

SAVED BY GRACE
EPH. 2:1-10

NEED: SALVATION

PROPOSITION: SALVATION HAS COME TO SINFUL HUMANKIND THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD.

OBJECTIVE: TO INVITE THE SINFUL TO RECEIVE GOD'S SALVATION SINCE IT IS BY GRACE.

INTRODUCTION:

One of our friends gave us a video entitle "Amazing Grace" for Christmas. It is a copy of a CBS program presented by Bill Moyers in which they explored the impact of the hymn "Amazing Grace" on our world. In the presentation they explored the background of John Newton who wrote the hymn. Never was a man lifted from a lower lifestyle into the joys of the gospel ministry than John Newton. I was prepared for the viewing of the video by the reading of a brief biography on John Newton this past year. From a somewhat godly background Newton slipped down to the depth of moral depravity. He not only involved himself as a seagoing man in the slave trade, he actually for one period of time became the slave of a slave himself. He was actually owned for a period of time by an African woman who was the slave of another. He was profane, arrogant, prided himself in his unbelief, and opposed to everything that was good and moral. Yet, it pleased God to save John Newton and to make him an effective minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the video Moyers asked people from all kinds of backgrounds why they thought the hymn was so popular. He asked sophisticated opera singers, sacred harp musicians from Alabama, folk

singers from the mountains, the old and the young, and all kinds of people. Some identified its popularity with its music. Others found some other explanation. It appears that there is something in the heart of every human being that senses that we need grace from God. We know something about ourselves that gives us tremendous encouragement when we hear God described as the God of grace. I know this to be true. There is no hymn in the book that so consistently moves my heart to gratitude as does "Amazing Grace."

When I think of God's grace my heart turns almost immediately to the semi-autobiographical section in the second chapter of the Ephesian Letter. Here we find that great declaration of the Apostle, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works so that no one can boast." As we look at these inspired words from one who knew so much about the grace of God personally, we began to discover by God's grace is so amazing. Indeed there is only one way we could be saved - it had to be by grace!

I. OUR SITUATION REQUIRES GRACE.

The Apostle describes the spiritual situation of every human being outside of Jesus Christ. To isolate his description and to separate it from this context of grace would be most depressing. His description of our situation can be summed up in two words.

1. We are helpless.

The Apostle mixes together two figures to describe the spiritual helplessness of humankind.

These are all designed to help us understand the impact that our sin has had upon us. It is our sin

that has brought us into a situation in which we are utterly helpless to save ourselves.

The first figure used by the Apostle to help us understand our situation is death. "You were dead in your transgression and sins." He is referring to the state of spiritual death. Because of sin our state outside of Christ is one of spiritual death. Whatever else is true of a dead person, they are helpless. You can shout commands at a dead person all day, and some people do, but in themselves they have no capacity to respond to your command. I've heard people command the dead to speak, but they have no capacity to speak. Our sin has brought us into such a condition that we are utterly incapable of making any response to God on our own.

The second figure used by the Apostle is that of slavery. He describes the human condition as being one in which our lives are out of our control. Rather our lives are under the control of the world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and our own sinful natures. We may declare ourselves to be free, but the reality is our lives are under the control of a world system that is in opposition to God, a spiritual world ruler who exercises control over our lives, and sinful desires that pull us any direction they please.

When you put the two figures together what you have is a graphic description of spiritual helplessness. If any thing good is to happen, it will have to happen from someone outside of ourselves.

2. We are hopeless.

"Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." This is the concluding statement in the Apostle's description of our situation. It is a revealing statement that underlines the hopelessness of our condition.

The Apostle uses the personal pronoun "we" to indicate that he as a Jewish man shares this condition with the Gentiles who made up the Ephesian Church. At this point being a Jew with a rich religious heritage didn't make him any better than being an Ephesians with a long history of adultery. The truth is that in both cases if they received from God what they deserved they would receive God's wrath.

Actually the Greek text speaks of a us being by nature "children of wrath." It is the Greek word that indicates by our very birth into the human situation we deserve God's wrath. When we look at our history, when you look at our conduct, it is obvious that if God gives us what we deserve, it will be His righteous anger and destructive judgment. When you look at us, it obvious that there is no hope of us ever earning from God or deserving from God salvation. If we are to ever receive salvation, in light of our present situation, it will have to be by grace. God will have to give us something that we do not deserve if we are to be saved. Isn't this amazing that God would extend salvation to persons in our situation?

II. OUR SALVATION REVEALS GOD'S GRACE.

I never shall forget hearing an aged, seasoned Baptist minister speak from this text. He was preaching from the King James Version and grabbed hold of those two words "but God" and

drove them into our hearts. While the situation was one of helplessness and hopelessness because our God is great in love and rich in mercy, He has acted toward us in grace. He has saved us by his grace!

The Apostle sets forth the greatness of this gracious work of God by looking at the salvation from two different perspectives. When you remember that we were deserving of judgment and you look at what God has done, it is obvious that He is a God of amazing grace.

1. Our salvation is a rescue.

"Saved" means to deliver, or to rescue. We are rescued by His grace for the wrath of God.

