

## The Rescuing Grace of God

Ephesians 2:8-10

Jeremy Shelton

Good morning Antioch! My name is Jeremy and I'm a pastoral resident at Antioch. I know it's a bizarre time. It's definitely surreal to preach looking at a camera phone instead of people. But I know from last week, on the other side, although it's a different experience, it's was a beautiful thing to know that we all were in one accord in our homes, worshiping and hearing God's Word together. So whether you are huddled together around a laptop on the couch or still in your bed watching on your phone, we are so thankful you have decided to join us this morning. We are still in our Ephesian series which is titled Into the Fullness of Christ. So go ahead and grab your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 2:8-10.

It's a surreal thing to hear the sirens of emergency vehicles and know they are coming for you. When I was in the second grade, I was stuck in a situation and a handful of people from the community had gathered around. Someone called 911 because my leg had become lodged between two branches and I was stuck in a tree about five feet off the ground. I could hear the fire trucks speeding my way. But right before they arrived, a man who was robust in stature used his strength and pushed the two branches apart so someone could take my wedged leg and lift it up and get me down. That's my rescue story. I basically have a rescue story of a cat.

We like to read and hear about good rescue stories. I think a lot of us are drawn to that narrative. That's why Hollywood keeps producing tv shows like Chicago Fire and all it's spinoffs. Or the Taken trilogy for example. We want to see a man with a particular set of skills acquired over a long career, whoop up on some bad guys and save the day! Partly why we consume these rescue stories and movie makers keep pumping them out is because woven into humanity's history is a Big Rescue Story! Storytellers echo the main plot in history which is the Gospel, a salvation story. Deep down we know that we and this world are not what it's supposed to be and we long for a rescue. Maybe more now than ever, people are looking for a rescue? Who will rescue the economy? Who will save us from the spread of a virus? And I know this is a scary time, but I hope today your faith will be strengthened by the Lord as He is going to remind us that our biggest threat, larger than Covid-19 is our sin before a Holy God. And our greatest need, greater than lysol and hand sanitizer, is a miraculous rescue and a Rescuer is here! Ephesians 2:8-10 - is a stunning summary of the gospel. In a nutshell, it's how God rescued us. The two points that Paul is going to teach us are:

- You were saved by God's grace, to boast in God. (vs. 8-9)
- We are created by God's grace, to work for God. (vs. 10)

Eph. 2:8-10. And I'm going to ask you to participate this morning, if you are able, by standing right where you are at in your living room or basement. Let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. All across the southend of Louisville to the east end, scattered in our homes, we can still stand together to hear from our God . Church, hear the Word of the Lord.

**“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.” Ephesians 2:8-10**

**Church, the Lord has Spoken to us.  
And “Thanks be to God.”**

When Ephesians 2 opens up, it holds no punches. You were dead in your transgression. Not just doing some bad things, but utterly lifeless in our spiritual state. No capacity to move towards God. And we were trespassers. We are the only part of creation that doesn't obey God. The prophet Jeremiah asks, “Who appoints the sun to shine by day and who stirs up the seas so that it's waves roar?” He answers, the Lord Almighty. When God says, surge up, they do. Be still, and they listen. And yet when God tells us, don't look at a person with lust. Don't lie. We can't help ourselves. We disobey. Jesus tells a massive storm and crashing waves to hush and it obeys. Then the disciples asked, what kind of man is this that even the winds and waves obey Him. Creation seems to know what kind of man this is. He is God, creator and ruler of all things. He is infinitely Holy, infinitely important, and infinitely good. Everything was made by Him and for Him, and while all the rest of creation obeys, we are the only creatures that say, “No thanks, I'll do it my own way. I'll live by my own rules and desires.” And so we all stand as objects of God's wrath. We can't get ourselves out of this situation. His wrath is stored up against us. Our only hope is for a rescue to take place. And thankfully, our Holy God is also merciful and loving. And He knows He is the only solution that can save us from Himself.

