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**SAVED - NOT BY WORKS!  
TITUS 3:3-8**

**NEED: SALVATION**

**PROPOSITION: GOD'S SAVING WORK ON OUR BEHALF AND  
IN US IS TOTALLY APART FROM OUR WORKS.**

**OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD PERSONS TO COME TO CHRIST FOR  
SALVATION.**

**INTRODUCTION:**

I think it can be proven that the most difficult concept in Christianity to understand is that salvation is totally by grace. Both those who are not Christians and even we who are Christians struggle with the concept that our salvation is totally a gift from God. There is something in our human nature that makes us want to contribute something to God for our salvation or to work it out on our own. Yet it is the unquestioned witness of Holy Scriptures that we are saved - but not by works!

In this word from Paul to Titus, he is giving a bases for humility in our attitude toward the world around us. While we have received salvation, this does not mean that we are better than the world around us. Last week we considered the words of Paul that demonstrate our sinfulness is just as obvious as the sinfulness of the world in which we live. Both our heart and our behavior has demonstrated our fallen condition. In Paul's reminder that we have been saved, He inserts this noteworthy clause, "Not because of righteous things we had done." That clause removes the possibility of our salvation being based upon something that we have done. I want to explore that truth with you this morning. For the assurance for those of us who are saved, it is important that we

understand that our salvation is not by our works of righteousness. For the conviction of those of you who are not believers in Jesus Christ, you need to understand why it is that you will never be saved on the bases of righteous deeds that you have done. Salvation is from beginning to end totally the work of a kind and gracious God.

## **I. NOT BY WORKS, BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF OUR WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

We need to understand why it is that our salvation cannot be based upon works of righteousness which we have done. We will never appreciate this concept unless we understand the nature of our works of righteousness. Our works of righteousness are such that they could never be the bases of hope or standing before God.

1. They have been corrupted by our sinfulness.

It is to be acknowledged that each of us have done works that we considered to be righteous works. We have been found on occasions doing the right thing for that occasion. In our eyes it appeared to be a righteous act. Much of the world believes that if you do enough such righteous acts, then when you come to the end of life, you will be admitted into heaven because you have done more good than you did evil. The problem with that is that even our good deeds, our righteous acts, have in them corruption that becomes offensive to God.

The Lord addressed this situation in a word through Isaiah, the prophet. Isaiah declared, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy

rags" (Isaiah 24:6). The "filthy rags" that the prophet has in mind are rags that have been used by a person with a running sore as a bandage around that sore, and have in the process become soiled. Are they could be rags used by a woman during her menstrual cycle. Such rags are obviously fit only to be burned or destroyed. Our attempts at righteousness on our own always produce something that will be in the eyes of God repulsive and offensive.

The famous Presbyterian minister of the past generation, John Henry Jowett, observed, "There is enough sin in the best prayer that I ever prayed to condemn my soul to hell." Dr. Jowett understood the depth of his sinfulness and how it affects everything we do - even our attempts to do something righteous. It is true that as sinful human beings our sinfulness corrupts our prayers, our preaching, our witnessing, our deeds of mercy, our deeds of kindness, our attempts at righteousness. They should not prevent us from doing things that are good, but we must understand they will never be totally free from our own internal corruption before God.

## 2. They come short of divine standard.

This truth was made clear by the Apostle Paul in the Roman Letter. In the third chapter of that letter, he lays down the bases for universal condemnation, or the lostness of all human beings. He quotes a statement from the Old Testament that declares, "There I no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). And then He declares, "There is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12). Then He makes the statement, "Therefore no one should be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law" (Romans 3:20).

Those three little words "in His sight" give us insight into what the apostle is saying. It is true that in our sight there seems to be among us some righteous people who do righteous things. In our sight, there do seem to be some people who do good things, righteous things, and in some cases they are not even believers in Jesus Christ. But our earthly evaluation of deeds is not the standard that must be applied. The difficulty is that they have to stand up in His sight. They have to measure 12" to the foot by His yardstick. They have to weigh 16 ounces to the pound by His scales. They have to be considered righteous by His standards. When you use that standard, then we understand that there is none righteous, no not one!

So, it is the very nature of our righteous deeds that makes them worthless as a bases for salvation. They in fact are even less than worthless - they are filthy rags, fit only to be burned in the fire.

## **II. NOT BY WORKS, BECAUSE OF THE LIMITATION ON OUR WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

By limitation we are not referring to the limited number of our works of righteousness, but rather to their limited power. Our works of righteousness do not have the capacity to do what needs to be done to bring about the salvation of a human life. What do we mean?

1. They do not have the power to cover sin.

We need to understand that if it were possible for you to begin today, never commit another sin, and only do righteous things, you would still be condemned. You cannot do

enough deeds of righteousness to cover one offensive sin from the eyes of God. Good works can never cover our sins.

