

10/13/2019 - Ephesians 2:8-10

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- [0 : 00] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Oodawa.
- You can find out more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. If you are new with us, my name is Benji Slayton. I'm the pastor here. I'm so thankful that you've come to worship with us and to be a part of what God is doing in this neighborhood to extend the transformative presence of his kingdom.
- You can be a part of it. We are just beginning. There's space for you. We'd love for you to be a part of it with us. Mary Oliver is a poet, and one of the things that she says is that attention is the beginning of adoration.
- Attention. What we give our attention to is the beginning of what we worship. Isn't that beautiful? So with that in mind, let's give our attention to God's Word.
- Our full attention. I'm going to be reading from the end of Ephesians chapter 2. We've been in a series, if you're new with us. We've been in a series in the Apostle Paul's letter to a small group of house churches in and around the ancient city of Ephesus.
- [1 : 22] And so we're looking at just a couple of verses today, starting in verse 8. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing.
- It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
- Amen. This is God's Word. Amen. So I grew up in a church. It was a good church. I learned about Jesus there. It's called an Assemblies of God church.
- It's probably similar to our Lee students who are sometimes here and help us play music. Probably similar to a Church of God church like theirs is. And it was a good church. It was healthy. And they taught me that Jesus loved me.
- And I'm really thankful for that. But it was also a church that had some quirks and it had some problems and it had some crazy people. One of the weirdest situations that I ran across, though, was this family that I was not super close to.
- [2 : 25] They were friends with my parents. We're in the same Sunday school class. But their kids were a little bit younger. And I didn't really know their kids. But the husband was a controller or an accountant for a medium-sized company in Dallas.
- And over the course of a couple of years, we didn't know this, but it turned out that his bosses, the senior leadership in the company, had recruited him in a scheme to embezzle millions of dollars from the company.
- And this happened over the course of a number of years. And this was just, you know, normal guy going to church, sitting in the pews every week, going to Sunday school class, going to Christmas parties.
- Normal guy, embezzling millions of dollars. And he was smart enough to realize that when the FBI started investigating the company, that the noose was somehow closing in on him.

And he got really scared. And frankly, he felt really guilty and ashamed because he knew that what he was doing was wrong. But as he got scared, what he decided to do was to flee.

[3 : 30] He went to the bank and he pulled out all the money in the family's bank accounts and he disappeared. Legit, legit disappeared. Nobody knew where he was.

The FBI didn't know where he was. He said nothing to his wife, nothing to his teenage children. He just vanished. He was gone for five years.

No word. Daddy didn't know if he was dead. Did he run off with some other woman? Nobody knew anything. After five years, he showed up back at his house. And he apologized to his wife.

I'm sure that conversation went well. And then he went and he turned himself in to the authorities. To my knowledge, he's still in prison, probably like the other executives in the company.

But it is such a fascinating and crazy story. I've never heard anything like this. It's crazy that you could have a person that sits in church every week, that talks about grace, that talks about God, that sings songs, that believes that it is true.

[4 : 35] And yet they get up and they go on set on Monday morning to an office and it has zero connection with what just happened on Sunday. That there's this gap between what's going on on Sunday morning and the rest of their week and everything else.

Isn't it true that you can believe that all of this is true and yet go home and feel a mild level of depression for the rest of the week? Isn't it true that you can sing of God's grace and his forgiveness and his love for you and feel a complete sense or a complete lack of delight in your own life?

It's true that you can come and rejoice with God's people and have connections with God's people and have lots of things to do.

And then when you lay at home at night, you feel like your life is completely meaningless. You know, if you feel any of those things, this passage is for you.

I mean, it is straight for you. It's a beautiful passage because last week we were talking about those two great words, but God. The but God of God's grace. There was this before that characterized your life, but God entered in and now there is something more.

[5 : 51] That's what we talked about of God's grace changing us. And here in this passage, you see what it actually looks like for a life where grace has been worked into the whole of their life, where there's not a gap between Sunday and Monday.

What does that look like? Well, Paul gives you three key words that you need to see this passage. Simple. The first key word is faith. Second key word is masterpiece. The third key word is walking.

