



The Power of Grace

March 30, 2014

Ephesians 2:8-9

Clint Pressley

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

(Pastor prays)

Ephesians 2:1-10 is really a long sentence; almost a paragraph. But right in the middle of this paragraph, you have verses eight and nine. These two verses have been called, “the heartbeat of the apostle Paul’s Gospel.” Ephesians 2:8-9 formed the bedrock. And from this foundation, we are able to build our lives better. We are able to build lives that are trustworthy, lives that are stormproof. You ask anybody in construction and they will tell you that what you build on is important. The psalmist knew that when he said in Psalm 11:3, *“if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”* Ladies and gentlemen, the foundations are destroyed. Look around you. Just take a snapshot from this past week in the news. We watched Hobby Lobby—a Christian-owned company, owned by a man who loves Jesus and loves God’s Word. He and his wife serve the church and have given lots of money to churches around the United States. Hobby Lobby is standing in front of the government as it seeks to mandate the Christian company. It’s mandating the insurance policies that cover paying for employees to have what amounts to abortion on demand. Now you think, *What does that have to do with me?*

Well, this goes in front of the Supreme Court, and if Hobby Lobby loses, our religious liberties from that point forward will change.

Turn the page and let's look at another news story. World Vision, one of the largest international relief organizations in the world, is a Christian organization. When I say Christian, it's not just in name. They are Christian in their statement of faith. That is to say, they believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, they believe in the summation of Christian faith as described in the Apostles' Creed. That organization, which has been historically and evangelically Christian, was set to allow the hiring of people in same sex marriages, thereby having that covered in their insurance. They were going to do that. There was an outrage in the Christian community, and thankfully, World Vision has reversed that decision. And I applaud their courage to do so. But the fact that it was on the table for discussion lets you know that the foundations are shaking.

Let's turn the page again and go across the ocean to London, England. England, the land that gave us most of what we believe as Protestants. In the 1620 Mayflower Compact, we get so many of our evangelical Protestant beliefs. But last week in London, at least 15,000 aborted babies were incinerated. They were burned at hospitals. And the reason they did this was part of a waste-to-energy effort so that the burning of those little babies was used to heat the hospitals. You can just Google it and you'll find, "A Holocaust in London." London! The city that gave us Charles Haddon Spurgeon who would stand on Sundays and preach. Thousands would come and hear him preach the gospel with such authority. London, England! Where Alexander Maclaren, the great Baptist expositor, who preached through almost all of the books of the Bible. London, England. It gave us Martin Lloyd Jones, a man who took seven years to get through the book of Ephesians. You get bored with me getting through Ephesians. It could be worse. London, that has the Anglican church, The Church of England. They used to have a gospel. They used to have something they could believe in. But it's gone.

Look, don't walk around here thinking that the walls of doctrine are not

important. Don't walk around saying that just loving Jesus is enough. Look around at the churches in our country that have abandoned the gospel. The Episcopalians, they used to have a gospel. They used to have a reason to go with their missions. Most of the Lutherans used to have a gospel. The Disciples of Christ, they used to have a gospel. And if we don't keep building fences, if we don't set parameters, if we don't drive pylons, if we don't clearly define what we believe, in 20 years we won't have a gospel either. You see, we must be clear on what we believe, and we must be clear on why we believe what we believe. And at the very bottom of what we believe is our understanding of how salvation works; how we are saying we are connected to God through something that happened on a cross 2,000 years ago. And in this short little passage, Paul offers up an explanation. The key to understanding this passage is a little phrase: God's grace. God's grace. Let that roll around in your heart. God's grace. We will say it in a sentence like this:

You Can Build Your Life on the Foundation of God's Grace

Let's take these verses and walk through them. Here's the first thing I want you to notice. If you're gonna understand how salvation works, the one thing we must nail down is, number one:

It Is God Who Makes the Purchase

In Ephesians 2:5, Paul tells us that even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive in Christ. It is God who makes the purchase. Let's back up a little bit. In Ephesians 1:7, Paul tells us that in Christ, we have redemption. That word, *redemption*, is from the slave market. It is the idea of someone purchasing another human being. We have been purchased from the slavery of sin through His blood. The price paid was the blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross so that God forgives us of our sin. It comes out of the riches of His grace. You see, it is God's gift of grace. He bought you. If you're a Christian, with the blood of Jesus, you've been purchased. If you've been bought, then you belong to Him. Some of you in the sanctuary this morning have adopted children. God directed you to adopt the child. And the truth is, you're sitting here and you love that adopted child. I know what I'm talking

about here. You love that adopted child more than you have the vocabulary to express. In fact, you would be willing to die for that child that was not naturally yours, but it's yours by adoption. Now, if you and I, as sinful as we are, can have that kind of feeling for an adopted child, how much does God—who is higher and holier and more righteous—love His adopted children? Now, when you think about salvation, when you think about what it takes for you to be a Christian, when you think about all that God has done through the blood of Jesus at the cross, then we come to the conclusion that it is God who makes the purchase. So if God makes the purchase, then, number two:

