

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians, chapter 2 is our text for today. I invite you to open your Bibles as today we talk about what is so amazing about grace. A couple of years ago I read a very interesting book by Chuck Swindoll, one of my favorite preachers and authors, entitled, *The Grace Awakening*. There are a lot of Christians who have not yet had their eyes opened to the wonderful truth of God's grace. I think once you discover the richness of God's grace, you'll just give a big sigh of relief. It is so good to know that my access into heaven is not dependent on how good I am, but upon the grace of God.

To review, chapter 2 said, "It is because of his great love for us" and "He is rich in mercy." Verse 5 says, "It is by grace you have been saved." And verse 7 states, "In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace." In other words, when Paul starts talking about God's love, God's mercy and God's grace, he is so overwhelmed; he can't find the right adjectives to describe how marvelous God's grace is.

It reminds me of a story a pastor friend of mine in Tennessee told me about a lady in his church who was in her mid eighties. She was living in a nursing home. Now, she was one of these individuals who was sick in body. Her body was very weak, but her mind was still as sharp as a tack. She said, "Pastor, I know I'm not going to live much longer, but before I die, I would really like to see the ocean. I've never been out of Tennessee. I've never seen the seashore. So, the pastor mentioned this to a couple of their retired deacons and they planned a trip. They went to the nursing home and loaded her in a van, and they drove 10 or 12 hours from Tennessee down to the Gulf of Mexico and upper Florida, down around Ft. Walton beach. They parked as close as they could to the beach. Then, they lifted this dear saint of God out of that van in a wheelchair and took her to the top of a sand dune. It was one of those beautiful spring days when the water was blue and the sky was blue and you could hardly tell where the two met at the horizon. The pastor said he looked at this dear woman and her eyes were moving from side to side, like she couldn't take it all in. As the tears streamed down her wrinkled cheeks she turned to her pastor and said, "It is so good to find something that there is enough of."

As I stand looking out at the shoreline of the mercy of God into the ocean of the grace of God, looking at the skyline of the love of God, I think the same thing. "It is so wonderful to find something that there is enough of." Of all the sinners in the world, of all who have ever lived, there is more than enough grace, more than enough love, more than enough mercy for all of God's creatures.

Ephesians 2:8-10. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

I. THE PLAN OF SALVATION

I want to say three things about salvation today and if you are a Christian, this will be a blessing to you. If you are not a Christian, this will be an explanation to you on how you can become a

Christian. First, notice the plan of salvation. How does God allow us to be Christians? “To be saved” as the Bible says. God’s plan of salvation is BY grace. These prepositions are very important. Salvation is not THROUGH grace it is BY grace. I want to try to tell you a little bit today about what grace is.

God’s
Riches
At
Christ’s
Expense

That little acrostic someone has given us says grace is “God’s riches at Christ’s expense.” That’s a good definition of grace. What are God’s riches? You could include his love, you could include his forgiveness, you could include his mercy...all the blessings but, those riches he gives us are not cheap. They may be free to us, but they weren’t free to the Lord Jesus Christ. They were terribly expensive to him. It cost him the ruby, red blood that flowed from his veins. It cost him the silver of his tears and the gold of his suffering. That blessing was purchased at tremendous expense to the Lord Jesus. But, God says, “Here, you didn’t buy it. You didn’t work for it. You don’t deserve it. You didn’t earn it, but here I’m going to give you these riches. My son has already paid the expense.”

Let me show the difference between grace and mercy. They are really two sides of the same coin. Grace is God granting a pardon we don’t deserve. It’s when God grants us a pardon, forgiveness we do not deserve. Last week we studied that the Bible says before we became Christians, we were spiritually dead, we were devilish, we were depraved, we were disobedient, we were doomed. What we deserve is separation from God forever and ever. I don’t deserve forgiveness. God says, “I know you don’t deserve it, but I’ll offer it to you anyway. There are a lot of people going around today who are claiming their rights. They say, “I’m not getting what I deserve. I deserve better than this.” Well, you’d better be careful. God may give you what you deserve. I don’t want God to give me what I deserve. It’s like the lady who went in to the photographer. The photographer’s philosophy was “Where there’s beauty, we take it—where there’s none, we make it!” He took her picture. She looked at it and she said, “I don’t like it. This doesn’t do me justice.” He said, “Lady, you don’t need justice, you need mercy.” I don’t want God to give me justice. I want God to give me mercy and grace. God gives us not what we *deserve*; he gives us what we *need*. If that is grace, then what is mercy? On the other hand mercy is God withholding punishment we deserve. That’s the mercy side of it. Grace says, “You don’t deserve love and forgiveness, but there it is.” Mercy says, “You know what you deserve, David Dykes. You deserve to be separated from me for all eternity in a place called hell. Why? Because you’re a sinner but, I am going to withhold that punishment because of my mercy.