### **You were saved by God grace, to boast in God**

All of this describes who we are without Jesus. But if you have repented from your sins, believed in Jesus, you have received salvation. You were saved by God's grace, to boast in God. That's the first point.

Look at verse 8. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”**

Paul tells you, us, that you and I are saved by God's grace. What is grace? God's grace is His favor placed on you which you did not earn. I heard one pastor describe grace as this: God's one way love towards you, a sinner. It's one way. It's not that you took a step first towards God, and then he decided to show you favor. He took the first step and all the steps towards you. Love was one way. We only love God because God first loved us. Grace is not something earned or deserved. We deserve death, but instead, He gives us life.

If you are in Christ, then you have a rescue story of God's saving grace. Maybe you have a similar story like one of my best friends who was a drug dealer, user, and suicidal. The power of God's grace met him one night when he was high on cocaine, contemplating ending it all, but in this state, God's Spirit willed him to google “The sinner's prayer.” Googled it. Crazy. And that

night, He believed in Jesus, and became sober that very second. He was rescued. But maybe you don't have that wild life story of drugs and rebellion, and you're more like me, saved at the young innocent age of 8. Compared to other conversion stories, yours seems on the surface as thrilling as a fire department rescuing a cat from a tree. But the same power that saved my friend was also experienced by you. Make no mistake. You were rescued! Your eyes were also opened to be sober and you saw that while young, innocent and good, you needed God's grace. God's grace made you alive in Christ, placed you in His family, and secured your salvation for all eternity.

We were saved by God's grace but it says that it was through faith. Grace is experienced through faith. Faith in Jesus! It's receiving what Jesus has accomplished for us and a confidence that Jesus makes us in a right standing with God where we are no longer objects of His wrath, but objects of His love. But how can spiritually dead people who have no ability to move towards God place their faith in Jesus? The second part of verse 8 gives us a clue. **"And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."**

The topic of debate for centuries in this verse is the word "this." What did Paul mean by "this?" Some have thought he's talking about the grace and others have thought it's faith. But most people who have studied the original language understand that the "this" here is used to encompass the entire thought. So when it says, "this is not your own doing, it's a gift. What's the gift? Grace? Yes. Faith. Yes. Salvation? Yes. In fact, all of it, the entire process is the gift. So the faith that He requires He will give. He gives us faith to receive the grace. He gives us everything about our salvation as a gift and it's not of our own doing or works. Looks at verse 9.

**"...not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Eph. 2:9**

Paul doesn't want you to be confused in your salvation. This is not a result of your works. Salvation didn't come from the Gentiles following the laws of Moses. It doesn't come from our spiritual disciplines. Since the beginning of Ephesians, Paul has been hammering away that you didn't choose God, but He chose you. He chose to present you Holy and Blameless in His sight. He predestined you to be adopted into His family before the creation of the world. You had nothing to do with it. You weren't in Heaven's boardroom offering up your opinions and strategic ideas.

God the Father planned salvation without you, but with you in mind. Then Jesus accomplished the Father's plan without you, but with you in mind. Jesus came and lived a perfect life, a life that you and I could not live. **And so through the obedience of one man, Jesus, many were made righteous.** And then Jesus was crucified on the cross. And He absorbed the wrath of God, **and for our sake God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** He wore our sins on the cross and clothed us in His righteousness. Jesus remained dead in a tomb, but on the third day, God the Father, said no more. And raised Jesus from the dead! Sin led to death, but Christ overcame it. **Because God has raised Him up, He will also raise us up by His power.** And now you've been given the Holy Spirit to walk in righteousness. He empowers us to be His witnesses. He emboldens us with faith in the midst of

fear. And so through all of that, none of it was your work. Paul flows back and forth from positive to negative. You were saved by the grace of God. Not of your own doing. It's the gift of God. Not from works! So that no one boasts. We have no room to boast. We have nothing to boast in but the Lord. When all of the church is gathered before the throne of God, and Jesus, the Lamb and Lion of God takes the scroll out of His hand, I can assure you we aren't going to start talking about how proud we are of ourselves for making the decision to walk an aisle and take the preacher by his hand and repeat a prayer. Or how great of a church member we were. Or the ministries that we started. No, when Christ takes that scroll, the heavenly beings and all of us will hit the deck. And we will cry out "Worthy is the Lamb. And by Your blood you ransomed people for God. So all honor and glory and blessing, all the boasting goes to the Lamb that was slain. And it's through this slaughtering of Jesus, salvation comes by the grace of God, as a gift from God so that we can boast in God."

