

SO GREAT SALVATION---

IN THE CHANGE IT MAKES

Ephesians 2:1-10

Need: salvation in its fullness.

Proposition: When God saves a person, He makes a radical change in the life.

Objective: To lead the lost to salvation in Christ.

Introduction:

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" This is the question that has prompted me to ask if we really understand just how great this salvation is. I am doubtful that those who have been saved have even begun to really comprehend the greatness of God's saving work for us and in us. It is almost certain that those of you who have rejected it have never understood.

Surely if I could help you understand the greatness of this salvation, you would seek it with all of your heart; you would not rest until you were able to say, "I am saved!"

We have already considered three aspects of this great salvation. We have learned that it provides complete forgiveness for all of your transgressions. We have also discovered that it establishes a new relationship with God in which you become a child of God. Then last week we were made glad by the discovery of the victory that it shares. Every person who has a part in this salvation overcomes the devil and the world. But there is more!

This salvation is also great in the change that it makes. There are those in our world who deny that any basic change can be made in a human life. They contend that you are what you are because of your genes, your environment, and your experiences, and that you can ever be changed. Of course they look at your life from strictly the human side. I am ready to admit that

you cannot be very successful in changing your life, but I am ready to contend that God does it all of the time. Let us consider the words of Paul to the Ephesian Christians as we reflect on the change God's saving work has made in their lives. Their story can be your story---it is my story. John Newton who wrote those unforgettable words to the familiar hymn "Amazing Grace" said it like this--"I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be. I am not what I hope to be; but, by the grace of God, I am not what I was".

A careful look at this great text on salvation should help us understand the change that God makes in salvation. Who knows, this could be the day that God will make such a change in your life.

I. WHAT WE WERE.

This is the proper place to begin. We will never appreciate that change that God makes until we understand how desperately we need the change. The first three verses of this passage remind us of what we were before God changed us.

1. We were Helpless.

The Apostle uses two figures to remind us of what we were. Death is the first of these figures.

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins". Whatever else death suggests to us, it speaks of helplessness. I do not know of one thing that a dead person can do for themselves.

You may speak to the dead, but they will not answer. You may shout a command to the dead, but they will not respond. Since there is no life in them, they are utterly powerless to do anything for themselves or for anyone else. They are helpless!

Because of our sins against God, this is our condition. The consequence of sin is death, spiritual death. Since there is no spiritual life in the unsaved person, they are completely to make any change in their lives.

Can we not agree that if a person is dead, they are in need of a change? Have you recognized that this is your true condition outside of Jesus Christ. You will never be able to make the changes in your life that need to be made---you are helpless.

2. We were hopeless.

The second figure that the Apostle develops is that of a slave. Actually we were slaves to three terrible masters who act in cooperation with each other. We were the slaves of the world system about us--"in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world". This world system structures a lifestyle that does not include God. It may include religion, but it will not include a dependence upon or obedience to the true and living God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. While we may have known about God, we had not vital personal relationship with Him.

We were also the slaves of the devil. "And of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." This enemy of God is so subtle in what he does that most of us were never aware that we were under his control, but we were. Everyone who seeks to live life without God, in disobedience to God, is actually the servant of the enemy of God.

And then were the servants of the fallen nature within us. "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts". We would have protested that we were in charge of our own lives, making the decisions that we wanted to make, but actually it was the sinful nature within us that called the shots.

What is the bottom line of all this? "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath". The only thing we had to look forward to was the righteous indignation of a holy God, even His wrath.

You may have noticed that Paul changed pronouns in the process of these verses. He began talking about "You", but he ends referring to "We". He started by addressing the non-Jewish believers in Ephesus who had come to Christ out of the pagan temples with their corruption, but

along the way he includes the Jews who had come to Christ out of a background that was rich with religious heritage. The situation was the same for both of them---apart from Christ they were hopeless. They were dead and doomed.

If you take these words seriously, you will have to admit that we needed a change. Yet we were helpless to change ourselves, and if God himself did not choose to do something, then were hopeless.

II. WHAT GOD DID.

I remember hearing a seasoned servant of the Lord preach from this passage years ago. He used just the first two words of verse four as they appear in the King James Version. They begin, "But God..." He drove those words into my heart in such a manner that I never read this passage without remembering his message. When we were helpless and hopeless, God acted. He did so because of His great love. His love expressed itself in the most generous act one can imagine--- "He saved us"! In order to help us understand what God did for us, the apostle develops two powerful figures.