If you still have a hard time understanding grace and mercy, let me tell you a story from when I was a ninth grader, fourteen years old, growing up there in South Alabama. When I was in the ninth grade, sports meant everything to me. If it had anything to do with a ball, I played it. I loved football, baseball and basketball and every sport you can imagine. I can honestly tell you that as a ninth grader, sports were more important to me than anything else: More important than girls, more important than my family, more important than church, and a lot more important than

schoolwork! I lived to play sports. I was on the ninth grade basketball team at our high school. On afternoons after school, Coach Prestwood would have ninth grade practice and then he would dismiss us and he would have eighth grade practice.

One afternoon we'd finished our ninth grade practice and my best buddy, Royce Dukes, and I were walking out the front door of the school. Coach Prestwood was in there coaching the eighth grade practice. We walked by Coach Prestwood's car. I can still picture that car. It was dark green, a 1950 or 1951 Chevrolet. I just remember it had a fast back, and it had a sun screen sitting out over the windshield. It was about as fancy a car as you could get back then, but even then in the 1960s it was old. You didn't have to use a key to crank it. You pushed a little button on the floor and the accelerator to start the car.

Royce, was kidding around and said, "Dykes, I'll put you in my car here and I'll drive you home." I said, "Okay." So, we jumped into that car (he was behind the steering wheel I'm in the passenger seat) and I said, "I dare you to crank it." He said, "I'd better not." I said, "I double dog dare you!" So, sure enough, he turned the key (you didn't have to have a key there's this little thing you just turn, then you push that starter and push the accelerator) Wummm... wummm... wummm... It wouldn't crank. So he tried it again Wummm...wummm...wummm...it still didn't crank. I said, "Here, let me try." We swapped places. I'm sitting over there and wouldn't you know it, it fired off the first time. We're sitting there with the car idling just sitting there knowing we're about to get in trouble. He says, "I dare you to drive it." I said, "I'd better not." He said, "I double dog dare you!" So, I pulled it into low gear, let off on the clutch and the car crept forward about 15 feet put it in reverse and sat there again in the same place, just idling. He said, "I dare you to drive it around the circle in front of the school." I said, "I'd better not." "I double dog dare you!" So, we drove around the circle and were sitting there in the front nobody had seen us yet. If we had stopped then, everything would have been okay. But that's the way the devil is with sin—he makes you think you can get away with it, and he keeps pushing you further and further.

Royce said, "I dare you to drive it around the school." Now, this was after classes. No cars. Everyone was gone except the basketball players in the gym. We pulled around the school, got to the back door and hadn't seen a soul. The moment we got by the back door of the school who should walk out the back door except the principal of the high school? He recognized Coach Prestwood's car and saw these two 14-year-old boys sitting in the front seat. We ducked down as fast as we could, hoping he wouldn't see us. I can remember driving as fast as I could to get back around to the front of the school. Screeched to a stop, jumped out of the car and we ran. Here comes the principal jogging around the side of the school "Boys, y'all come back here!" I want to tell you it's not that I disliked school; it was the principal of the thing. He grabbed us by the collars, and pulled us in to see Coach Prestwood, stopped practice and said, "Coach Prestwood these two boys have stolen your car. I caught them driving your car." Well, Coach got so angry, he stopped practice and said, "Dykes and Dukes, you guys are off the team!" Go sit in my office and I will talk with you later. You talk about a couple of guys with a hangdog look! We dragged ourselves into his office and sat there until he finished practice, blaming each other. "It was YOUR fault!" "No, it was YOUR fault!" I was as devastated about it as much as a ninth grader can be, because I have told you how important sports were to me, and this was the beginning of the season. The thought of watching my friends play basketball for the whole season. I just

couldn’t take it! I would have taken any other punishment. I would rather he had turned us in to the police. I would rather he had called my parents and let my dad deal with it. I would rather he had put us on suspension in school anything but getting kicked off the team.