It Is God Who Makes the Agenda

God makes the purchase, and, if that's the case, then God sets the agenda. All throughout Ephesians, Paul is showing us how God sets the agenda. Let me illustrate. From chapter one verse three, God blesses us. In verse four, God chooses us. In verse five, God predestined us and He adopts us. In verse seven, God redeems us and forgives us. Now we get to chapter two, and God shows us mercy. God loves us. God makes us alive, and God, by grace, saves us. But when He does, something happens. We don't just believe in Jesus and keep living like we've been living. God doesn't come to us on our terms. We are drawn to Him on His terms. In fact, Jesus Himself, when He preached, said that very thing. We have four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. John is different than the others. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic Gospels because they're very similar. The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of them; it's just 16 chapters. He writes in a real clip fashion. In fact, in chapter one of Mark, he just skipped the boyhood of Jesus. In chapter one, Jesus is preaching. And in Mark 1:14-15, you hear what Jesus calls the gospel. Let me read it to you. Mark 1:14-15: *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* You see that God has set the rules of engagement for everyone who will receive this gift of salvation. Salvation doesn't happen unless it's through faith, and faith is not real unless it's accompanied by repentance. Let me circle back around and see if we can get that process. I want you to see the logic. Salvation

doesn't happen unless it comes through faith, and faith is not real unless it is accompanied by repentance—by a changed life, by turning and going the other way. For instance, maybe you were in a sexual sin when you saw Christ and you believed in Christ, and you put your faith in Christ. And when you did, you repented of that sin; you turned from that sin. Or maybe you were a chronic liar. You just couldn't tell the truth, and when you saw Christ and you believed and put your faith in Christ, you repented of that lying; you turned from it. Or maybe it was pride or gossip or hatred or anger or lust or whatever you come up with. He makes this purchase. He buys us. He sets the agenda that we believe and repent.

We come away from that sin. You see, by grace, you are saved, through faith. That faith is seen in repentance. Let's see what we've got so far. Now, God makes the purchase, and He does that at the cross. God sets the agenda. Let's look at another point, number three:

It Is God Who Takes the Initiative

Paul wrote most of the New Testament, including the Book of Romans. Romans is what you might call his magnum opus. It is the book that has all of the theology. I always heard that you need wisdom in your life to be able to preach Romans. So I had made up my mind early on in the ministry that I would probably have enough wisdom to preach Romans when I got to the age of 40. It turns out that's not the case. So I'm going to wait until I get to 50 and maybe preach through Romans. But in Romans chapter three, Paul does something. He quotes Isaiah in Romans 3:10-12. Listen to what Paul says: *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*

Let's bring it a little closer to home. Down here in Ephesians, Paul says that we were dead. Now, he's using vivid language so that we understand our condition before salvation. That if something good is going to happen, then it is God who makes it happen. In this passage, Paul makes it very clear that

salvation is not based on a human. Here's a simple way to understand it, but hopefully it's clear. Salvation is not a reward, salvation is a gift. You see, you are rewarded when you do something. When you do something good, if you run fast or jump high or sell enough, you get a reward. That includes working hard—you get a reward. Salvation is not a reward, it's a gift.

Let me illustrate it from my own life. In my house, we have a dog that is almost a year old, a little Beagle. His name is Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I'm not kidding. He's got a little tag around his neck: Charles Haddon Spurgeon. That dog is not out of the puppy stage yet. In fact, yesterday he ate one of Mack's hunting boots he got for Christmas. It was a nice pair of boots. Spurgeon just destroyed it. I had to stop my son from doing dog murder yesterday. So we're trying to teach the dog a little bit and trying to reward him as we do. One of the things we're teaching him is for him to get into his little dog bed when it's time for us to leave. So we're leaving the house and don't want him loose in the house because he tears up everything so we put him in the dog bed. And so what Connie has done is she's trained him to know that if he gets in the bed, he gets a little dog biscuit. Well, I saw that and I thought that when you reward him a little bit, he does pretty good. But, what if you reward him a lot? So I just dropped him a handful. And look, I can go to that can where we keep his biscuits, and he can see me. He just goes and runs and gets in the bed because he knows that there is a reward. So you do something good, you get a reward. So many people have that understanding of what salvation is. "If I'll just do enough, if I can be nice enough, if I go to Sunday School enough, if I say the right things and wear the right clothes if I read the Bible enough, if I can do these things, then God's going to reward me." But that is not how salvation works. It is God taking the initiative.