Those are the three things that he wants you to see. So faith. Look back at verse eight. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.

It's the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. You are able to get in on the grace of God, not by the things you have done, but by faith.

Theologians call this the instrument of faith. That the thing that God gives you in order to enable you to be reconciled with him by his grace is that faith.

[6 : 59] Paul is adamant. It's not anything that you've done. Your obedience. Your morality. Your giftedness. Your intelligence. Your beauty.

Your accomplishments. None of that has gotten you God's favor. It has not gotten God's attention. In God's economy, all of that stuff doesn't get his attention.

What does is the faith. Is your faith. And your faith isn't even yours. He says it's a gift of God so that no one will boast.

You see, what happens in salvation is that God comes in and he provides you the faith that you need to respond to his call of grace. That's what Paul's talking about.

You know, a lot of Christians, including the church I grew up in, the way that they talk about salvation is though it's a transaction. Right? God comes in. God provides grace. But you provide the faith.

[7 : 58] And when you mix those two things together, you get salvation. The problem with that is that's not what Paul's talking about. Paul's talking about something totally different. Because if I provide one of the key ingredients for salvation, all of a sudden I have something to boast about.

You know, I've gotten God's attention. God loves me because of the things that I have done. My faith. And Paul says, no, no, no, no, no.

You see, your faith is even a gift of God. We can say it this way. God has been gracious to you before you ever even knew you needed it.

He gave you the faith to even recognize your need of him. You have been saved by grace through faith.

And this isn't your own doing. It's the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one can boast. It is sheer gift. Sheer and unadulterated gift that God has given.

[9 : 07] By faith. What does faith look like? What does it mean to... Well, faith is just simply the resting in the promises of God.

That the promises of God are true. Think about it this way. My wife, she left. So she won't have to be embarrassed by this. But I believe that my wife... I have faith that my wife loves me.

I rest in my faith that my wife loves me. I mean, she promised to, right? We stood on a church stage and she made vows to love me. And I believe that that is true.

And most of the time, I can see it in the way that she acts towards me. And that's great. But there are times that, you know, it's harder to see. And in those times where it's harder to see her love, how should I respond?

I mean, should I question her? Should I... Should that thought creep into the back of my mind that perhaps she's just using me as a trophy husband? I mean, is it possible that maybe she just sees me as like this unending cash machine?

[10 : 13] No, of course not. I mean, it would be totally logical if I thought that. But no, of course not. That's not how you do it. I trust her because she made this promise.

So faith... Historically, Christians have said that faith has three parts to it. The first is noticing. I notice, I saw the fact that she promised to love me.

Then we assent. So noticing and assenting. I assent to the fact that she is being truthful. She's being earnest and truthful in the fact that she's making these promises and intends to keep them.

So I notice and I assent. But that's not faith. Knowing that somebody is sincere does not mean faith. But third is that I rest in that.

That's where faith is. I notice, I assent to the truth of it, and then I rest in it. I see that God tells me he loves me. I believe that God is truthful in that affirmation.

[11 : 13] But then I rest in it. I rest in him. And that's what faith looks like, is resting in that faith. I've quoted this Nigerian scholar named Yusufu Turaki before.

He's great. He writes on Ephesians. And one of the things he says is that, and actually this is fascinating. The image that he likes to use, think about this as an African who has been in his continent ravaged by the AIDS epidemic.

Here's what he says faith in God's grace looks like. He says it's like an infection. He says it's that God, with that faith, implants in a person faith, in his grace, resting in his grace.

And that infection begins to take over all of our life. It begins to, from the inside out, work a change in our bodies and in our minds and in our souls.

And it makes us become who he wants us to be. Isn't that a provocative image for a Nigerian to have? You see, faith isn't the work.

[12 : 22] We could say it this way. Paul is going to say in verse 10 that he's preparing us for good works. And a lot of people think, well, faith is the first good work I do. That's not it. Faith is the gift.

The good works come after. Faith, we could say, is the root. Faith is the root of our salvation. Grace is the root of our salvation. Those good works, those actions are the fruit.