Finally, Coach Prestwood came in and he was as angry as he should have been. “You know what you guys deserve, don’t you? You deserve to be turned over to the police.”

“Yes, sir. We do.”

“You know, you deserve for me to call your parents and let your dads deal with you. Do you want me to do that?”

“We deserve that, sir.”

“Well, I want you to know, I am not going to kick you off the team. This one time, I am going to overlook it. I am going to forgive you. Now, you guys get out of here. I’ll see you tomorrow at practice and stay away from my car!”

We left that office and I felt like a new person. I had lost all hope, and suddenly hope was back. I had been given a second chance. He gave us grace. He gave us mercy. When he gave us grace, he gave me a forgiveness that I didn’t deserve. When he gave us mercy, he withheld the punishment I deserved.

That’s just a human story about human forgiveness, but that’s exactly what God has done for us, because we are absolutely guilty. We deserve to die. Now, you may be sitting there thinking you’re a good person, and you don’t deserve to go to hell, but the Bible says “there is none that does good no, not one.” In fact, we recently installed “goodness detectors” in all the doors of our church. They’re kind of like metal detectors and whenever a good person walks through, a buzzer goes off. Have any of you heard it yet? It hasn’t gone off once yet and it never will. We all deserve the penalty of our sin, but God’s grace and mercy says, “I’ll forgive you. I won’t send you to hell.” Jesus took the punishment you and I deserve. That’s what grace is.

II. THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

Here’s the second thing. What about the process of salvation? How can you get in on that? How can you get involved in that kind of a plan? The process of salvation (and it is **THROUGH** faith, that’s the important preposition, *through* faith. Don’t get those prepositions confused. If somebody asks you how you are saved don’t say, “Through grace” It is by grace through faith. How are you saved? By faith? No. It’s by grace through faith. Faith is the conduit through which God’s grace is placed in our lives. An acrostic for faith is:

Forsaking

All

I

Trust

Him

1. Faith is our response to God’s grace

Forsaking all means forsaking all other methods, all other sources of strength; all other ways of thinking that I could ever be saved—forsaking all of those, I trust him. Notice a couple of things

about faith. First, our faith is our response to God's grace. It is God who initiates his grace. We don't come looking for God trying to find God and say, "God, where are you?" God came looking for us. The Bible says God demonstrated his love toward us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That means God didn't say, "You awful sinner! When you get perfect, when you get cleaned up, when you get good, then I'll love you. Then my son will die for you." He didn't say that. He looked at us in our sinful condition and said, "I love you just the way you are. My son is going to die for you." Now, faith is only our response to God's grace.

If you want to look at it like this, it is like God reaches down from Heaven and says, "Here, I offer you my hand." That's grace. Faith is our response reaching up and taking God's hand. "God, I believe. I believe Jesus died for me I believe you want to forgive my sins." That's what faith is. The Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The Bible says in the book of Romans, "If you believe in your heart the Lord Jesus and confess him with your mouth, you'll be saved." Here's the problem. A lot of people say, "Just put your faith in Jesus." That's too simple. I just can't accept that. Americans have an aversion to simplicity. You may think it's just the opposite, but it's true. We like things to be a little complicated so we feel like we have done something.

A few years ago Duncan Hines came up with a new product, a cake mix they had formulated that only required adding a cup of water. You poured the water on the mix, stirred it up, put it in a pan and put it in the oven—it came out a perfect cake. That product did not sell. It sat on the shelves. When they did some marketing research, they discovered consumers did not want to buy it, because they thought a cake that all you had to do was add water to wasn't any good. So, Duncan Hines took it off the market, re-formulated it so all you had to do was add a half cup of milk and an egg. Ever since then it has sold like hotcakes, because people like to feel like they have done something. Just adding water is too simple.

The same is true of salvation. There are a lot of people who say, "Do you mean, just put your faith in God? Trust God? That's too simple" It is for some people. Say to a third grade boy, "Son, the Bible says you are a sinner. Son, have you ever told a lie?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever disobeyed your parents?"

