

Ephesians 2:8-10

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Date: 06 November 2016

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[0 : 00] First, I want to offer a thank you, particularly to, well, especially to Pastor Greg, Pastor Nick, and Pastor Matt.

I say that not only because I want to say that, but also because I understand the privilege. I understand the seriousness of the opportunity to stand before you.

I want to thank you and present what I believe the Lord put on my heart for this text for you. And I really appreciate it.

I want to say thank you to those three, first of all. Secondly, I want to also briefly tell you, say thank you to two people who are not here, but they're very much the reason why I'm here now.

Those are my parents, Dexter and Vena Park. They've both gone on to be with the Lord, but they both had a passion for both the Lord and a passion for his word.

[1 : 05] And he was also a bivocational pastor. And through the, my friends used to call it 24-hour church. They somehow were able to convey and pass this faith on to me.

So this is the reason why I'm here. And part of the reason why I'm here, those two are part of the reason why I'm here. Not only just because of my parents, but because of just their influence in the faith.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, Lord, we thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you for your grace, your power, your love.

Father, I pray that you would speak through me today, Lord. Send your Holy Spirit to just illuminate your word, illuminate everything I have to say.

I pray, Lord God, now that the word of my mouth and the meditation of my heart will be acceptable in your sight. O rock of my redeemer, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[2 : 13] So, are we cool? We're good? I'm not talking too loud. Okay. So today we're looking at Ephesians 2, verses 8-10.

And let me read. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is a gift of God. Not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

In verse 10 it says, For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

About a month ago, I had the opportunity to see, more like experience the brilliance of Savion Glover. For those of us who don't know who Savion Glover is, Savion is considered to be, by most, as Willie Huff, the artistic director of the Duke Ellington Jazz Series at Yale School of Music, aptly declared, the world's greatest living tap dancer.

Mr. Glover, who is also a choreographer, performed with his jazz quartet called The Others with a Z at the end at Sprague Memorial Hall on Yale's campus.

[3 : 35] Not only dancing as Huff declared that he would do, as David of the Bible did with all his might, but he also conducted his quartet as he was dancing.

And his performance literally turned Sprague Memorial Hall upside down with emotion, applause, and sheer beauty. One of the most compelling things about his performance were the moments where Savion appeared to be squarely in another world.

He especially noticed this when he was just, he just closed his eyes at times, facing the audience and dancing effortlessly, with a smile from ear to ear, his whole being engaged and relaxed.

He seemed as if he was experiencing a moment of joy, somehow transported by the experience he was creating for us into a world where we were no longer present or available to provide him the energy to perform or the validation that he may have needed, assuming he needed any validation from us at all.

And it was a moment that read to me as transcendent or surpassing the ordinary. And in this transcendent moment, he seemed truly alive.

[4 : 49] And I could not help but think about the combination of something transcendent and alive that was operating out of a gift given to Savion that I and others were encountering that night that was making me feel so blessed and inspired like much of the audience was feeling, I'm sure.

Here in the second chapter of Ephesians, it tells us that we've been made alive in Christ. But before that, we were dead in our trespasses and sins, which he writes in verse one.

And then in verse five, he writes again, this again about being dead. And then he writes that we were made alive together with Christ. Then he writes that by grace you have been saved.

And then he says again here in verse eight. And this is where we pick up. By grace. For by grace you have been saved. There's three things in this passage of Ephesians 2, eight through 10, I want to look at briefly tonight.

First thing is, I want to look at some elements of the character of God's grace. Some elements of the character of God's grace. The second thing I would like to look at is the undeserved gift that God's grace gives.

[6 : 04] The undeserved gift that God's grace gives. And finally, I want to look at the responsibility of being God's masterpiece. The responsibility of being God's masterpiece.

First, let's look at some of the elements of the character of God's grace. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. We heard deacon Jonathan, Elder Jonathan say that last week.

The unmerited favor of God. It comes from the Greek word charis, which means a generous gift or charitable act in the most technical sense. In verses six and seven, we are told that God saves us so that he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The word grace here is most likely speaking to a theological dimension of his meaning that refers to God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Yet what is interesting is that when Ephesians declared that God saves us so that he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

It's almost as if he, if the, this, this kindness implicit within or part of this generous or charitable act, charitable act of God, within our author's mind is, is not descriptive enough to express what God's grace is or has done for us.

[7 : 37] So this grace of God seems to hold the distinction of being a generosity demonstrated by God in Christ that is beyond kindness. That should be expected, you know, in a generous or charitable act.