### **We are created by God's grace, to work for God**

When memorizing these verses, many of us stopped with verse 9. But leaving out verse 10 is to have an incomplete picture of God's salvation. Salvation isn't God rescuing us and then we sail off into the sunset. His rescuing grace is producing something spectacular in you and through you. We are created by God's grace, to work for God.

Look at verse 10, **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** Ephesians 2:10

We, the church, where God has brought Jews and Gentiles together, are God's workmanship. We are the result of God's saving activity. The word workmanship comes from the Greek word "poiema," from which we derive our English word poem. But the meaning is far greater than just a poem for it describes all works of art such architecture or a custom designed woodwork. We as the church are the product of His craftsmanship created in Christ Jesus. This is another way to say we were made alive like in verse 5. We were created new! Something that wasn't there is now there. A new creature with new faith, a new way to love, new eyes to see the things of God. God has made a lot of beauty in this world from glaciers, to mountains, and oceans. But people are his prize. Babies grow up to be men and women of intelligence, inventors and innovators that help jets fly across the ocean. They create cures for diseases. Man is without a doubt the apex of God's creation created in His image. Whatever team successfully creates a vaccine for Covid-19 will be praised and rightfully so. Yet, as awesome as men and women can be, they are not the ultimate handiwork. The chief workmanship of God is you and me who once walked in darkness, dead in our trespasses, but now have been made alive in Christ! That's His masterpiece! The dead being made alive. And so like any well crafted workmanship, it reflects how awesome the artist is. The world sees the Body of Christ, His chief workmanship, doing good works and God gets the glory.

When it says that we are to walk in good works, it's contrasting our old way of life in Eph 2:1-5. Our way of life used to be darkness. We used to walk by our own rules for our own gain. But now, we are created anew, and our way of life is not for our own gain but for the good of others.

We walk in good works. Paul essentially says, you weren't saved by works, but you were saved for works. And these works were prepared for us before we were even saved. God planned out our salvation and He planned out our sanctification and our good works. So Paul isn't anti works, he's just anti salvation by works. It must always be in this order: Gospel first, works second. These good works are to bless others and the communities that we live in. **Pastor Tim Keller says this: "...God sent his Son to save us by grace and to adopt us into his family. So now, because of that grace, in our gratitude, we want to resemble our Father...We want to look like our Savior. We want to please our Father. we always put first what pleases God and what loves our neighbor."** Pauls spends the first 3 chapters of Ephesians explaining the gospel. And then chapter 4 thru the end of the letter he shows us how the gospel plays itself out in our life in how we relate and love one another.

Right now, I've heard some people say about the church, this is our time to shine. And at first, I sort of wrote that off as being cheesy and maybe a little overboard, but as the events continue to unfold, and as I studied over these verses, I thought, you know, they're right. I'm the one that needs to wake up. This can be our time to shine. **Charles Spurgeon, when cholera broke out in London said this, "Now is the time for all of you who love souls. You may see men and women more alarmed than they are already; and if they should be, mind that you avail yourselves of the opportunity of doing them good."**

Let me give three practical ways we can practice good works during this time:

