



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, October 13, 2024

Ephesians 2:8-10

Last week, as we walked through Ephesians 2:1-10, we were reminded that although we may not be where we want to be, we are certainly not where we used to be. For many of us, the simple reminder of what God has pulled us out of should deepen our appreciation for His grace and mercy. I shared how, in my early teenage years, I began to experience the tension between the pull of the world and my faith, praying that God would keep me close even if I felt tempted. This resonates with Paul's message to the Ephesians, as he shows the stark contrast between life before Christ - marked by sin and hopelessness - and the new life we have in Him. Paul also reminded us that our salvation is not earned through our good works, but is a gift from God. That we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works - because we are saved, not in order to be saved.

So as we step into our message this morning, I'd like to take the entirety of the message to focus on that last thought: the idea that our good works don't earn salvation but help to express it. This is what Paul says:

Ephesians 2:8-10

'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.'

So, over the past few weeks, we've seen how Paul clearly identified salvation as a free gift from God: that He alone is the one who pulled us out of the pit, rescued us from slavery to sin, and invited us into His family as sons, daughters, and co-heirs with Jesus Christ. There's nothing we could have ever done, or ever could do to earn that status - it's purely a gift of grace because of God's great love for us. These three verses now bring us to the crux of Paul's message. It's almost as if Paul has been building all of this background in order to arrive now at this point. And we know this because he starts off with the word 'For,' which is a conjunction that serves to connect the coming thought with the previous one. It's a direct response to Ephesians 1:7 where Paul introduces the idea that we

have redemption through Christ's blood and the forgiveness of sins, which is given, 'according to the riches of His grace.' All Paul is doing now, is just building on this earlier thought and expanding it by essentially saying that not only are the riches of God's grace abundant for redemption and forgiveness but guess what, Grace is everything! 'For it is by Grace you have been saved.'

Now, if you've been around church culture for any length of time, when talking about salvation you would have come across two significant terms - Grace & Mercy. Both are incredibly important to salvation and although they are different terms, they work in tandem:

Growing up in Children's church I remember learning the definition of Grace through an acronym:

God's
Righteousness
At
Christ's
Expense

But there was never an acronym for Mercy - you were just left to figure it out on your own. So very simply, when it comes to salvation, the problem is our sin. We all have it and it needs to be accounted for and we are responsible for that. However, BUT God, decided that He loved us so much that He would take that payment for sin off of our own shoulders and place it onto His Son Jesus instead. Jesus stood in our place and paid the price for our sin so that we would not indeed perish but have everlasting life. So both Grace and Mercy are at work in this one action.

Grace is receiving the gift of salvation that we don't deserve.

Mercy is not receiving the judgment for sin that we do deserve.

And Paul now adds another essential element to the mix: Faith.

Grace, Mercy and now Faith. And what's really interesting about the way Paul talks about faith is that he connects it to God's gift of grace by presenting it as the means by which we receive this gift. Faith is believing in something you can't physically prove or necessarily see with your naked eye, and it's through faith that we embrace God's grace. Without faith, it's impossible to receive grace because faith is the act of accepting this gift. This is precisely why the writer of Hebrews says that:

Hebrews 11:6

'...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is...'

Everything starts here. We first enter into relationship with God through Faith and it is faith that helps us to continually walk in that relationship. Everything in the Christian life flows from this relationship between grace and faith - grace being the gift, and faith being the means by which we receive and live out that gift.

Example: Asthma. Growing up with asthma, the medicine was crucial to my health. I considered it a gift, freely given to restore breath in my lungs. But unless I actually inhaled that medicine, it wouldn't do me any good - the relief it offered would remain an abstract reality unless I chose to embrace it and apply it to my life. Inhaling a foreign substance into my lungs wasn't easy, but I had to trust that the doctor wasn't lying to me and that it was indeed for my well-being. Only then would I experience its life-giving effects. It's the same way with grace, isn't it? God's salvation is available to all and it is powerful, but unless we exercise faith and accept it, the effects of grace simply cannot be personally experienced. Just as I had to have faith in the doctor and take the medicine to experience its life-giving effects, we must have faith and trust in God, which allows us to fully receive and experience the life-transforming power of salvation.

