

What We Believe about Salvation – Ephesians 2:8-9

I have several items of good news and bad news for you today. I'll start with good news. The good news is I went to find some good news, bad news jokes to start my message and just decided to skip that part all together. They were all horrible and I knew y'all would appreciate me leaving those out. So, let me give you some bad news. The bad news is that humanity is born into this world with a void, something missing. And people try to fill that void with all sorts of things that don't work. On one hand, people try all the usual fleshly things: sex, drugs, alcohol, blah, blah, blah. On the other hand, some people try to fill the void with religion and good works.

The problem with living a life of sin is that it always ends in death, Hell and eternal separation from God. The problem with human religion and good works is that it always ends in death, Hell and eternal separation from God. The drunk, the drug addict, the prostitute, the child molester, the rapist, the murderer, the thief, the homosexual and every other kind of sinner you want to mention is going to Hell. But, so are the people who are trapped in the false religions of the world. Regardless of how sincere they may be in their belief system, those who have nothing more than religion are headed to Hell. Whether they are Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Humanist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, or any other religion that does not go through Jesus to get to the Father, they are lost and headed for judgment.

You want some more bad news? You can be a really good person and not live any of those lifestyles I just mentioned and do lots of good things and be very moral and still go to Hell if you don't have a relationship with Jesus. In fact, (so here's more bad news and I promise I will get to the good news in just a minute) God says we are all sinners and we all deserve to go to Hell. (Romans 3:23 and 6:23) Now that's some serious bad news.

Now, to get to the good news that I promise is coming, I want to start with the good news and bad news that Paul gives us in **Ephesians chapters 1 and 2**. Don't worry. I'm not going to read it all. I can sum up the first chapter by saying the good news is that Jesus is awesome! That's not Paul's word for it but that's basically what he is saying. He talks about the grace of Jesus, the love of Jesus and the power of Jesus. Ephesians 1 is all about how good God is through Jesus and Jesus is just awesome. Then in chapter 2, Paul gives us the bad news. You ready? We are dead. Yep, we are all dead. Not only that but God is mad at us. The words Paul uses to say that are, "objects of wrath." We'll see it in just a second. That's bad news. We're dead and God's mad. So, there ya go. The bad news is we're dead and God's mad. The good news is I don't have any jokes. So, thanks for coming. See ya later.

But I'll tell you what, let's just turn to the book of Ephesians and let's see if we can't find some good news in there somewhere. I bet we can if we turn to **Ephesians chapter 2**. The book of Ephesians is in the New Testament between Galatians and Philippians. There is some serious richness to all those books. And while there is some bad news in there, Paul writes all those books to tell the really, really good news and we will see that in just a second. I promise. We are continuing our study on what we believe and we have come to Ephesians to see what we believe about how we are saved. You can call it becoming a Christian or starting your walk with the Lord or being born again or several other names but it all means the same thing. Let's see what we have **to do** to go to Heaven. Just how good do we actually have to be? How do we know when our good deeds are more than our bad deeds? And, are those even good questions to ask? Let's see in **Ephesians 2:1-10**. Our main focus will be on **verses 8 and 9** but let's read this whole paragraph to get the context.

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 **For it is by grace you have been***

saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Woo! That’s good stuff! Now, if you can’t see the good news in there, something is wrong. What starts out as bad news turns to good news because of God’s grace. Paul starts out by saying that we – when we were still unbelievers – were spiritually dead in our sins. We start out dead. We are born into sin. King David said in **Psalm 51** that we are conceived in sin. Mankind has been born into sin since Adam and Eve had their first kid, you know, Abraham Lincoln. 😊

Until we are made alive in Christ, we are dead in our sins. We can’t make ourselves alive to God or anything spiritual any more than a physically dead man can make himself alive physically. We are dead to desiring God, desiring truth, having true joy or happiness in the hard times. We are dead to being right with God. Apart from God, we are spiritual zombies. We think we are alive and may act alive in some ways but we are stone cold dead. Not dying, not very sick, dead to all things spiritual. So, there is no way we can be good enough to get to Heaven. Just like a dead man doesn’t know he is dead, a sinner doesn’t know he needs help. So, let’s look at the help we get. I want to ask all the important questions, namely the who, what, why, where and when of how we are brought to spiritual life. We know God does it but the first question I always have to ask is **“Why?”** Why would God do that for me? I don’t deserve it. You don’t deserve it. Why would He do it? Well, Paul tells us in **verse 4**. Look at it again. *“...because of his great love for us.”*

That’s it. That’s why. Last week one of the neighbor kids came to church Sunday morning and I noticed that he seemed to really be paying attention. Sure enough, he came back to church Sunday night and paid attention again. And afterward, he stuck around and asked me some questions. One of the questions was very similar to the question I just asked about this verse. Why? He asked why God would forgive somebody who could kill somebody else. It’s a great question. But the answer is the same. He loves us. God made us. He created us and He has a vested interest in us as our Creator. He wants what is best for us and doesn’t want us to go to Hell. He wants to spend all eternity with us. Even though our sin is highly offensive to Him, God still loves us.