Root and fruit. And if you get those mixed up, you miss a lot. You see, I think that one of the problems with this guy at my church growing up, the gap between Sunday and Monday, is that he felt like the only way to get through that gap is not by faith.

Not by resting in faith. Resting in the promises of God is the only way to get through that. Okay. So that's faith. The second thing is masterpiece.

Look at verse 10. It's this glorious passage. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[13 : 33] You are his workmanship. Actually, in Greek, that is a fantastic word. It's this word poema. Say that again. Poema.

Poema. No, you didn't do it well enough. Poema. There we go. Good. Poema is this great word we get in English. We get the word poem from it.

Poetry. But it's actually interesting. It's not talking about just your basic poetry. You know, roses are red. Violets are blue. Anything that I would write for my wife would not be poema. But it's talking about creative accomplishments.

You know, Mary Oliver. Emily Dickinson. Shakespeare. That's what poema is. And Paul is saying, you are a poema.

You are a creative accomplishment of God. You can translate that word in a number of ways. ESV translates it as workmanship.

[14 : 29] I think of workmanship as something that has like precision. That all the component parts work the way that they are supposed to work. And build into something that functions correctly.

You know, like a fine watch. You are like God's fine watch. Your pieces work together to achieve the goal that he wants for you. But it can be translated other words.

Like workmanship. Or like craftsmanship. I think of craftsmanship like woodworking. You know, something that is beautiful. There's an attention to detail with it. That all the materials are right.

I had a friend when I lived in Austin. And he and his brother made their own canoe. And it was like 15 feet. I mean, this thing was huge. And it was gorgeous.

And you just looked at it. You didn't want to touch it. You didn't want to get it in the water and get it dirty. Like, it's beautiful. God's saying that you are his craftsmanship.

[15 : 29] He's created you with an attention to detail. But the other word that you can use to translate it is masterpiece. And I might like this one the most. I think of like a piece of artwork.

Like a sculpture. Or a painting. Something that not only is beautiful. But it communicates something that is true. And what Paul is saying is, you are God's masterpiece.

That's who you are. Because of the grace that he has implanted in you. That he has poured out over you. He's changed you from the inside out. So that you would be his masterpiece.

Showing forth the truth of who he is. His glory to the world. It's a glorious image. That means that your life is not an accident.

You are exactly as you are by the perfect design of God. But that's really hard to see sometimes. One of my pastor buddies, whenever he talks about this passage, he shows the clip from Mr. Holland's opus.

[16 : 35] Y'all remember this movie from the 90s? It's a great movie. If you're a millennial, it probably passed you by. Go back and watch it. It's worth it. But in the movie, Richard Dreyfuss is a high school music teacher.

And one of the great scenes is he's doing a private lesson with this girl who's learning the clarinet. And she can't get it. And she's really struggling. And part of the problem is that she's just not good at it.

But the other part of it is that she feels small. Because all of the rest of her family members have these incredible musical accomplishments. And she can't get the clarinet to stop squeaking.

And so she's just like way down. You know, her sister got a scholarship to Juilliard. Her mom is a recording artist. Her dad has this other creative accomplishment.

I don't know what it is. But she just feels like she's just so normal. You know, she's just normal. I totally remember feeling like that as a teenager.

[17 : 38] I remember telling my mom, all of my friends, they all have their thing. And I don't have my thing. You know, I'm okay at a lot of stuff. But I would give anything as a high schooler to not be normal.

Normal was like the worst. I just wanted to have something. I really didn't care what. The beautiful thing in that clip is that Richard Dreyfuss, he sits down.

And he walks through with her. And he helps her to realize that just under the surface, in what she just can't quite see yet, there is this masterpiece that's been waiting to be brought out.

There's something beautiful under the surface. And I feel like what this passage is saying to you, especially if you're a teenager and you feel the way that I did, you need to hear that God has a plan for you.

God, you are his masterpiece. You have been created for a specific purpose with a particular design to achieve the particular ends that he has designed for you.

[18 : 42] You know, if you're an adult, maybe you remember the person who helped you figure that out for yourself. You know, was there one person who just helped you realize, oh, you know what?

That's who you are. That's who God has made you to be. Do you realize if you've found that, you have the opportunity to impart that gift on the young people of our church?

I love the fact. One of the things that I am loving about grace and peace is that we're developing the kind of culture where the people who are older are investing in our younger people.

That's beautiful. Because we need you to invest because they need to know that they've been created by God as masterpieces of his grace.

And they need to discover that. Okay, so faith is how you get in on this. Understanding that you are a masterpiece. Understanding God's work in you is one of the ways that you get over that gap of Sunday to Monday.

[19 : 44] But finally, that takes a particular form. That you walk in that. Created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

You will, as you discover God's grace and his design for you and his work through you, you're going to be enabled to live by that grace. And what form does God's grace take when it begins to produce fruit in you?

It produces the fruit of good works. Of good works. Of obedience. Of kindness. Of goodness. Of gentleness. Of faithfulness. The self-control. The fruit of the Spirit. That's what it's doing.

And Paul uses this image of walking. I mean, it seems so commonplace for him to use an image of walking. I mean, that was fundamental to life. You couldn't do anything without walking. They didn't have indoor plumbing.

You know? You needed to go to the bathroom. You had to go walk somewhere. Wanted water. You had to go somewhere. Everything you were walking. Jesus was walking. There's this... We've lost the import of that image.

[20 : 50] But that walking for him... Paul actually brings this up in chapter 4 of Ephesians. We'll get to in a few weeks. That walk in the manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

He likes this language. And this is what it looks like to go from Sunday to Monday. Is to begin to walk in a different way. The inevitable result of the root of your life being changed is that the fruit will be different.

Okay. One of the things that I think is interesting about this passage is there's a little textual thing that you probably wouldn't pick up. In him using walking here in verse 10, he actually is replaying it because he used it in verse 1.

You remember this? What was verse 1? And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked. So there was this before you walking in your trespasses and sins.

There's now this after of you walking in the good works that God has prepared beforehand. What does that actually practically look like? Think of a young father.

[22 : 05] Let's just take a young father. You know, beforehand he used to walk in the ways of this world that we talked about last week. He walked in ways that led to death.

He walked in his own selfishness and sin. But now God has changed him at some point along the way. And now he's walking in life. In ways of life. What does that practically look like for a guy who finds himself as a young father?

Well, it begins by internally changing him and expanding out. He becomes a different person on the inside. Grace has changed him. It begins to change the way he responds for himself individually.

You know, he changes his loves. He begins to become a person who seeks God's word. He seeks God in devotion. He seeks God in prayer. That's what his first responsibility is.

At the very least, he is an individual before God. But it expands beyond that. He has a family that he's responsible for. A wife that he's responsible to love and to serve and to care for and to seek after.

[23 : 11] He's got children that he's responsible to raise and to care for, to discipline and to guide, to strengthen. But it extends beyond that. He may be an individual, but in God's world, we are never just individuals as opposed to collectives.

There's always individual and many. One and many. And so his life expands out beyond him to his neighbors, to his friends, to his co-workers, to his business.

He's responsible to his business. He's responsible to the people who live next door. He's responsible to the person who cuts his hair. He's responsible to the other community entities.

You see, those good works, we can talk in abstractions about them. God has made you his masterpiece for good works. And we stop there and say, oh, isn't that nice?

But it always takes practical implications in the very fundamental and small ways that we are responsible to one another.

[24 : 14] That's always what it looks like. You know, we live out when the gap from Sunday to Monday, we get over that because our hearts are changed and it leads us to the small, everyday decisions that serve one another, that are those good works.

Eugene Peterson loves to call this, he calls this a long obedience in the same direction.

There's nothing heroic about it. We went on a hike yesterday. Well, Friday night and Saturday, the men of our church took a bunch of boys and we went and we camped out and cooked a lot of horrible food and some of it was good.

And then we went on a long hike yesterday and we had a great time. Our boys had a great time. It was really, really fun. But, you know, we were just walking all day.

You have to make the continual decision, I'm gonna go up this switchback and another switchback and another switchback. I'm gonna go to the next overlook and then the next overlook. And it's those small decisions to go a little bit further that end up with a glorious day of hiking.

[25 : 34] It ends in some sort of fruitfulness. You know, those small steps. Other than my back, I feel great after going yesterday. And we felt great as a group.

But, you see, it's those small decision making, those are the way that we begin to get the grace of God into our lives. Eugene Peterson, he goes on and he uses this image.

He says that the good works are to grace as a bucket. Like we sent our kids down to the creek on this camp out to get water out of the creek to bring it back to the campsite so that we could use it at the campsite.

Good works are the bucket by which we carry the life-giving water of life, of grace back to us to feast on.

Good works are just what's helping you to see the grace. And I think that's a really helpful image because you cannot be a Christian without those good works, but you are also not a Christian if you just focus on good works and think that it earns you something.

[26 : 42] You must be a Christian that is motivated by the grace of God and sent out by the grace of God and yet goes and lives a life of fruitfulness. You see, one of the problems with the spirituality that I was given when I was young was that the Sunday was this massive emotional moment.

If you could reach the heights on Sunday, it was thought that that would carry you with diminished returns until you got back to Sunday, through the end of the week, and then you get filled up again.

It was like a tank. Fill me up. I spin, spin, spin, spin, spin, and then I get empty, and then I come back. The problem is is that's not the way that it works. Paul is saying that there's a fundamental link between the grace of God that we see and our obedience ongoingly.

And that's the way that we're changed. That's the way that we get over that gap. And it doesn't sound heroic. You know?

Getting up and reading your Bible is not heroic. If you're a young father, going and taking your wife on a date is not heroic. If you're going and sitting with your kids and reading them a story and loving them, reading the Bible with them at the dinner table, none of that is heroic.

[28 : 02] In fact, it's often full of just terrible mundane realities. It's not heroic. And yet, it's the way that God is bringing His transformative presence to your family.

How can I get at this? Think about Jesus. Jesus, in many ways, Jesus went, He healed the sick.

He fed the poor. He raised people to new life. He sacrificed Himself. He did these seemingly amazing things. And yet, how did the vast majority of people who saw Jesus respond?

They didn't care. In fact, Jesus, the Bible says that Jesus, in Himself, was showing you what God was like.

He was revealing the invisible God right for you. And all the people who are around, they looked at the invisible God made known in Jesus, and they said, no thanks, I'd rather have the invisible God.

[29 : 01] Why would they do that? Because there was something about their projection of God. There was something, they could make God into something, into something of their imagination, instead of dealing with just the simple realities of a Jewish guy who walked around, who ate just like them, you know, who, who was just normal, probably had body odor as he walked around in the sweaty Middle East, whose feet got dirty, who needed to sleep, who was probably a little bit irritating to his brothers and sisters because he did everything right, who was probably a little bit irritating to the disciples because he was so focused on the mission.

It was way easier to believe in a God they couldn't see. And we do that with our spiritual lives. We think that it's this heroic thing when God is calling us to the small and simple acts of good works that he has prepared beforehand for those who love him, that we should walk in them.

See, the mystery is that you think you need to conjure up faith or make yourself into a masterpiece or be heroic in some way in order to not just earn God's love, but that that's what the Christian life looks like.

The mystery that God is trying to get through our heads is that he's already provided everything we need. He's already given it by his grace. We just have to rest in it.

We just have to rest in it. But we need so much help doing that. I don't do that. I don't rest in God's grace. I want to be heroic.

[30 : 41] I want to be big and well-known. I want to be a masterpiece. I want everybody to see my gifts and admire me and think that it's great and then as a result love Jesus.

That's not how it works. God is saying, my, it is his grace that brings us to new life. We need his Holy Spirit to do this for us.

So let me pray and ask him that he will do this. Our Father, I don't even know how to get this into my head. it's so difficult for me to see myself the way that you see me.

I want so much to find my own way forward. And so Lord, I pray and I ask that you would give us the grace of your Holy Spirit to live in this new life.

Would you do this for your glory's sake? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[31 : 42] Amen. Amen.