1. He resurrected us.

Using the resurrection of Jesus as the point of beginning, the Apostle declares that we too have been raised from the dead. It began when God "made us alive with Christ even when were dead in transgressions". The older version uses the old word "quickened". The word means to enliven, to make alive. God has caused to be in us the very life that was in Christ when He came forth from Joseph's tomb. But there is more---"But God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ". Just as the resurrected Christ did not remain in the place of death, the tomb of Joseph, so God brought us out of the realm of death. Just as Jesus left the earth and ascended back into heaven to take a seat at the right hand of the Father, even so we too in

Christ have been lifted from the earth and have been seated with him in the heavenly realm. Do I understand all of this? No! But at least it says to me that everything related to my salvation has been completed since I am seated in Christ. We learn from Hebrews that He was seated in the heavenly sanctuary because the work of redemption is done. We too are seated with Him because there is nothing else for us to do because He did everything that was required of us. But this says something more. It declares that we are now apart of everything that God is doing in the world through our exalted Savior.

You will have to admit that this is some change. We were dead and doomed, but we are now alive in Jesus Christ, and even now we reign with Him in life.

2. He re-created us.

The second figure developed by the Apostle is that of creation. After emphasizing that what God did was totally by grace, and that all we did was receive it as a gift, he declares, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." This one of the most profound statements in all of the Bible about God's saving work.

"Workmanship" is actually the word from which we get our English word poem. Scholars indicate that it refers to a masterpiece, a work of art. In the making of such a poem or masterpiece, the poet or artist creates. They take the idea or picture that is in their mind and put it down on paper, or draw it on the canvas. While we were fit for nothing by divine destruction under the wrath of the God, because of His great love and as an expression of His grace He has been pleased to change everything. He has taken the mess that we had made and has so changed it that it has become a work of art, a masterpiece. Williams gets at the force of it when he translates it, "He has made us what we are. because He has created us through our union with

Christ Jesus for doing good deeds which He beforehand planned for us to do." The change is totally the work of God. It is a work of special creation on His part.

III. WHAT WE ARE.

What does being a new creation mean? What does it involve? From this statement of Paul there are two obvious truths.

1. We are in Christ Jesus.

Surely you noticed how much emphasis Paul placed on being "in Christ" in this text. This is not an exception, but is rather just a sample of what you find throughout the New Testament. We are in Christ. Williams gets hold of the force of this prepositional phrase when he translates it "in union with Christ". On one side this means that God now relates us to us in light of the fact that we are in Christ. While before we were in Adam, and thus under the condemnation for our sin, we are now in Christ. Being in Him changes everything concerning our relationship with God. We are as accepted in the presence of God as the Lord Jesus since we are in Him. But on the other side it means that Christ is in us. Having Him in us changes everything. We are not capable of doing good works which would have been unthinkable before. This is so dramatic that the only way you can describe it is call it a new creation. God has made us to be something that we were not before.

2. We are agents of God's work.

One of the basic things revealed about God in the Bible is that He is good. His goodness is manifest in the good things that He does. Jesus revealed this about God when He went about doing good. Jesus never missed an opportunity to do good, to minister, to lift a burden, to serve another person. When God does this work of new creation and resurrection, He so joins us to the Lord Jesus that it is possible for Him to work through us in continuing to manifest His goodness

in the world. His goodness is manifest in the good deeds of love and ministry that we are enabled to do through the indwelling Christ.

Indeed, the Apostle indicates that God had planned ahead of time the works that He wanted to do us before He did this work of recreation and resurrection. "Which God prepared in advance". It would seem that God did not just plan for us to do good works, but He rather planned some specific good works that He planned to do through us in manifesting His goodness.

When the artist creates His workmanship, he reveals Himself in His work of art. When the God of grace recreates us in Christ, He reveals Himself in His work of art, even our redeemed lives.

When God does this blessed work of salvation, the change will become obvious rather quickly. I read about such a change recently, The American Red Cross was gathering supplies, medicine, clothing, food, and the like, for the suffering people of Biafra. Inside one of the boxes that showed up at the collecting depot on day was a letter. It said, "We have recently been converted and because of our conversion we want to try to help. We won't ever need these again. Can you use them for something?" Inside the box were several Ku Klux Klan sheets. The sheets were cut down to strips and eventually used to bandage the wounds of black persons in Africa. Could the change be any more dramatic? Changed from an angry racist to a compassionate helper of those they have hated.

This kind of change happened in the life of John Newton who wrote Amazing Grace. As a young sea captain he was actually involved in the brutal slave trade that took black captives from the shores of Africa and sold them across the English speaking world. But when God saved him his voice became one that helped overturn the practice of owning slaves in England. The slave trader became an agent through which God did something good in the world.

We have been privileged to see some rather dramatic examples of this here in our fellowship.

God changed Gilbert Herrea from an angry ex-convict into an evangelistic jail chaplain. We list him among our ministers today. He changed Jan Payne from a jail inmate into a channel of His love for inmates. While the change that He makes in your life may not be quite as dramatic, it will still be a work of resurrection and recreation.

Do you realize that your only hope of ever being lifted from the death and doom into which your sin has brought you is in God's saving work? You are helpless to ever make such a change, but He can. He will do it today if you will open you life to Him in faith.