

Safe! By God's Grace – Titus 3:4-7

In 1987 an 18 month old little girl was wandering around her back yard in Texas, and fell 22 feet into an abandon well, becoming stuck
She was quickly dubbed “Baby Jessica” the watching nation
And due to her age, as well as the fact that the well was very narrow, very dark, and its walls at risk of collapsing . . .
Rescuers were unable to simply lower a rope and extract her

So for two days, rescuers labored around the clock to devise and implement an elaborate plan of digging a parallel well to get her out
Finally, after 55 grueling hours, they were able to reach her and pull her to safety
Although numb from the cold, dampness, and cramped position; dehydrated and hungry from a lack of food/water, her injuries were minimal, and a watching nation breathed a huge sigh of relief

I was a junior in college at that time, and I remember that Baby Jessica was absolutely helpless and could do nothing to get herself out of that well
The story was *not* that Baby Jessica clawed her little 18-month old body up the sides of that well, scratching and clawing her way back to life – that didn't happen
Her fate was completely in the hands of her rescuers; Left to herself, she had no chance

That's exactly the situation we're in when it comes to our *salvation* – we're utterly powerless to save ourselves, and completely dependent on God to rescue us
The more we understand that, the more amazed and confident we'll be that we are Safe!
By God's grace
That's the thrust of our text this morning – read **Titus 3:4-7**

Let's start with this . . .

We're saved by God's grace (4-5, 7)

Flow of this passage – *When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us . . . [then tells us how and by what means]. . . so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*
The when of v4 is just the right time

While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom 5:6)
At just the right time, after 55 hours of grueling work, the TX rescuers saved Baby Jessica
At just the right time, after giving the life of his Son, God saved us

- That's grace – the unmerited favor of God toward us, fueled by his goodness, loving kindness, and mercy
It's God's work to deliver us from our sin and its consequences
Jesus embodied that grace
The goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior (4) refers to Jesus coming into our world to live, die, and rise again on our behalf (2:11)
That grace that Jesus embodies, saves us
So when it says *he saved us* (5) it means – God rescued us from our well, our sin, by forgiving us, cleansing us, renewing us, and declaring us righteous in his sight
That's salvation – rescue, forgiveness, cleansing, renewal, and justification
- While the grace that saves us is available to all, it's not *received* by all; it's not appropriated by all – because not all have *faith*

Faith is the trigger that releases the flood of God's grace in us

Eph 2:8 – *By grace you have been saved through faith.*

God's grace was made effective for you, when you trusted him to save you
That's faith – the simple, confident assurance that God can/will save you by his grace

The wonders of that can never be over emphasized

Christ took the hell He didn't deserve so we could have the heaven we don't deserve
Go figure

If you're not amazed/stunned by the thought of God's saving grace, then you either don't recognize God's cost to offer it, or your unworthiness to receive it

What's more, we're saved by God's grace . . .

• **Not our works**

Just as Baby Jessica was saved by receiving the help her rescuers offered

We're saved by receiving the grace God offers; Period

She couldn't save herself, neither can we

In other words, works have nothing to do with it; In fact, it wouldn't be grace if they did

5 – *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness*

Not because of the things we do; Doesn't get much clearer than that

It's not what we do that gains, earns, or keeps our salvation

Even things done *in righteousness* – with a pure or righteous motive

That's why baptism doesn't save you; Or confirmation; Or taking communion; Or serving the poor; Or going to church; Or anything else you *do*

The things we *do* in no way gains or ensures or maintains our right standing before God

They don't *make* us righteous in God's eyes; And don't *keep* us righteous in God's eyes

- Over and over again the Bible tell us that works don't cut it

Gal 2:16 – *A person is not justified [saved] by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ*

Gal 3:11 – *It is evident that no one is justified before God by the law [by works]*

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

Think of it this way . . .

Works don't gain or ensure your salvation anymore than good behavior makes you a child of your parents

You're a son or daughter through birth just like you're a child of God through faith

- If you think good works are necessary for your salvation, you're not only thinking unbiblically, but you're in trouble
Because 2000 years under a law of works proved that nobody could do it; Nobody could be saved by works; You *are* going to fall short

And yet in religion after religion, church after church, all kinds of *man-made* traditions and works are added and deemed necessary, in order to *be* saved and *stay* saved
That results in bondage – it results in a works-based salvation that says “if I don't get that checked off and this checked off, I won't go to heaven”

If you're thinking – "Well, it can't all be wrong, it's been done that way for hundreds and hundreds of years"

Who cares? If it's not in the Bible, it's bogus; It's man-made, and unnecessary

Rom 3:20 – *By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight*

If people couldn't be saved by keeping God's law, what makes you think you can be saved by keeping *man's* law?

Works have their place in the Christian life, but they are not *necessary* for salvation, nor are they a means to *keep* it

We're saved by God's *grace* . . .

Because of God's mercy (5)

5 – *He saved us . . . according to his own mercy*

Mercy is the disposition of God to withhold the punishment we *deserve*

It's the other side of the coin of grace, which is the disposition to bless us with the salvation we *don't* deserve

- Imagine that instead of 18-month old, innocent Baby Jessica at the bottom of that well, it was Wesley Allan Dodds who had fallen in . . .

Subsequent to his conviction for torturing, molesting, and murdering 3 boys

Would you have been so eager and frantic to dig down and rescue him?

Mercy says that God would have been; Mercy says that God *did* rescue him

Because Wesley Allan Dodds' last words before his hanging in 1993 were – "I had thought there was no hope and no peace. I was wrong. I have found hope and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ."