And so, whereas some would say that faith is a work of salvation, I would disagree and argue that faith is not a work, but a response. For faith is simply the act of receiving what has already been given. It is an expression of trust rather than an effort to earn. For a gift to be truly accepted, it must involve the free will of the recipient. We see this clearly in the example of the thief on the cross. He had nothing to offer, no works to rely on, yet in his final moments, he placed his faith in Jesus which was not a work but a response to his spending hours upon hours up on that cross and coming to the realization that Jesus was indeed the messiah. And so he said: 'Lord remember me when I come into your kingdom...' It wasn't his actions that saved him but his response of faith in the One who could save. That's the heart of the gospel - grace is given, and faith is the hand that reaches out to receive it.

Paul now goes on to remind the Ephesians - yet again - that this gift is not earned through works but given freely in love. But now he takes it a step further, by explaining why this is the case. He says salvation is not of works, '...lest anyone should boast.' The point he's making is that if even 10%, 5%, or 0.001% of salvation were based on our works, well, then we could claim partial responsibility for saving ourselves. Follow that thought to its logical conclusion, and you'll quickly see that it leads to a place where humanity desires to become like God. Another word for this is pride. And this is exactly what both Adam and Eve experienced when the original sin was first embraced in the Garden of Eden.

So after establishing this important core, Paul now goes on to explain the significance and beauty of our works now as they are truly an expression of our salvation, not a determination of it.

In our family, all three of my kids do different things around the house in order to maintain its up-keep and ensure everything runs smoothly. They don't do these tasks to earn their place in the family but they partake in these tasks because they are already a part of our family. I'm not walking down to the neighbours house and asking their kids to come over to clean the bathroom or do the dishes because they aren't a part of our family. And as family, our roles and responsibilities are all just part of what makes us work together as cohesively and effectively as possible. In the same way, our works as Christians aren't done to earn our place in God's family - we've been born into His family - hence the term 'born again.' Just like a family flourishes when each member contributes, God's kingdom thrives when we, His sons and daughters, live out the good works He has prepared for us in response to His love and grace.

The apostle Paul talks at length about this concept with the church in Corinth and to drive the point home with them he actually uses the example of a human body:

1 Corinthians 12:14-19

'For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

What I love about Paul's analogy is how it clearly highlights the parallels between a literal human body and the church. In both, each part has a unique function and purpose, yet none can exist in isolation. The foot, the hand, the ear, and the eye all contribute to the overall health and effectiveness of the body as a whole, but no one part is more valuable than the other. Each needs the others to function properly. If the foot decided to sever itself from the leg then it would surely die. If the eye decided that it didn't like the body it was in and wanted to hop out and find another body..... good luck. In the same way, every member of the church has a specific role to play in the body of Christ but the point isn't the individual rather, the body. No individual gift or role is superior, and none of us can thrive alone. Just as a body flourishes when all of its parts work together in harmony, the church thrives when every believer operates in the gifts and good works God has prepared for them. Think about what would happen if the nose woke up one morning and decided that it's job

wasn't that important and it wanted to be an eye? What do you think is going to happen? Nothing. The nose will try its hardest to function as an eye - trying it's very hardest to provide sight but ultimately coming up empty. And as a result not only will the nose fail in its attempt to be an eye but the body now as a whole will suffer because it has lost the ability to smell and has become a mouth breather...

For you, Oh eye, are created as Christ's workmanship, created for sight and clarity. For you, Oh nose are created as Christ's workmanship, created for smelling and breathing. Let the eyes be the eyes and let the noses be the noses. Let the feet be the feet and let the hands be the hands and for Pete's sake, let the big toes be the big toes. We have got to stop with the mindset that there are certain roles and responsibilities that are better and more important than others.

Example: bible college roommate losing the tip of his big-toe while mowing the lawn as a kid. It was in that moment that he realized just how valuable that half an inch piece of bone and flesh really was as he spent the following year in rehab learning how to walk again.

And I think that's part of the point here. Yes, we understand that our works don't save us, but neither also do they define us. We are not a collection of hands, eyes or feet. We are a body. We may have various differing roles, but first and foremost we are sons and daughters of the most high king. That is what unites us. And when the kingdom of God is functioning as it is meant to, no single gift or role stands out. Instead, we see the whole body moving forward in unison, perfectly in sync. Members knowing who God has created them to be and what He has called them to do. This is the point.