It may be that an old illustration will help you understand this. Suppose that through the over-use of a VISA card I have created more debt than I am able to pay. Some of you can bear testimony that this can be done rather easily. But I have done it! I have run up a debt on a credit card that I have no way of paying. It is utterly impossible to pay that debt.

So, I sit down and write the VISA company and say to them, I am sorry that I have run up this debt but I want you to know that from this day forward I will pay only will cash. I will avoid creating any debt in the future. I will do everything by cash.

I can imagine a reply from one of the officers of that company that would go something like this: "Mr. Lowrie, it is commendable that you have come to the decision to live on the bases of cash from this day forward as soon as you have taken care of the indebtedness that you have created with us, you will enjoy much financial freedom. We will anticipate your monthly payments to continue until your debt to our bank has been satisfied."

But I sit down and write them back, "Sirs: you must not have understood my letter. It is my intention to create no more debt. I have made a commitment to live by cash from this day forward." It is easy to see the folly of my reasoning. My paying cash in the future will not take care of the debts I have created in the past. All of the cash paying that I

could ever hope to do in the future will not remove one dollar from my indebtedness that I have created in the past. This is the situation we are in. If from this day forward I could present before God only righteous deeds they would never be able to cover the sins I have already committed. Righteous deeds do not have the power to cover sin.

2. They do not have the power to change a life.

It is obvious that God's saving work in us involves an internal change of the heart. In fact, the apostle refers to it in this passage by the words; "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." Until something dramatic, life changing has happened on the inside of me in my heart, I cannot be saved. What I do as a deed of goodness or righteousness does not have the power to change my heart. This is the reason that my deeds of righteousness can never be the bases of my salvation.

This truth helps us understand why Jesus said to the religious leader of the Jews, Nicodemus, "You must be born from above." Nicodemus did not have the capacity to change his heart. He could do religious deeds and observe the rules of the law outwardly, but He could not change His own heart. It takes a work from the Holy Spirit to change the human heart.

It is obvious when you think about it that our works of righteousness have a severe limitation upon them. They may be good enough to impress our friends and our family,

but they are not good enough to make the difference in our lives that need to be made. They can ever cover our sins or change our hearts.

### **III. NOT OF WORKS, BECAUSE OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE WORK OF CHRIST.**

This is the bottom line of the whole matter - our works are not needed. I searched for a word that would express that and never came up with a word that satisfied, so I stated in the positive - Because of the sufficiency of the work of Christ.

#### 1. His work for us is sufficient.

The apostle summarizes it in this text by simply saying, "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us." The appearance of God our Savior was in the person Jesus Christ. While he was here on the earth in those years of incarnation, He did everything that was necessary for our salvation. "For it is by grace you have been saved - through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). The expression "the gift of God" makes it clear that our salvation is based upon what God did for us in Christ. It comes to us as a gift, without any righteous deeds on our part to supplement what Christ did.

The Apostle Paul stated the same truth so clearly to the Roman Church when he wrote, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). You will remember on that unforgettable Friday that Jesus came to the conclusion of His hours upon the cross that He cried out, "It is finished!" We

are to understand that everything necessary for our salvation was finished by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is it not rather arrogant on our part that we could ever imagine that some pitiful act of righteousness on our part could in any way add to the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God on our behalf on that tree. Surely, it is not of works since it is based upon the all-sufficient work of Christ for us.

## 2. His work in us is sufficient.

The work of God in our salvation includes that which He did for us and that which He does in us. That which He does in us is based on that which He did for us in Christ. The Apostle alludes that which He does in us with these words in our text: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, our savior, so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

In the Roman Letter to which we have already referred, you will find this further word of explanation for by Paul: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!" (Romans 5:10). "We shall be saved through His life!" These words remind us of the work of salvation He does within us. In a beautiful act of grace on the part of the eternal God He causes His dear Son to live in us by the Holy Spirit and from within He does His work of transformation and salvation. Our works of

righteousness can never add anything to these works that the Son has done so sufficiently for us and continues to do in us.

What about our good works? If they are not the bases of our salvation, what are they?

The answer is simple! The good works are the proof of our salvation. In this text the Apostle said, "This is a trustworthy saying, and I want to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to do what is good. These things are excellent and are profitable for everyone." We give evidence to others that Christ lives within us by the life that we live. The life that we live which is to be full of good works and righteous deeds is a continuing proof to the world that we are indeed the people of God.

So, if we do not bring to Holy God our righteous deeds to claim salvation, what do we bring?" The old hymn writer put it well, "In my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." We come to God like that penitent tax collector that Jesus told about. We come with our heads bowed, acknowledging to him, "God, have mercy upon me, a sinner." We come with confidence that everything that could be done for our salvation has been done. It is now up to us to acknowledge that we deserve judgment but that we desire mercy. It is up to us to open our lives and to receive the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Will you not so open your life to Him today?