- That's stunning – the idea that God would show him mercy and save his wretched soul But the fact is, it's no more stunning than God saving us because of his mercy

We imagine that the distance between our sinfulness and Wesley Dodds' depravity is about as far as the North pole is from the South

But even if that's true, from God's viewpoint, light years away, that distance, that difference in sinfulness, is negligible

Apart from Christ, we're all repulsive to God; We're all in the same boat as W. Dodds

When you finally see it the way God does, suddenly mercy isn't quite so offensive, because we *all* desperately need it

We're saved because of God's mercy . . .

- **Not our merit**

It doesn't matter where we were stuck in the well of our sin

Whether 22 feet down with Baby Jessica, or 222 feet down with Wesley Dodds – we deserved to stay there; Because of our sin, we didn't deserve God's merciful rescue

We're saved because of God's mercy, not our merit – because we *have* none

Apart from Christ . . .

None is righteous, no, not one; no one seeks after God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good not even one. (Rom 3:10-12)

We have done nothing in our lives to deserve God's merciful rescue, let alone his gracious blessing

Until you get a grasp of your *lack* of merit next to God's holiness, you won't appreciate

God's mercy – his beautiful, stunning, unthinkable mercy – Cling to it

We're saved by God's grace; Because of God's mercy . . .

Through God's Spirit (5-6)

5b – *He saved us . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the HS*

By the HS's washing/cleansing action on our souls, to give us new life in Christ

God saved us through the HS, *whom he poured out on us richly* (6) as a result of our faith in *Jesus Christ our Savior*

Notice the past tense of the verb *poured* – when God saved us, he gave us his Spirit and all the blessings that accompany him – in abundance

There's no stinginess here; There's nothing partial about it, with the rest to come later

It's past tense – the complete power/presence of the HS resides within us at conversion

- It's only as the HS acts on us and in us that we *can* be saved

He does the work – we are passive; he is active

We cry out in desperation; he responds

Christ dug the tunnel of rescue to save us; The HS takes us through it

But he waits for you to first acknowledge what Christ has done on your behalf, trust his means of salvation, and cry out for help

And when we do, he indwells us forever, enabling us to live a life pleasing to God

The HS is the agent of the Godhead who worked in your life when you turned to Christ – to cleanse you of your sin, and renew your soul

We're saved through God's *Spirit* . . .

- **Not our power**

There's a reason God *poured out the HS on us richly* – it's because we *needed* it!

We were powerless before God saved us – Want to know how powerless?

Eph 2:1 – *You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked*

Dead as in you couldn't do anything of any value spiritually

You couldn't live for the Lord; You couldn't please him

You couldn't worship him or glorify him; You couldn't get yourself out of the well

Apart from God's grace, through God's Spirit – you were dead

Christianity is not about pulling yourself up by the bootstraps and being good on your own

Because you can't; You have no *power* to do so

We're saved through the power of *God's* Spirit, not our own

To quicken our souls and raise us to new life in Christ

We're saved . . .

To receive God's gift (7)

We're saved by God's grace – not our works; Because of God's mercy – not our merit

Through God's Spirit – not *our* power; To receive God's gift

Baby Jessica was rescued/saved that she might receive a new lease on life; A life that seemed a long-shot during those long hours in the well

When rescued, she was given a gift; Another opportunity to live; A second chance

So too with us – *God saved us . . . so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life* (7)

That as children of God, we would, with full assurance, be the recipients of God's promised inheritance – eternal life

Nothing like that was promised to Baby Jessica or her parents

The risks and uncertainties were too high and too many – they wouldn’t allow for such
promises or guarantees

But we *are* promised, and we *have* God’s assurance, guaranteed by the blood of his

Son – that he will give us eternal life just as certainly as he died and rose again

We’re saved by God’s grace to receive God’s gift

Rom 8:16-17 – *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit* [testifies to God on our behalf] *that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*

Having been saved by God’s grace we are children of God, heirs in line to receive his gift of eternal life, and the blessings that come with it

We’re saved by God’s grace to receive God’s gift . . .

- **Not our demands**

Oh how easily we get this messed up

We treat salvation like it’s a multiple choice thing – Choose the path that you like . . .

A) I really want eternal life, but I don’t want to live under the authority of the Scriptures

B) I really want life to the full, but I’m not too gung-ho about living for him

C) I really want God’s blessing, but I’m not too keen on doing what he wants

God is not a divine gift horse that we can look in the mouth and make demands of

“I’ll accept your gift of salvation, but . . .”

Only if you make my life better; Or get me out of debt

Only if you bless my business; Or give me lots of influence

Only if you give me a girlfriend; Or find me someone to marry

Can I tell you what God’s response is to that? No deal

God says, here’s the gift of salvation with all its benefits – best thing in the whole world

But it’s all or nothing, and you’d be a fool not to take it

If Baby Jessica could’ve spoken, she wouldn’t have dared to tell her rescuers the conditions under which she would receive their help

She wouldn’t have dared to make demands regarding the quality of her life upon extraction from the tunnel

She received the gift of rescue no matter how it was given, void of any demands, because life itself was waiting at the other end of the tunnel

The thought of anything else is ridiculous

About as ridiculous as someone who makes demands of God, instead of just receiving his *gift* of eternal life

We’re saved by God’s grace; Because of God’s mercy

Through God’s Spirit; To receive God’s gift

Thank him for his gift; Surrender to his Spirit; Cling to his mercy

Be amazed by his grace

Close

Getting close to final plans for the build-out – we’ll let you know

Possible we’ll close May 15th – Pray!