I don't want to be a church that is known only for its kids ministry. Nor do I want to be a church known only for its hospitality. Nor do I want to be a church known only for its preaching or worship or anything else. I want us to be a church that is known for advancing the mission of Christ. This is the point because when all of these aspects - teaching, serving, worshipping, hospitality, etc... are working together as Christ designed, then the focus isn't on any one aspect of the mission, the focus is on the mission.

The Great Mission, or as the Bible calls it - the Great Commission - is central to who we are and what we are meant to do. In the book of Matthew, after His resurrection and just before His ascension, Jesus leaves His disciples with this command:

Matthew 28:19-20

'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'

The Book of Mark also records the Great Commission and I like how he opens up with the focus on the Gospel:

Mark 16:15 (MSG)

'Go into the world. Go everywhere and announce the Message of God's good news to one and all.'

This is God's mission - to bring the message of salvation through Jesus Christ to the world. This is the work that He has already done through His Son, Jesus Christ. And when Paul references these good works and calls us to walk in them, we have to understand that this is something that God is already at work at and we are just coming alongside - behind His hands and feet on the earth. We can walk with Christ by:

Spreading the Gospel in word and in deed.

Making disciples.

You see, it's so easy to get so lost in trying to figure out the specific nature of what it is you are called to do that we can miss the forest for the trees. We are called to share the good news of Jesus Christ in everything we say, and then everything we do. That's it pure and simple. The second thing is we are called to make disciples: that as we share the good news of Jesus Christ, and people start responding to the gospel by accepting salvation, then part of our role becomes walking alongside these people, so that they can grow and mature in their relationships with Jesus. It's plain and simple. It doesn't necessarily matter what your role in the local church body looks like, nor does it matter what your role in the larger global church body looks like, all that matters is that we are faithful to the mission God has given us - to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to make disciples.

Whether you're serving in kids' ministry, leading worship, offering hospitality, or if all you can offer in this season is just faithfully honouring sabbath and showing up to worship or simply being a light in your workplace or neighbourhood, the heart of it remains the same: to point people to Christ and walk with them as they grow in their relationship with Him.

We each have a unique role to play, but those roles are just the means through which we fulfill the greater purpose of the church. When we focus on the mission rather than the specific roles, we see

the beauty of the body of Christ moving in harmony, each part doing its work to build up the whole. The church isn't meant to be known for just one thing; it's meant to be known as a reflection of Christ's love, a community of believers united in the centrality of the Great Commission.

And do you know what the reward is for walking with the Lord in this good work? A surprising reward: the joy of being given more of the good work to do!

Do you remember the parable of the talents? In this story, a landowner prepares to go on a journey and entrusts three of his servants with varying amounts of talents - one receives five, another two, and the last, one. The lesson of the parable isn't about how much each servant was given; it's about how they used what they had. The servant with five talents used them and gained five more, and the one with two did the same, earning two more. Both were praised for their faithfulness. But the servant who received just one talent buried it out of fear, believing it was too insignificant to make a difference. Instead of using what he had, he hid it away, and in the end, he lost even that.

And that's the key lesson here: God isn't concerned with the amount we start with; He's concerned with how we use what He's entrusted to us.

In the same way, God has given each of us specific gifts, roles, and opportunities to participate in His mission. It's not about comparing what we have to others or feeling like our part is too small to matter. It's about being faithful with what God has placed in our hands - whether it's five talents, two, or just one - and using it to advance His kingdom. When we do, He often entrusts us with more because He sees our willingness to serve Him wholeheartedly.

So let's be a people who faithfully use what God has given us - whatever that may look like - and let's trust Him with the results. Let's keep our focus on the mission, not on our own limitations or strengths. When each of us plays our part and offers our gifts to God, the church moves forward, lives are transformed, and we experience the joy of knowing that we are part of something far greater than ourselves: the expansion of God's kingdom on earth. And in the end, isn't that the greatest reward? To know that we have been faithful with what He has given us, that we've made a difference, and that we've brought glory to our King.

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