Paul says it like this in Romans 5:8—think about this now—*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. God hasn't put you on a treadmill making you run and run and run and work and work and try and try and strain to earn His love. Don't think that if you just do enough, He will finally love you. That's not what that passage says. This passage says that even when we were sinners, God loved us. When you were looking at pornography, God loved you. When you were committing adultery, God loved you. When you were lying to your spouse, God loved you. When you're

cheating your boss, God loved you. When you're having those bad thoughts, God loved you. When you were losing your temper, God loved you. When you were drunk, God loved you. When you were strung out on drugs, God loved you. When you were still a sinner, that's when Christ died for you. Look, He didn't wait on you to get ready for Him. He's not waiting on you to get yourself prepared and get ready for Him. You were dead. Listen to the language. Dead people don't get ready. Dead people don't get better. Do you get the picture? They just decay.

Unless there's some intervention, and here's the intervention. God makes the purchase and God sets the agenda. God takes the initiative. It probably could be all summed up in this last point, number four. I'll say it like this:

It Is God Who Does the Work

Paul's going out of his way so that we understand—to make sure we don't mix this up—so that we understand that we don't do anything on our own to earn our salvation. In verses eight and nine, he gives us three phrases so that he is clear that when you walk out of here, you understand that salvation is by grace alone. Look what Paul says in verses eight and nine: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.* You didn't do anything to get this. Paul says that you don't have anything to do with it. Here's the second phrase in the same verse: *it is the gift of God.* You didn't earn it; you get gifts for nothing. You have a birthday, you get another year older, and people give you a gift. You didn't do anything to get it. Here's the third phrase, it's down in verse nine: *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Those are three phrases that remind us that we have nothing to be proud of, nothing to boast about, nothing to make us feel any better than anyone else. Being a Christian and being prideful is an oxymoron. There is no such thing as a prideful Christian. It is an oxymoron with a heavy emphasis on the *moron*. When you know it's not our own doing, that it's the gift of God, it informs us how we view other people. This informs what you think of other people. This

informs your attitude to other people who might be struggling with sin that you have never had any trouble with. I have never, never, never been drunk a day in my life. I've never had a drink, never been drunk, never took any kind of drug. It's easy to slip over and think badly of someone who struggles terribly with addiction. But if you understand God's grace, it didn't take any more of the blood of Jesus to forgive you of your sin than it does a person struggling with drugs. Let's take a step into something that's hard to even talk about, homosexuality. And we've got to figure out a way to deal with those who are struggling with homosexuality in a way that is not condescending. We need to communicate in a winsome way that we understand the struggle of sin. We've had a struggle of sin and it's God's grace that has saved us. It's not as a result of works.

John Bradford was an English reformer, a preacher in England back in the 16th century. He was a Protestant. During that time, England was ruled by a lady named Mary Tudor. History has named her "Bloody Mary" because she killed so many Protestant preachers. John Bradford was a pious and godly man; he loved God's Word, he loved to preach, and he preached joyfully. He loved God's people, and he preached free grace. Well, that got him in trouble with Bloody Mary. On July 1, 1555, when he was my age—45 years old—they tied him to a stake and burned him alive. And as the flames rose up from his shins and into his thighs and onto his torso, he turned to John Laff, who was dying there with him—they both had been condemned to die—and he said, "Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night." What courage did it take to do that? But, you know, courage wasn't the only thing that John Bradford had. John Bradford understood grace. While he awaited his own execution in the Tower of London, he witnessed common criminals who were charged with everything imaginable in London at that time executed. There was one such common criminal who had committed murder, and the day came for that criminal to be taken to his execution, John Bradford, looking from the jail cell as the man was taken to his death, Bradford said, "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford." There, but for the grace of God, go I. Paul said it like this in chapter two verse three: *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh,*

carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. He tells us that. We were all once children of wrath, by nature, just like everybody else. But it's God that does the work. It is God who secures the outcome. It is God who gives the gift. It is God who sacrifices His Son. It is God who raised Jesus from the dead. It is God who declares us righteous. It is God who offers us hope. And all of this work of God is applied to us in verse eight: *For by grace you have been saved through faith.* The word is *faith*. That word means to trust by grace. You have been saved through trusting. We all live by faith in something. We'll walk out here today, and maybe you stop by the water fountain and get a drink of cool water and you put your lips down to that cool water and you are trusting that the water that will come out of that water fountain is not filled with disease. Today you might go sit down at the restaurant, and put a plate is put before you, you're going to eat it trusting that it is not filled with disease and not going to make you sick. You walk into a dark room and as you do, you take your right hand and flip on the switch, you're trusting that the lights are going to come on. We all have faith and trust in something. Now listen, the work of pleasing God enough to be saved has been done. It is secured and finished in the perfect life of Jesus: the atoning death of Jesus on the cross and the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. We add nothing to the finished work of salvation.

We just believe. You see, *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.* Friends, you can build your life on the foundation of God's grace. He makes the purchase at the cross. He sets the agenda. He takes the initiative. We were dead, and He makes us alive. If you believe that God does the work, through faith in Christ, this very day, you can be saved.

(Pastor prays)