2. Our salvation is a resurrection.

This is the first descriptive word that the Apostle gives us of this great salvation. He has "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions." The older version uses the word "quicken" here. The idea is that God has imparted life to those who were dead in trespasses and sins.

He then puts together a series of statements that describes this quickening work of God. "And God raised us up with Christ." This is a picture of God bringing us out of the tomb in which our sin had placed us even as He brought Christ Jesus out of the tomb of Joseph. As Jesus came out of the tomb of Joseph full of life, we came out of the tomb in which our sin had placed us full of the life of God. "And seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." This word defies our explanation. Just as God lifted the resurrected Christ off the earth, and received Him

into the heavens and caused him to be seated at his right hand, so God has caused us spiritually to be lifted out of this earthly realm and caused us to have a seat in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. What a suggestive description.

To be "seated" in the heavenly realms means that we even now share in the complete victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over sin and death. To be "seated" means that we are now in a position in which everything with reference to our salvation has already been completed. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus was seated in heaven because His work was finished. From the spiritual perspective we are even seated now in the heavenlies because our salvation is a completed work in Christ.

Can you imagine this? God has revealed His grace in lifting us out of the helpless, hopeless situation out sin had created and has caused us to be participants in and beneficiaries of the victory of Jesus over death and sin.

3. Our salvation is a re-creation.

The Apostle uses this second figure of God's saving work in the closing seconds of this great passage. "But we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

"Workmanship" is a word with a rich background. Actually our English word "poem" comes from this word. It could be translated "masterpiece." It is used as the word of an artist through which he expresses his personality and creativity. God's grace has chosen to take the mess that we have made of our lives and so transformed them, so changed them, that they actually become

a revelation of His grace and mercy. We indeed are His "new creation."

This is a reminder to us that God's salvation is not a repair job. He doesn't take our lives that have been so decimated and damaged by sin and do a repair job on them. Rather, he takes our lives and their terrible state of spiritual disrepair and so works upon them out of His grace that they become "a new creation," even His workmanship.

Is this not what the people of Texas need? Do they not stand in need of a spiritual resurrection? Do they not stand in need of a moral and a spiritual transformation that can only be described as "a new creation"? This is what our God is pleased to do. Our God is pleased to take that which sin has destroyed and so restore it that it becomes an everlasting evidence of just how mighty and how gracious He really is.

III. AS SINNERS WE RECEIVE GRACE.

It is noteworthy to discover when this saving grace is given. We catch a time note in this statement, "God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions." This is an amazing thing! This saving grace comes to men and women while they are still sinners. It is not a payoff for some moral reformation on their part. It is a gift that comes freely from God..

1. "It is not by works."

While God's salvation does produce "good works which God prepared in advance for us to do," it is not "by works so that no one can boast."

It is not by any kind of works. It is not by religious works. It is not by church works. It is not by good works. It is not by any kind of works. It is totally and only by grace. The only people God saves are those who don't deserve salvation. The only song that the saved can ever sing is, "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!"

2. It is received through faith.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." This salvation comes from those who are still sinners. When God has so worked in their lives that they have come to the place that they are ready to acknowledge their helplessness and hopelessness, and they have come to understand something of what God has done in Christ to make salvation available, and they lift up empty hands to God and receive salvation as a gift. If it is through faith, then it is by grace.

This is an amazing truth. It has profound implications for our personal lives. It is an eloquent reminder to us that we are all essentially alike. We sometimes pride ourselves as being different but at this one essential point, we are all the same. We are all such persons that if God doesn't act in grace to save us we are eternally doomed.

But not only are we this way but the millions of people that populate this state, and the billions that populate this planet, are in the same situation. If God does not act in grace, they are eternally doomed. How does God act? What could we anticipate God doing to change this situation? If

God desires to save the millions of this state and the billions on this planet, how will He do it? The answer is rather simple. In the first creation, God did what He did by His word and His spirit. In this new creation God does it the same way. He uses the word of the Gospel, spoken by warmhearted, loving witnesses. He causes the power of His Holy Spirit to use that warm, loving word of witness concerning Christ to bring about a resurrection and a recreation. Just as the word of Jesus in the cemetery in Bethany brought Lazarus out of the grave, the word of the gospel spoken in personal witness in the power of the Holy Spirit has the capability of calling men out of the entombment of sin and of eternal life.

This makes our mission clear. We are not responsible for saving anybody, not even ourselves. Only God can save. But we are responsible for sharing this word of the gospel with every creature. Our sharing the Word of the Gospel with every creature in the power of the Holy Spirit creates the circumstances in which the God of grace can reveal the depth and the riches of His grace into salvation of sinners.

This is our **calling and this is our mission**. Our reason for being faithful to our calling and fulfilling our mission is that we have already received grace. The experience of this amazing grace fills the heart with gratitude and a desire to tell the story to others.

Alternate Outline:

- I. The Requirement of Grace.
 1. Because of the helpless state of man spiritually.
 2. Because of the hopeless state of man eternally.

II. The Revelation of Grace.

1. Grace in the Rescue.
2. Grace in the Resurrection.
3. Grace in the Re-creation.

III. The Reception of Grace.

1. It is not received by works.
2. It is received by faith.