If a person was driving down the road, texting on their phone and ran over and killed a small child, that person would be arrested, tried and put into prison for involuntary manslaughter. But after he served his sentence and paid all the fines and did everything he was supposed to do, he would be free to go. As far as the law is concerned, everything is paid in full. But that person has done nothing to restore the life of the child or repay the parents for their loss and grief. The offense against them was immeasurably deeper than it was to the state and the only way that person could ever have a relationship with those parents is if they forgave him. Only the offended can offer forgiveness and only forgiveness can bring reconciliation. (MacArthur, Ephesians, page 58) But look. It says that God is rich in mercy. He is so rich in mercy that He forgives us of our sins and shows us love. That is why He saves us.

The next question is **how?** How does God save us? This is the big question that I want to get answered today. It is the question that everybody needs to know the answer to because the spiritually dead have lots of answers and none of them are truth. The truth is told to us in our main verses, **verses 8 and 9**. We are saved *by grace and through faith*. Now, this is where some people make a bit of a mistake. Some people read this and think, *“Well, okay, grace is God’s part and faith is my part. Between me and God, we will get me saved. It’s a deal, God. You do your part and I’ll do mine.”* Right? Not exactly. See, the problem with that is...we are dead. Remember? Dead people can’t do their part to make themselves alive. If we could do even that much, we could say that we did something to save ourselves and God doesn’t want to share His glory with us nor does He need our help. So, how does this work?

In **Romans 12:3** it says that God gives everybody “a measure of faith.” A measure is not much but it is enough and He gives it to everybody. The question is, what are you going to do with it? Think of faith like a muscle. When you are born, you are given muscles but they aren’t very powerful. But first you start to lift your little head. Then you roll over, then walk a few steps. Pretty soon you are running and climbing and able to lift heavy things and before you know it, you have big muscles.

Faith is the same way. God gives you a small measure of faith. You don't understand much of anything at first but you believe it and you act on it and it changes your life. Then you see how God works through your faith. You still don't understand everything but you see more and more that God is trustworthy and pretty soon you have some real muscular faith. But if you start out saying that you were saved by God's grace, our faith that he has given us AND anything else...that is wrong. That is actually blasphemy and don't do that. Paul says that we are saved by grace and through faith. But I hear ya. Todd, uh, where does he mention being baptized as being part of our salvation? He doesn't. Where does it talk about taking the Lord's Supper as part of being saved? It doesn't. What about the part where we have to be really, really good? Nope. See, all of that stuff is good, even commanded to do for people that are saved but it has no part in the salvation process. "By grace and through faith." Period. Do you know why he saves us like that? **Verse 9** tells us that it is not by works so that we can't brag about it. You know what bugs me? It bugs me when I hear people brag about being able to do something and then they say, "*It ain't bragging if it's true.*" Right? No. It's still bragging and nobody wants to hear you bragging about anything, especially God. He doesn't want you to be able to brag about doing the least little bit because every little bit you take credit for is the little bit that is taken away from Jesus dying on the cross to pay the price. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone.

Now my next question is for what reason are we saved? We have seen why we are saved. Because of God's great love. We have seen how we are saved. By grace and through faith. Now, for what reason are we saved? And for the answer to this, we actually need to go back a verse to **verse 7**. Do you see the answer there? Paul says that God saved us to show "*the incomparable riches of His grace.*" The incomparable riches of His grace. That, too, is obviously for our benefit but it is first of all for God's, because it displays for all eternity His incredible, amazing, overwhelmingly beautiful and undeserved grace. In all this there is a thought you need to come to realize and embrace. When God gets the glory, everything works out better. God getting glory is the oil that lubricates the machine that blesses us. Have you ever noticed that? It's there in your life even if you don't notice it. When you give God the glory – when you make Him look good in your life and you point to Him, you brag on Him, you let Him have the spotlight instead of yourself, God doesn't just show a little grace to you. He blows up the whole situation with grace.

You get grace and mercy and blessings. Your family gets grace and mercy and blessings. Your friends, your church, your dog, your garbage man, the greeter at Walmart, the mayor of your town – it's scandalous! It is overwhelming. It is *incomparable!* There is nothing like it. And one of the reasons that God has saved us by grace and through faith is to show off his *incomparable* grace. And I'm here for it. Yea, let's do that! But there is another reason that God saves us by grace and through faith and that is found in **verse 10** and this is the last of my questions. For what reason did God save us by grace and through faith? **Verse 7** tells us it is to show off God's grace and **verse 10** tells us that he saves us also to do good works.

Look at verse 10 again with me. There is a little nugget here I just have to touch on. It says, "*...we are God's handywork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" That word "handywork" or some versions say "workmanship" is the word "poiema" (poy-ay-mah) in the Greek and it is where we get our word "poem." God is the Poet and we are His poem. I love that thought. He is writing a beautiful poem in our lives. He is not finished yet but every time we do something good that brings Him glory, He is able to write another verse.

And every day, God is setting you up, providing you with opportunities to do good works and make Him look good so He can show off His grace. And that's good for us and everybody around us. Sounds like a pretty good deal to me. How about you? Have you been saved by grace and through faith? Is there a time in your life that you can point to and remember as the day you asked God to forgive you of all your sins and then you asked Him to be Lord of all your life? All you have to do is use the little bit of faith that God has given you. You don't have to understand. If you understood everything it wouldn't be faith. Just step out in faith right now and accept God's incredible gift of grace. Do it right now as the music plays.