce ONLY thorns and thistles which God said would come as the result of His judgment in Genesis 3:17-19 (cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you**

shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread), **but also food and materials for other necessities of life (Psalm 145:15-16 -- All living things look to you for their food, and you give them their food at the right time. 16 You open your hands and give every living thing all that it needs).** In fact, God is responsible for the growth of living things by causing the sun to rise and rain to fall (**Matthew 5:44-45 -- He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust**). Even the beauty of the natural world is evidence of God's common grace. Though nature itself is **cursed** (**See Genesis 3:17-19**), **subjected to frustration** and **in bondage to decay** (**See Romans 8:20-21**), much beauty still remains for us to enjoy. You just have to be able to appreciate it.

A woman was grading a science test at home that she had given to her elementary-school class and was reading some of the results to a friend. The subject was "The Human Body," and the first question was: "***Name one of the major functions of the skin***." One child wrote: "***To keep people who look at you from throwing up***." Aaah, common grace at work!

- **In the Intellectual Realm** – **Though Satan is a deceiver and the father of lies** (**See John 8:44**), **and he is referred to as the god of this age** (**See 2 Corinthians 4:4**), **people living in the world are not totally given over to deception or lies.** We can grasp a certain amount of truth both in our UNDERSTANDING OF GOD (**John 1:9 -- The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world**) AND THE WORLD (**Proverbs 2:6 – The Lord gives wisdom. From His mouth comes knowledge and understanding**). **In a very real sense, then, every new scientific discovery and technological advance carried out by unbelievers is the result of God's common grace**. Have you ever stopped to give thanks to God for any of these? Do you thank Him for new medical technologies that save lives or for new technologies that improve the quality of life for us?
- **In the Moral Realm** – **God's common grace also keeps people from becoming as evil as they could be**. We refer to this innate sense of right and wrong as a **CONSCIENCE** (**Romans 2:14-15 -- For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them**). **It guides us to approve of the moral standards found in the Bible in spite of possessing a sinful nature** (**See Luke 6:33**). **The conscience even acts as a warning system that reminds us of God's final judgment** (**See John 16:8, 11**).

However, in the case of some who persist in evil, God gives them up to greater and greater sin (**Romans 1:24 -- Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator**). I'm sure it was with KNOWLEDGE IN MIND that someone once said, "**Once we assuage our conscience by calling something a 'necessary evil,' it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil**." ***Take the lady who accidentally locked her keys in her car, before the days of cell phones. Unable to gain access, she called her husband, who was understandably quite annoyed by her situation***. He quickly located the second set and left for the fifty-mile drive to the friend's house where his wife sat waiting. Not long after that, the woman just happened to check the other doors on the car and discovered that the back one on the passenger side was unlocked. Surprised, she opened it and

retrieved her keys. Then her friend asked how she was going to break the news to her husband since he was now on the road. After a few moments, the woman replied, ***"I'm going to do what any red-blooded American wife would do."*** Then she opened the car door again, through the keys on the seat, pushed down the lock button, and slammed the door shut!

- **In the Societal Realm** – **The existence of various organizations and structures in human society is also evidence of God's grace**. Rather than being stricken dead, Adam and Eve were permitted to start a family. This idea of family has become ***the basic building block of any society*** and the primary way in which children learn about God (**See Deuteronomy 6:1-2; Ephesians 6:3**). Even government is meant to be a blessing to mankind. It is **God's servant who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer – Romans 13:4**)
- **The Spiritual Realm** – Christians are commanded to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (**See Matthew 5:44**). We are also told to do good to all men (**See Galatians 6:10**) because this reflects the kindness of God who is good to all and has compassion on all He has made (**Psalm 145:13-14 -- The Lord can be trusted in all that he says. He is loyal in all that he does. The Lord lifts up people who have fallen. He helps those who are in trouble**).

WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR COMMON GRACE? Here are three for us to consider.

- **To Redeem More Believers** – God bestows common grace on mankind because He loves the world. The Apostle Peter tells us that the Day of Judgment is being delayed so that more people will be saved (**See 2 Peter 3:9-10**). Rather than immediately destroy Adam and Eve for disobeying Him, God chose to suffer long with humanity so that many more would have the opportunity to come to faith in Christ.
- ***To Silence Unbelievers*** – On the day of God's final judgment, every mouth will be stopped so that no one will be able to complain that God has acted unjustly (**Romans 3:19 -- Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God**).
- **To Glorify God** – Though all of man's activities are tainted by sin, they nonetheless reflect the excellence of our Creator and bring glory to Him. So, in the exercise of our dominion over the earth, and in the evidence of His provision, we declare His glory. That's what the Psalmist is doing in **Psalm 96:1-3 is calling us to do when he says, "Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! 2 Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.**

Conclusion: I hope that this morning you have developed a sincere appreciation for God's COMMON GRACE as it is revealed in the PHYSICAL, INTELLECTUAL, MORAL, SOCIETAL, AND SPIRITUAL realms. More than that, it is my prayer that you will be so profoundly touched by the grace of God in this world that you will talk about it with others so that they, too, acquire a heart of gratitude toward God. **Do you remember the Mercedes Benz TV commercial that showed their car colliding with a cement wall during a safety test?** Someone then asked the company spokesman why they did not enforce their patent on the Mercedes-Benz energy-absorbing car body, a design evidently copied by other companies because of its success. He replied matter-of-factly, "***Because some things in life are too important not to share***." Helping others identify evidence of God's grace in our world may be one of the most important things you ever do for people. It might even result in some coming to experience His saving grace.