"Yes, I have. I know I'm a sinner."

"Well, son, that's the bad news, but the good news is that God loves you and has a plan for your life. Jesus died for you on the cross. If you would just turn from your sins, and place your faith in Jesus and open the door of your heart and ask Jesus to come into your heart, he'll forgive your sins and you are a Christian forever, and you will go to heaven when you die." Do you know what that third grader will say? He says, "Oh, boy! Wonderful! Do you mean that's all I have to do?" "Yes, son." He says, "I want that in a second." You tell the same thing to a sixty year old man and you know what he's going to say many times? "Huh! I don't believe that. That's too simple to me. I have to believe I have to do something more. Don't I have to stop doing a lot of things and don't I have to start doing a lot of things? Don't I have to start reading my Bible? Don't I have to start coming to church? Don't I have to start praying? Don't I have to start associating with the right kind of people?" No. Let me tell you what it takes to become a Christian: You repent of your sins. That means you recognize you are a sinner and you change your attitude about your sins. You admit you could never save yourself. That's what repentance

is. Then you come to Jesus. What does that hymn say? "Just as I am." Here's the problem: A lot of people think they have to get fixed up before they come to Jesus. That's like going to the hospital and saying I have to get well before I go to the hospital. No you come to Jesus as a sinner and he changes you. That's what faith is. Our response to his grace.

2. Faith is a gift of God

There's another thing about faith. Even faith itself is a gift from God. I want to show you there are two ways people spell salvation. Some people spell salvation "d-o." "It's what I do." Those of us who know the Bible spell salvation "d-o-n-e." "It's already been done."

When I said God reaches down from Heaven and we reach up with our faith, you may be thinking, "Well, I guess there is something for me to do, isn't there?" Even your faith is a gift from God. You can't even brag about all the faith you have, because it came from God. Imagine behind those two doors is a room full of riches: gold, silver, jewels, currency, securities—everything you can imagine. Let's say the owner of it came to you and said, "It's yours. All of it is yours for the taking." Across those two doors is a bar with a padlock on it. You say, "Hmmm that's all mine, but there is an obstacle. I have to get in there first." The owner reaches into his pocket and says, "Now, all that is yours, there's a padlock on it but, by the way, here is a key to the padlock. It's yours. Go after it." Faith is the key that unlocks all of God's riches. Some people would stick that key in their pocket and go over there with a crowbar or a hacksaw "Let me cut that thing off." Or they'd try to take blow the lock off with a gun. You say, "That's so dumb! The owner has already given you the key. Just use it." Listen God says, "I love you here's grace" he even gives you the faith the key to unlock all the riches. So, when you use God's key that's his gift.

III. THE PRODUCT OF SALVATION

Here's the third thing, the product of salvation and it is "unto good works." Look at those three prepositions again and don't confuse them. Somebody says, "How are you saved?" Don't say, "By good works." Somebody says, "How are you saved? By faith?" No by grace. "How are you saved? Through good works?" Absolutely not! You are saved UNTO good works.

1. Our good deeds will never earn salvation

Let me make a couple of statements about good deeds or good works. Number one: Our good deeds will never earn salvation. What is salvation? Ephesians 2:9 says, "By grace through faith." The Bible even tells what it's not. "It is not by works so that no man can boast." Listen to what the Bible is saying. The Bible is saying if there is anything you or I could ever do to earn salvation, then we could brag about it. There are some people who don't understand that. There are some people who are bragging about what they have done. They think it is going to get them into heaven. They say, "I walked down an aisle. I filled out a card. I stood up in front of the church and they voted me in. I got baptized. I read my Bible every day. I pray every day. I tithe. I go to church every Sunday. I sing in the choir. I teach Sunday School." Anybody who thinks they do those things and it will cause them to be accepted by God is so confused! There is nothing you can ever do to brag about how good you are to earn salvation.