1. Follow the guidelines from our government leaders who have authority over us and our local pastors who have spiritual authority over us. The book of Romans tells us to be subject to our government authorities and Hebrews instructs us to submit to the leaders who watch over our souls. Staying inside, washing your hands more, staying home when you're sick, staying away from people and crowds right now is one of the best ways you can love your neighbor. It is a good work. It is a very practical way to love your neighbor during this time.
2. Look for ways to serve your neighbors, especially the more vulnerable. The pastors are working hard to ensure the elderly here in this body are cared for during this time, either by them or by their family group. But what about your neighbors on your street? Look for practical ways to serve them right now. Check in with them. See if they need anything from the grocery store, or medicine picked up. Or if they are sick and showing symptoms, maybe they need some encouragement to call a hotline right now. It could save their life. Look for ways to serve not just the edlerly, but all your neighbors.
3. And lastly, look for gospel opportunities. Right now, people might be thinking more about the fragility of life, their mortality, and what happens if their loved ones die. Todd shared a story in Family Group this week that a pastor he knows was in a restaurant in Lexington right before the city was mandating a close. And his waitress was clearly angry and scared she was going to be out of a job. He told her he would pray for her and she was like, "great, thanks a lot." But then he left a very unlikely extremely generous tip. When she saw it, she began to break down and cry and asked why would you do it? He

said, because God loves me and because He loves me, I love you. This is how the gospel of grace works. We are recipients of God's grace. We extend to others what God has shown us. And our good works towards them should lead to gospel conversations. We have been rescued by a God who loves us. We can hold out hope to them in the midst of fear. When things seem to be changing rapidly, we can point them to an unchanging God. People are looking for which way to turn for security and what truth to believe right now. We should point them to Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life, and gives them secure access to the Father by grace! A Rescuer has come to rescue! And who knows, perhaps this will be the time your friend, your neighbor, parent or kid experiences the grace of God in their own life that started with a good work that led to a conversation. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, **"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."**

Church, God has rescued us by His grace! We were in a way more serious situation than being stuck in a tree wedged between branches. It's more like we were miles deep at the bottom of an ocean, chained up to a weight with no way to escape. But God, in His great love for you, showed you His grace. He sent His Son Jesus to the depths of the ocean, to rescue you out, did some Holy CPR, and breathed into you life! And now we walk in good works as His Workmanship!

If you are watching today, we all are in different places in life. And thankfully Jesus gives us different pictures of God's grace to meet us where we are at. Maybe you feel out of reach from God's love because you've turned your back on God. You've been living a life of reckless abandonment with bad choices causing pain on others and yourself. Jesus gives you a picture of a father running crazily to his rebellious son, wrapping him in his arms and throwing a party because he came back home! You are not too far out of reach for the grace of God.

Or maybe you are weighed down in shame and feel like a failure because your sin has led to a broken marriage, a fractured relationship and you've been cut off by a group of friends. Others don't want to be around, why would God? The picture for you is Jesus is readily found in the home reclining and dining with tax collectors and sinners. Touching the unclean lepers. Your sin and shame will not keep away the grace of God.

Or maybe right now because of the events of the coronavirus pandemic, anxiety takes root in your heart. You want to have faith but it's weak. The picture for you is while the disciples were on a boat during a violent storm scared for their life, Jesus was with them and calmed the storm in spite of their little faith. Your fear and a virus will not prevent the grace of God.

And for the children that are watching. You might think all of this for your parents and we are talking about grownup stuff. The picture of God's grace for you is Jesus told the grownups not to keep you away from Him because the Kingdom of God belongs to you too. You are not too young for the grace of God.

And for the believer who is exhausted because you are trying to make something of yourself. You are working hard to be special, be the best employee, parent, the gifted pastor, the smartest theologian. And so you work, work, work to be approved and you are exhausted! The picture Jesus has for you is Him on the cross breathlessly getting out His last words, "It is finished!" You can stop because the work was accomplished. You are already someone special and approved because of the grace of God.

If you haven't received Christ, you can experience the rescuing grace of God today by believing in Jesus. If you are a believer, you can rest in the securing grace of God, that you have been rescued. You have been given a great gift. Rest in his grace, be refueled in His grace and then go live out of that grace doing good works so others might see and give glory to God. Let's Pray.

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