This kind of kindness should be expected. It's almost as if the author was sitting there asking himself when writing this epistle, you know, how can I describe a type of generosity that is more than kind, than, than, than kind, uh, the kind that you find in generosity itself?

Or how can I describe a generosity so kind that it's indescribable? So God's grace is not only generous act.

It's not only a generous act. But it is an indescribably kind, indescribably kind, stumbling over those words, indescribably kind, in this generosity.

So God's grace contains a generosity that is, that is indescribably kind. Next, God's grace is full of wealth. In verse seven, we are told the riches of God's grace are immeasurable.

[8 : 56] Now try not to think of money, although God's shows favor in all areas of our lives, including finances. But think of the things money can't buy, like favor, healing, restoration, protection, peace, wisdom, discernment, power to overcome in trials, divine directional guidance, power to overcome sinful habits, or just power to overcome ourselves, power to overcome our past, present, and future, a grace that is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The immeasurable riches of God's grace. So grace is rich. A final thought on grace is, not only is it a grace that is indescribably kind, and rich, but God's grace is also costly.

God's grace is also costly. Meaning that it didn't come cheap. In writing about grace, German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a great book actually, declared that true, the book is called, Cost of Discipleship, declared that true grace, which comes from God, is costly.

He writes, costly grace is a treasure, is the treasure hidden in the field. For the sake of it, a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is a pearl of great price to buy, which the merchant will sell all his goods.

He goes on to say that it is costly, because it costs a man his life. And it is grace, because it gives a man the only true life.

[10:52] In other words, it is in this true life, where a man is made alive. And this is accomplished, as Ephesians points out, verse eight, through faith.

Before I talk about faith, and just the undeserved gift of grace, there's one more thing I want to say about grace, and it's funny, I didn't think about it this morning, until I heard Pastor Nick preach, and I ran into this quote, and I said, man, I have to say this quote, by the same lady he quoted this morning.

The grace of God is ultimately a mystery, that we can never fully understand. It's ultimately a mystery, and the quote comes from author Anne Lamott.

She sums it up when she writes, I do not understand the mystery of grace, only that it meets us where we are, but doesn't leave us where it found us.

So ultimately, God's grace is beyond our comprehension, but it does something to us. And here I want to talk about one of those, one of the things it does, and here I want to talk about the undeserved gift that God's grace gives.

[12:01] The gift is salvation through Jesus Christ, but it is accessed by or through faith. The writer in the book of Hebrews, in chapter 11 of verse one, gives a definition of faith where he writes, now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Another translator puts it, and I love this one, it says, now faith is confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see. In verse two of the same chapter in Hebrews, one translator writes, for this kind of faith, for this kind of faith, the men of old gained divine approval. Why was divine approval a combination given from God to men and women of old, as scripture points out? It's simple. Because they trusted what God said was true.

Because they trusted what God said was true. In other words, what God says here in Ephesians about being saved by grace through faith can be trusted.

And faith is important because faith plays a big part, not only in our conversion, but also in living the Christian life day by day by day. Now we know this because scripture tells us that the just shall live by faith in Romans 1.17 and Galatians 3.11.

[13:25] A prominent theologian, when describing the character of faith, wrote, and I love this, faith is a living and unshakable confidence.

A belief in the grace of God so assured that a man would die a thousand deaths for its sake. This kind of confidence in God's grace, and I would add God's character, this sort of knowledge of it makes us joyful, high-spirited, and eager in our relations with God and with all mankind.

So faith is a big deal. Who you and I put our faith in is an even bigger deal. It's such a big deal that if you and I put our faith in the right place, meaning the God of the Bible, the keeper of our souls, through our relationship with his son, Jesus Christ, then divine approval is attached to it.

Then divine approval is attached to it. Now the author tells us in the second half of verse 8 through verse 9, it's interesting, he says, not of your own doing, seems to break it up, not of your own doing, it is a gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Now I don't know about you, but I found myself wondering why our author felt the need to write this, but he wrote, not of your own doing, it is a gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

[15:01] If we take a look at Ephesus in antiquity, or in biblical times, the social context was interesting, you know, in a very unique way, distinct way. You know, it was an honor-shame culture, where honor and shame were values that shaped everyday life.

Honor, the primary measure of social status, was based upon ascribed honor and acquired honor. Inherited or ascribed honor was social standing due to being part of a social unit, principally a family.

For instance, for those born to rulers, those born to rulers were held in high esteem due to the family honor. Now, acquired honor was gained through meritorious deeds or public performance.