Most people still have the old scales of justice idea about salvation. Our justice system in America, which I think is the greatest in the world, has to use the scale of justice, the evidence for/the evidence against, but some people carry that over to God and they really think up in Heaven God has a couple of sets of books and every good thing you do he writes down on one page every bad thing you do he writes down on another page and they really think when they stand before God, he'll tear out all the good pages and put it on one side of the scale and tear out all the bad pages and put it on the other side of the scale and some people really think if the bad pages outweigh the good, too bad, you are going to hell. If the good pages outweigh the bad, go on into Heaven. That's what most people think. If you go out there and say, "What does it take to go to Heaven?" They'll usually say, "Be good! Do good! Keep the Ten Commandments." They'll name something to DO. That is not true.

Think of the poor old thief on the cross there with Jesus. Look at all the bad pages he had—books and books of bad pages. He was a criminal, a murderer, a thief and the very last thing he did before he died was to say to Jesus, "Lord." (that takes faith to look at a dying man and call him Lord, doesn't it?) "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus said, "That's the only thing you ever need to do. Today you will be with me in Paradise."

2. Our good deeds are evidence of our salvation

The only thing that will determine whether you get into Heaven or not is giving yourself to Jesus, not good works. You can't earn it. The second thing our good deeds are evidence of our salvation is, "We are saved unto good works." That means is if you are a Christian, your life will be characterized by good works, just as a fire is characterized by heat. You can't brag about walking down an aisle. You can't brag about accepting Jesus. You can't brag about being baptized. But if you are a Christian, you will be willing to do those. They are good works that follow salvation. Jesus said, "By a person's fruit, you shall know them." Good works are not the *root* of salvation they are the *fruit* of salvation. Jesus said in Matthew 5, "Let your light so shine before men," meaning doing good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." How can you know if you are truly saved and there is good evidence in your life of your salvation? When people look at you and the goodness you exhibit—are they giving you the credit? Are they giving you the glory? Or are they turning and giving the glory and credit to God? That is the best example of the kind of good works this is talking about.

CONCLUSION

Grace really is amazing! I want to show you how amazing grace is. How the grace I am talking to you about right now and that the Bible teaches is so totally different than anything else taught in any religion in the world.

Imagine for a moment you have fallen into a deep, dark, dangerous pit. It's too deep for you to crawl out of and the bottom is covered with a vile, filthy, smelling slime, and you are sinking. To make matters worse, you hear a sound and you turn and there coiled beside you in the bottom of that pit is a hideous, huge, poisonous snake ready to bite you. You are in a bad way! That's the way we all are in our sin.

The different religions of the world come along and try to help you. Confucius comes along and says, "Ah, so! You are in a pit. A man should walk circumspectly so he will not fall into the pit of his own making." and then he leaves, and you say, "Big help that is to me I'm already in the pit." A Buddhist comes along and the Buddhist says to you, "You're miserable, aren't you?" "Yes, I'm miserable." "Well, you see you are miserable because of your desire to escape from the pit and the snake. If you want to relieve yourself of your misery, it will be attained with a cessation of all desire. Put your mind in neutral and don't desire to escape and you will no longer be miserable." and he leaves. Then a Hindu comes along by the way, you hear a lot about the New Age Religion, all the New Age Religion is Hinduism dressed up in a 3-piece business suit in America. The Hindu comes along and says, "You just think you are in a pit. You just think there is a snake there. There is really not a snake there. There is not a pit there. They're all products of your consciousness, which is limited. If you will just work to raise your consciousness to a higher level, you can escape in your mind, because the mind is more important than the body anyway. You can even have people who can help you attain that higher level of consciousness." So, you sit there and try to do that, but you say, "I don't care what he says that snake is real! This pit is real." Then a Muslim comes along. He says, "It is the will of Allah and the snake may bite you, but when you die, die with the name of Allah on your mouth. That way you may die as a martyr and earn a place in the paradise of Allah." You think "Well, I don't like that prospect either." Then Jesus comes along Jesus looks at you and he has compassion. In fact, the Bible says he stood and looked over Jerusalem and cried because of their sin. Then Jesus climbs down into the pit and he stands between you and that serpent and he lifts you up and he lifts you out of the pit just as the poisonous fangs of that serpent strike his body then he turns and crushes the head of the serpent with his heel. Now that's what is so amazing about grace!

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II. THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

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2. A gift of God

III. THE PRODUCT OF SALVATION

Our good deeds

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2. Are evidence of our salvation



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes