

He Saved Us

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0 : 00] We don't often do this here in our times of worship, but there are many churches who utilize the historic Christian creeds and confessions as a vital part of their weekly worship services.

These statements like the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, or the London Baptist Confession, or the Westminster Confession, or the Heidelberg Catechism, there are a number of them historically that the church has used. What these statements do is they helpfully summarize for us and express the core doctrines of the Christian faith.

We must be careful that we never elevate them to the level of Scripture or even above Scripture, as many denominations and Christian traditions have done. We must be careful not to do that.

We believe in sola scriptura, that the Scriptures are the authority above all else, and even the statements that we use to summarize these core doctrines that are found in the Scriptures must be subservient to the Scriptures. And insofar as they agree with the Word of God, they are very helpful to us, and they can be edifying to recognize them and to meditate on them. When churches incorporate these creeds and confessions into their corporate worship Sunday by Sunday, they're really following in the footsteps of Christians from the early church. In fact, our primary text for this morning, verses 4 through 7, is believed to have functioned as an early creedal statement of early Christians, or at least perhaps a hymn that would have been sung in the worship of first century believers.

And what a tremendous confession it is. Can you imagine gathering with believers in Crete 2,000 years ago, and together, either in song, they believed that this was probably used at the baptismal services that they would have, as you gather for a baptism or maybe in the service, whether you're reciting it or you're singing it.

[2 : 07] Can you imagine lifting your voices together, and this is the thing that you say. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us. And you move on from there to talk about the roles of the Holy Spirit and the Son, Jesus Christ.

What a wonderful confession it actually is. Before we get into the details of what is actually being said here, let's first acknowledge why Paul is actually using it.

Why has he inserted it here in this passage? Remember, the structural pattern for chapter 2 and chapter 3 is exactly the same.

Paul begins with exhortations for the Christians in Crete to follow him. He grounds them in the gospel of grace, and then he concludes them with pastoral instruction for Titus and the other elders to follow.

In chapter 2, the emphasis is on Christian behavior in the church. In chapter 3, the emphasis is on Christian behavior in the world, outside of the church and the testimony that we have before others.

[3 : 14] And so as we look at the structure of chapter 3, that's the reason I wanted to read all 11 verses there just a moment ago, because we need to see the bigger picture here, else we'll get lost in the weeds and we won't know exactly.

It will be fruitful for us to dig into 4 through 7, but it is important for us to know why Paul has it here. The main appeal is in verses 1 through 2. We talked about that two weeks ago.

And everything else flows, all the way down to verse 11, flows out of verses 1 and 2, where Paul has exhorted Titus to remind the people to behave in particular ways in the world.

In verses 4 through 7, where we study today, Paul lays the foundation of God's grace as the source and motivation for the Christ-likeness that he has commanded in verses 1 and 2.

And then when we get to verses 8 through 11, he gives more pastoral instruction, particularly how Titus and the elders are to insist on these things and how they are to discipline people in the church who do not insist on these things or perhaps even contradict them.

[4 : 19] So Paul takes what might have been an early Christian creed or hymn, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he employs it to emphasize that God's grace toward us is the very reason why we should act with such grace toward the unbelievers around us.

Do you see that in the big picture? Because I'm going to move on from it, but I want you to see that first before we dig into the details. Paul takes this creed in the middle and he inserts it to say, behave this way because this is the way God has behaved toward you, okay?

That's the motivation, the gospel of grace. Now, everything in verses 4 through 7 revolves around a single phrase, and you find it at the beginning of verse 5.

Look at it with me. He saved us. He saved us. Saved here means to be rescued. And it brings into view the desperate condition each of us is in as a result of our sin.

We're all guilty before God. We're guilty of sinning against God. By nature, we are enemies of God, destined to face His eternal wrath.

[5 : 36] But to be saved is to be rescued from the penalty of sin. It is to be reconciled to God in peace.

And when we come to verse 5, we see the central focus is on this phrase. God rescued us. And what did He rescue us from? Himself.

It was the holy wrath of God, destined to condemn us for all of eternity. And it is the loving grace of God that provides a way for sinners to be made right with Himself.

He saved us. And the text emphasizes that this salvation is God's work of grace apart from any merit or action of men.

Twice in these short verses, God Himself is declared to be the Savior. We see it in verse 4, the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior appeared.

[6 : 36] And then we see it again in verse 6, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior. And all of the saving action in this passage is attributed only to God and to His work.

You see, salvation is not a reward for those whose good outweighs their bad. Salvation is not a debt that God owes us for religious services that we render to Him.

Salvation is the gracious act of God whereby He grants forgiveness and eternal life solely on the basis of His mercy.

And if you forget everything else I say this morning, I hope you will at least remember this, that if anyone is to be saved, it will only be as a result of the gracious work of God in their life.

And that's the emphasis of this gospel of grace. It's not only the emphasis of the gospel of grace in Titus chapter 2 and Titus chapter 3. It is the emphasis of the gospel of grace from Genesis 1 to the end of the book of the Revelation.

[7 : 48] It is all of God's grace. And we find a particular, wonderful, glorious statement of it here in this early creed. The creed declares three wonderful truths about the saving grace of God.

It tells us when He saved us. It tells us how He saved us. It tells us why He saved us. That's the structure I want to take with you this morning. First, let's see when He saved us.

When He saved us. Verse 4, But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us. Goodness and loving kindness of God toward the Cretan believers in the context here is set in contrast with the spirit of those Christians in Crete toward the unbelievers in the world around them.

They perhaps had fallen into pride, into rebellion, into arrogance against the unbelievers. But in contrast to that, Paul highlights the goodness and loving kindness of God that was shown to them when they were unbelievers.

And Paul calls them to show this same grace to others. The same grace that they had experienced from God, they were to show to others. And how had God shown this grace to the Cretan Christians?

[9 : 04] His grace was demonstrated through the person and work of Jesus Christ. And appeared, the word appeared is significant here.

Just like in chapter 2 and verse 11, it's the same word that we get, epiphany, meaning a sudden manifestation or appearance of something. It is something being made visible.

And what Paul is saying, or the Creed is saying, and Paul is saying through the Creed here, is that the goodness and loving kindness of God are not abstract ideas that we just kind of theoretically attach to God up there somewhere.

No, they are tangible realities that we see in the person and the work of Jesus. In other words, if you want to see the goodness and the loving kindness of God, look at Jesus.

If you want to see the grace of God, look at Jesus. That is how God has manifested his grace. Another way to say it is to say this, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[10:10] Or we might could say it another way. We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. It's the theme of the Bible. It's everywhere. Now I want you to notice here in verse four that the timestamp of our salvation is given in the past tense.

When the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared, the person and work of Jesus in the past, he saved us in the past. How are we to understand this?

Simply reverse the phrases to see it maybe a little bit more clearly. He saved us when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared. And I want to take just a moment to show you why I think this is so significant.

Don't turn me off yet. This is good. I want you to think about the various dimensions of salvation recorded in the Bible. The first thing I want to point out to you is that our salvation was determined before the world began.

[11:28] So in eternity past, God sets his love on his people. We see that in Ephesians chapter one. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved. What does he mean by that? That our salvation in one sense was determined before we were ever even created. Indeed, before anything else was ever created. But then we see our salvation is confirmed at the moment of conversion.

It is determined before the world began. It's confirmed at the moment of conversion. Romans chapter 10. Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. If someone were to come to you this afternoon and they said, hey, I heard you are a Christian. I've heard that being a Christian means that you have to be saved. Tell me, when were you saved?

[12:42] Your immediate reaction is gonna go to the moment of your conversion because that's the moment that your salvation graciously given to you by Jesus Christ was confirmed through your faith in Jesus Christ and his finished work.

So salvation is determined before the world began. It's confirmed at the moment of our conversion. Thirdly, our salvation will be completed at Christ's return. will be completed at Christ's return. Hebrews chapter 9. So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time. He's coming back. Not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Now, I thought we were already saved. If we know Christ, God has predestined it before the world's began. It was confirmed at the moment that I trusted Christ. Why is he saying that I won't be saved until Jesus returns?

Because there's this past, present, future dimension to salvation. We are saved. We have been saved. We are being saved. The gospel is transforming us by the work of the Holy Spirit to be more like Christ.

[13:53] We will be saved. That is one day. All of this will be brought to completion. Glorified. No more sin. No more death. No more disease. It will all be over. We will be saved, and we will be with him in eternity.

And I say all of that to say this. It's determined before, confirmed at conversion, completed at Christ's return, but it is secured at the cross.

Our salvation is secured at the cross. We read it last week, John 19, 30. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, what's the next three words?

It is finished. It's finished. It's done. What's done? Everything necessary for our salvation was done.

It was complete. We were saved. It was secured at the cross. The salvation of sinners is God's work from beginning to end.

[14:57] It's his plan, born of his mercy. And if you are in Christ today, it's not because you met a certain standard, and it's not because you fulfilled your religious duty.

Your salvation was won and secured at the cross when Jesus bore the wrath of God in your place, making a once-for-all time atonement for your sin.

We were saved when the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared, and how did it appear? In the cross of Jesus. And if God secured your salvation at the cross, he will see it through to the end.

He will see it through. He will not say, your redemption is good for now, but if you cross me again, I'm taking it away.

No, it's secured. It's been secured for 2,000 years. Romans chapter 8. Think about this. This is so awesome. Romans 8.

[16:03] For those whom he foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he called.

Those whom he called, he justified. Those whom he justified, he glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

When did he save us? When the goodness and love and kindness of God appeared. When did that appear? On the cross. Our salvation was secured.

It was God's work from beginning to end. And it's the only place that we can begin at this point in this creed. When he saved us. Secondly, how did he save us? How did he save us?

Verse 5. He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

[17:11] Again, Paul is very quick here to remind us that our salvation does not come as a result of anything that we do. And here's why.

We cannot possibly be saved by our own righteousness because according to verse 3, put your eye back on it. According to verse 3, before God's gracious intervention in our lives, what were we?

We were foolish. Led astray. Slaves to sin. So on and so forth. A foolish person.

A person that is led astray. A person that is a slave to sin. This is a picture of all of those who are without Christ. That kind of person will not just wake up one day and decide, you know what? I think I'm going to be a Christian now.

It doesn't work like that. No. So how does God save us? Without the righteousness of Christ being imputed to us, our very best efforts are worthlessly ineffective.

[18:12] You can go to church every Sunday. You can give in the offering every week. You can do all the things. You can greet all the people. You can fulfill and tick all your boxes on the religious things.

And it will be completely ineffective for your salvation. Why? Because he saved us not because of works done by us. It's not about us.

It's not about our righteousness. Our righteousness will never be good enough. Paul knew this better than anybody. Remember in Philippians chapter 3, Paul says, if anyone else thinks that he has a reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

And he goes through his pedigree. Circumcised the eighth day. Tribe of Benjamin. Hebrew of Hebrews. As to the law, a Pharisee. That means that he kept it to the nth degree.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church, thinking he was fulfilling the will of God. As to righteousness under the law, blameless, he says. But whatever gain I had, I count it as loss for the sake of Christ.

[19:15] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, he says.

Rubbish. All of the righteous efforts that you've put in are nothing but trash, Paul says. Because the only way to know Christ is through faith, by his grace.

So if God doesn't save us through self-righteous works, how does he then save us? And the answer is succinctly given here in verses 5 and 6. And it has everything to do with God's grace. But what I love so much about this creed is that it is ultimately Trinitarian, revealing how the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit work together for our salvation.

Bill Mountain said it this way. This passage has one of the most elegant descriptions of the Trinity anywhere in the New Testament. It shows the three members of the Godhead actively involved in the salvation of sinners.

God the Father as planner and initiator. God the Son, Jesus Christ, as the agent of redemption. That's verse 6. And the Holy Spirit as the instrument of regeneration and renewal.

[20 : 28] That's verse 5. Gordon Fee calls it an inerrant Trinitarianism that sees Father, Son, and Spirit working co-jointly jointly for our salvation.

And why does that matter? Because our salvation is all of God. So how then does God save us? Well, the entire plan of redemption is based on the Father's mercy that has been revealed to us in the sacrifice of His Son.

We've touched on those already. Let me focus now for our time this morning on this work of the Holy Spirit in verse 5. There's a two-fold work that is stated here.

Two words are given. Regeneration and renewal. Regeneration, the kids have learned this in Adventure Club. Kids, what does it mean to be regenerated?

Do you remember? Gus, it means to be born again. That's exactly right. Regeneration means to recreate, to bring to life again. It's when sinners who are dead in their trespasses and sins are cleansed from sin, awakened to new life in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 35] And in John chapter 3, Jesus called it, as Gus said, being born again. John chapter 3, verse 5, Jesus answered Nicodemus, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, water there being the cleansing of sin by the Holy Spirit and being born of the Spirit being the regenerating work, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

He cannot be saved. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. And he says, do not marvel that I said this to you. The wind blows where it wishes.

You hear it sound. You do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with those who are born of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work in regeneration. The wind blows.

The wind of the Spirit blows when the Word of God is declared and the Gospel is declared. And the Holy Spirit does this. Sin, cleansing, regenerating work where he takes dead sinners and he gives them new life.

The regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. The second word is renewal. Renewal refers to the quality of life that is given to us by God's Spirit. And it is a life that is distinctly different from the one before.

[22 : 51] That's Paul's point here. Think about it in Romans 12 too where the same word is used. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by what?

The renewal of your mind. Don't be like the world. Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Well you can't renew your own mind. That's the work of God's Spirit according to the Word.

The Holy Spirit transforms us. He renews us. How about Colossians 3? Do not lie to one another seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

It's this work of sanctification that the Holy Spirit does. He brings us back to life and he renews the quality of that life to be distinctly different from what we were before. So he not only gives us life he gives us a different kind.

And this regeneration and renewal is part and parcel of the motivation behind our pursuit of Christ-likeness in the world. It's how it relates back to the first two verses. If you have the Holy Spirit that has brought you to life and is renewing you actively, progressively in your life in sanctification you will progressively change from being so frustrated and arrogant and prideful to the world to where you will now humbly show the grace of God and the forgiveness of God and the mercy of God.

[24 : 18] God does this. It is his work. But perhaps you're wondering how does the Holy Spirit actually go about doing this? I mean is it just like you just happen to be standing in just the right place like a person getting struck by lightning and if you just happen to be in the right place suddenly the Holy Spirit just bam you're there and it's done.

No that's not how it works. The Bible tells us in Ephesians chapter 6 that there is a sword that the Holy Spirit wields to do his work. The sword is the word of God.

The Holy Spirit accompanies the Holy Scripture. The wind of the Spirit blows in regeneration and renewal when the word of God is preached and shared and studied and what this truth should do is

radically affect our efforts at evangelism and our spiritual maturity neither of which can be fruitful apart from the scriptures.

They cannot be because the way that the Holy Spirit does this work is through the word of God.

That's why we want people we want to invite unbelievers to a church service.

That's why we don't want to just encourage them to be like Christians. We want to encourage them with the word to believe and follow Christ because it is the word of God that the Holy Spirit uses to make the people of God.

[25 : 50] Hebrews chapter 4 the word of God is living it's active sharper than any two-edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit of joints and of marrow and it discerns the thoughts and the intents of the heart not because not the book itself it's not that there's a magic button here that if you just open your Bible one day and you start to read through a passage that there's something that comes alive out of the pages itself and does some type of mystical work in you.

No that's not how it works it's that it is brought to life through the regenerative and renewal work of the Holy Spirit as the word of God goes out he always accomplishes his purposes and as he accomplishes his purposes he does it through the work of the Spirit.

So how then has God saved us? Not through anything we've done our salvation rests solely on God's sovereign work of grace accomplished through the death of Jesus and the transformative power of his Spirit.

I know that was heavy and that's a lot but perhaps it'll marinate on your mind for a while when we were saved how he saved us finally why he saved us why did he even do this if salvation is God's work from beginning to end if it flows out of his mercy and through the demonstration of the love of Christ on the cross and it's this regenerative work of his spirit if it is God's doing from beginning to end why does he care to do it why verse 7 so that it's the purpose statement of the creed so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life let's condense it down again he saved us so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life again grace is set in contrast with works of righteousness and it reiterates how God saves us but the ultimate goal of God's gracious initiative is to make us his own people is to make us his own adopted into the family of

God we've been praying for the Blevins for some time now they're in this waiting cycle for the adoption of a child from Columbia and whenever the Lord sees fit to bring that child into their home legally bestowing all rights as being their children will be given to that child adopted into their family belongs to them all the rights all the inheritance all the things belongs to this child and that's the image that God uses of us here we become heirs if salvation came from works then its benefits would be a payment that God owes us and our relationship with him would be merely contractual and professional that is we do something for God and in return he does something for us okay if it was through works that's how it would function but the true gospel is so much more glorious than that it's amazing actually because salvation is of

[29 : 14] God's grace its benefits belong to us positionally not because of something that we have done but because of who we are and who are we we are the children of God and our relationship to him is not contractual and professional our relationship to him in grace is covenantal and personal it's glorious Galatians 4 when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law that's the when and the how here's the why so that we might receive adoption as sons and because your sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts which causes us now to cry out to God as father so you are no longer a slave but a son and if you're a son then you're an heir through God and what is the inheritance that you have it is eternal life that was won for us at the resurrection of

Christ all that belongs to Jesus our elder brother now we might say all that belongs to Jesus now belongs to us not because of what we've done but because of who we are in him and why would God do this why why such marvelous grace there is only one possible answer it can only be out of love that's the only answer that could possibly work Ephesians 2 we quoted this while ago let's quote it again God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead so his love doesn't come because of something we've done it's not something that we are it's just his love because it's his love so that we might receive adoption excuse me that's the wrong quote so that he made us alive together with

Christ by grace you've been saved and it goes on we sing about this grace and this love could we with ink the ocean's fill and where the skies of parchment made where every stalk on earth a quill

and every man a scribe by trade to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry nor could the scroll contain the hole though stretched from sky to sky why has God saved us because he loves us because he loves us now this passage is immediately relevant on at least two levels first expresses the truth of salvation by grace alone it's God's work from beginning to end but he calls us to enter this love by trusting the work of

Christ by faith we are justified by faith no matter what no matter what your background is and I don't know everyone that's here today I don't know what your background is and what your particular position is in regards to spiritual things or in regard to the things of God but no matter what you are where you are you are trusting in something for life and peace you may be trusting that your good outweighs your bad or that you've done just the right kind and amount of religious works you've done the baptism and you've done the catechisms and you've done the confirmation and you've done the church things you do all the things and you're trusting!

Maybe you're completely irreligious you are struggling with whether or not you even think that God is there that he exists well that's a trusting action there is an element where you are trusting life and peace to the fact that there is no God to which you must be held accountable no matter how you look at it either way the issue eventually boils down to faith and according to the scriptures what God has told us in his word true salvation only comes to those whose faith is in the grace of God through Christ that's where salvation lies true peace true love true grace can only be found in Christ that's the first way that we apply it the text is also relevant because it shapes the entire perspective of how we live and worship doesn't it when we understand and focus on the grace of God it will always produce in us humble praise humility worship joyful service to

[34 : 22] God that is the product of grace it affects the way we view and treat others because those who have received God's grace are keen to show God's grace and if you find that your spirit toward others is arrogant or harsh or if you determine that your worship is cold distant mundane it's not because the structure of the service is not beneficial it's not because the word of God has failed it's not because people are worse today than what they've been at other times in the world it's not because of any of those things it's because you've lost sight of the grace of God in your life and the only solution for you is to look to Jesus that's the only solution to look to Jesus and understand the grace and love of God will lead us to love others it will lead us to worship God in humility we will want to be at worship not only on

Sunday on the Lord's day Sunday by Sunday we will want to worship him at home we will want our kids to know him we will want our kids to understand his grace we will want to evangelize the people that are around us because our eyes are set on Christ and because we've come to understand the grace of God if you're struggling in those ways just remember God's grace isn't that what Paul says remind them remind them to live this way because of who God is and what he has made them in Christ