The public forum provided something called challenges for gaining or losing honor. A challenge, depending on where you ended up, might show the superiority of one person or group over another. Shame, on the other hand, was not simply the opposite of honor. Both positive and negative shame did exist. Shame could be handled positively by knowing how to keep matters out of public awareness.

[16:16] For example, a woman could bear shame well by remaining covered in public and avoiding male-dominated arenas. I told y'all that was antiquity, right?

So, or shame could also be designated honor, designated dishonor, dishonor, or loss of honor. So, most moral appeals were made to honor or disgrace.

And because of this reality, members of the lower class often knew that the only way they could get ahead was through patronage, which was typically a mutual relationship between those of unequal status and which both benefited.

So, the giving and receiving of favors, not one's industriousness or hard work, was a pathway in most cases to social elevation. In other words, you had to have the hookup.

So, this was the social context which existed in Ephesus and biblical times. Therefore, our author is putting it in a context to an audience of individuals who can understand the relevance and/or consequence of being hooked up or not hooked up in a society.

[17:31] Work or work in their relationships or their status or their savvy to get something they wanted or something that is being offered or something that's available that's good. But he's telling them that you can't utilize the culture's customs to get this gift of salvation.

The gift does not have and will never have anything to do with your hustle, your good people-ness, your connections or your social status or non-status. There's no network you and I can work.

There's no palm that you or I can grease, literally or figuratively. You do not have to be down with so-and-so. If you have the hookup, wonderful. If you don't, that's wonderful too. Everyone has to walk through the same door to acquire it and that door is Jesus Christ.

Now once we walk through that door, scripture tells us in Ephesians that we are made alive although we were once dead. But it doesn't stop there.

It gets better. It gets better. The responsibility of being God's masterpiece. Next, according to the book of Ephesians, we now become God's workmanship in Christ Jesus.

[18:46] One translator writes that we are God's masterpiece or work of art because we have been created in Christ Jesus something only God can do.

Now what could this mean? God's masterpiece. Not only does it mean something but it carries with it a responsibility.

Now if we think about a masterpiece or a work of art, first thing that comes to mind for most is something visual. Something to be viewed, to be appreciated with our sense of sight.

But we also know that art or masterpieces can come in many forms. It could be musical or poetic, packaged in your favorite song or poem and therefore heard to be appreciated as opposed to being seen.

It could have an aroma like your favorite dish. If you're me, for me, you know, if you're from Jamaica, if there's Jamaicans in here, that dish would be stew peas, the pork version, not the vegan version, whatever that is, cooked by a master chef and the master chef in my case would be one of my aunties.

[20:04] And that can ultimately not only be smelled but tasted. A masterpiece can be touched like a scarf someone knitted just for you or a beautiful handmade Persian rug under your feet.

but I submit to you that the best art moves beyond impacting the individual peculiarities of the five senses and becomes something that is fully experienced and done so in a way that everything around it or that comes in contact with it can become blessed by it, encouraged by it, strengthened by it, and ultimately transformed by it.

So as God's masterpiece or as God's workmanship made the image of God and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have a job to do. We have a responsibility.

In fact, this is possibly the reason why those in Christ are called God's masterpiece because God wanted to do something with us being his people that would extend beyond our own benefit or that of our own immediate community or of people who look like us or act like us or who may see life in the same way as we see it.

In other words, as God's masterpiece, we now are put in a position to bring a transcendent experience to earth through the power of God's Holy Spirit that dwells in us because of our commitment to the risen Lord.

[21:37] Well, how do we do that? As my pastor in L.A. would say, you know, you ask good questions on a Sunday night, 725 on a Sunday night.

Well, Ephesians provides us a clue by telling us in verse 10 that we are created in Christ for something called good works. And these are good works that God created beforehand specifically for us so that we should walk in them or that they should be our way of life.

These good works that Ephesians refers to are a necessary component of our walk with the Lord. Why? Scholar Richard F. Lovelace writes in reference to Jonathan Edwards' conclusions on the nature of good works and why they're necessary to bring about full-fledged renewal in the world points out that good works had to involve a balance between personal concern for the individual and social concern.

It went beyond that proliferation of religiosity in the form of meetings, prayers, singing, and religious talk to emphasizing works of love and mercy which will bring the God of love down from heaven to earth to set up his tabernacle with men on earth and dwell with them.

So God has designed us as masterpieces to be experienced especially as we move out from the familiar much like great art when put on display so that people will get to know God so that people will get to know God.

[23 : 25] We are those works of art that are created to now I'm quoting Pastor Matt on this one display God's nature, character, and work in the earth or in short God's glory.

And even more than Savion Glover's performance that night our lives will then become something more transcendent emanating and shining bright the beauty of the Lord. I want to add that the nature of good works means that it can be almost anything because it will be different for each individual in this room.

So I can't tell you what God has designed for you to do but scripture gives us a clue concerning how we can examine what we are doing as we pursue what God has designed for you and I to do and in doing so pursue God's will and way in the process.

Here's a clue. 2 Corinthians 5 17-20 we read therefore if anyone is in Christ he's a new creature the old has passed away behold the new has come all this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation underline ministry of reconciliation verse 19 that is Christ in God was reconciling the world to himself not counting the trespasses against them and entrusting to us here's the other part the message of reconciliation therefore we are ambassadors for Christ God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God so we have been reconciled to God in Christ and we have been given both a ministry and a message of reconciliation to help others to be reconciled to God to reconcile means to cause people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement or misunderstanding those of us who know Christ through his death and resurrection we now have peace with God theologian James the oldest Roberts writes the reconciliation of man to man through the reconciliation of man to God releases the healing power of the cross of Christ into this anxious broken and bitter world only redeemed men can serve as agents of reconciliation so these good works that God designed might well be attached to this ministry and message of reconciliation and it's interesting that we we hear the terms ministry and message because the scripture does not say that this ministry and message is only for pastors or extroverts or div school students or popular people in church no it's for all of us because if you're an introvert

God knows that already or if you are not the best communicator God knows that too but he also knows that everyone everybody can do something because God designed us to do whatever that something is specific to how he created and wired us and there are no exceptions therefore it is something that you and I must seek after from God and if there's any prayer that you and I can trust the Lord will answer is a prayer that asks God to point us towards what he has designed for us it is in God's will that we know and do these good works and it is in his will that we know and we do these good works that he's designed for us in Christ and we can trust that praying with God's will in mind is a great way to pray because he will respond to our desire for his will and his way in our lives in Christ we are God's masterpiece we are God's work of art and again because we've been made alive in Christ if you know

[27 : 51] Jesus Christ in this specific reality we can then manifest God's beauty in closing Dr. Tim Keller in his book The Reason for God points out that the existence of God can be seen or proven within what he calls the clue of beauty the clue of beauty that is often associated with great art he writes that such clues give a sense that life is not a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing great art fills you with hope and gives you the strength to carry on though you cannot define what it is that moves you but as God's workmanship created for good works we know

what not only moves us but also what is capable of moving others and transforming their lives the lives of their communities and the world just like we've been and are continuing to be transformed in the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit by the way let me take some pressure off all of us we also know that because of God's grace we are allowed to be a masterpiece and a work in progress at the same time because we've been made alive in Christ who's merciful towards us scripture tells us in Micah 7 18 to 20 that he delights to show mercy

I love how the message says it it's his favorite part he's a God of steadfast love and compassion and we as his workmanship are an everlasting work made alive in Christ whose scripture declares is Christ in you the hope of glory in closing closing given the times we're in politically given the fact that Tuesday is fast approaching I want to encourage everyone as a few of the pastors have already done I want to encourage everyone here by declaring that this hope we have in Christ is unchanging it will remain the same no matter what happens or does not happen on Tuesday heaven will not be shocked by the outcome of Tuesday's election the God whom we belong to and whom we serve will not be wringing his hands about it but one thing is for certain leaders may change governments may change turmoil will come and go but the kingdom of God of whom we are citizens of whom we are citizens remains rock solid and consistent and it is as the book of Hebrews declares it is an unshakable kingdom so let us keep our focus here and then set our face like Flint to the good works he has designed for us to do

God bless you let us pray I just want to say thank you thank you that you you're mindful of us like the psalmist says what is no what is man that you're so mindful of us that you care for us you care for us so much Lord God that you sent your son to die and be resurrected so we can have life true life be made alive in him Lord Father we also thank you in advance Lord God for what you have for us to do I pray Lord God that myself included that we would be able to Lord move in the direction Lord God you designed for our lives Lord God with dead set determination and with complete trust in who you are and what you say knowing Lord God that the plans you have for us are good plans plans not to harm us but to give us a hope and a future help us Lord God to complete the job assignment you've had for us to do Lord God in that those good works you've designed for us Lord God in Christ so when it's all said and done

Lord God you'll be able to say just well done thou good and faithful servant we thank you Lord we give you the honor and glory and praise Lord God for who you are and what you've done we thank you and ask this in Jesus name Amen Amen