

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

GOD'S GRACE TO SINNERS

(ROMANS 3:21-26; EPHESIANS 2:1-10)

JUNE 2, 2019



SERMON OUTLINE

Three biblical vantage points that bring C to what it means to *be saved*:

1. The vantage point of the word R

2. The vantage point of the word B

3. The vantage point of the phrase B B

What do I need to do with what I have heard today?

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MAIN POINT

All people have fallen short of God's glory and were without hope, but God has shown amazing grace through the sacrificial death of Jesus for sinners.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Describe a time when you recognized you were in a dangerous situation, but were spared from harm.

2. How did you feel once you were spared from the danger you faced? How does the recognition of danger add to the relief of being rescued?

Leader: Whether we recognize it not, all of humanity is in great danger. That's because there is no middle ground when it comes to our spiritual lives. Either we are dead in sin, or we are alive in Christ. Until we see how bad our situation was without Christ, we will never appreciate how good the news of the gospel really is.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:21-26.](#)

3. What do these verses teach us about ourselves?

4. What do these verses teach us about God and about what He has given those who place their faith in Jesus?

Leader: The effect of sin's entrance into the world (Genesis 3) was catastrophic; it left humanity helpless and hopeless. However, it was into this helpless state that God showed His giving nature by sending His Son as the source of our salvation. This is the gospel. Our sin offends God and provokes His wrath. Payment must be made to satisfy His righteous demand for justice. Our only hope was for God to mercifully give us a way of salvation in Jesus Christ, His Son.

5. How would Paul's readers have understood the idea that Christ was a sacrifice of atonement through His blood? How did that sacrifice justify sinners?

Leader: Atonement is the Biblical doctrine that God has reconciled sinners to Himself through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. The concept of atonement spans both Testaments, everywhere pointing to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the sins of the world. Justification is the doctrine that sinners are pronounced righteous before God because of the work of Christ on the cross.

6. What do we need to do to be declared righteous in God's sight?

Leader: Because of His generous nature, God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. By His death Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins; by faith we receive the righteousness of God. This truth should transform our lives, our witness to the world, and our desire to give back to God. In Ephesians 2, Paul emphasized that salvation from God is a gift, not something we can earn.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10.

7. How do verses 1-3 help us understand the impact of sin in our lives?

8. God would have been justified in destroying us all for our sinful rebellion. How does this reality magnify the great love He has shown us?

9. Paul referred to his audience in past tense terms because this was how they once were. Why, even as Christians, is it helpful for us to remember our sinful condition before Christ?

Leader: In verse 4, Paul marked an important transition when he followed a description of humanity's helpless state with, "But ... God . . ." Paul turned from describing our spiritual death to the gift of new life in Christ. Paul used three important words that describe God's generous spirit: mercy, love, and grace. In verses 1-3, Paul described all people as being God's enemies and under His judgment (see also Rom. 5:6-10). Here

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he wrote that those same people were saved not by anything they had done, but because of God's matchless grace in Jesus.

10. Why is grace a difficult concept for people to comprehend? How is God's offer of grace an offense to our fleshly desire to earn the good we receive?

Leader: When we were dead in our sins and only deserving of wrath, God poured out His grace and mercy to make us alive in Christ. God gave His own Son so that sinners could be saved from judgment and become His children (John 1:12-13). The gift of salvation reveals God's grace and love to us, and is a gift we could never repay.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

11. What is one way you can cultivate your gratitude for God's amazing gift of salvation this week? How about over the summer months?

12. Who do you know needs to receive God's gift of salvation? How is God calling you to respond in light of today's reminder of His lavish grace in your life?

PRAYER

Thank God that in His mercy, He made you alive with Christ when you were dead in sin. Pray that you would have a greater appreciation of what Jesus has done and a greater compassion for others as you look deeply into the truth of the gospel.

MEMORIZE

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:4-5

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

ROMANS 3:21-26

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3:21. Few passages in Scripture are as rich in theology and as important for understanding salvation as this portion of Romans 3. Paul had established that all people have sinned and that the law is inadequate for salvation. What then? What is the hope? Paul's answer would have surprised many people. Apart from the law God has revealed His righteousness. Last week's lesson explained the law's function: it reveals sin (see Rom. 3:20). The law diagnoses the spiritual disease of sin. This lesson shows God provides the healing apart from the law. Though the law is inadequate to save a person, it does testify to God's means of salvation. The Old Testament serves a valuable role in our faith. The arrival of the New Testament by no means rendered the Old Testament obsolete. The Law and the Prophets testify to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. This prophetic role is indispensable to our faith.

3:22. The phrase in verse 21 "attested by the Law and the Prophets" is parenthetical, and Paul returned to his point in this verse with the words that is. He clarified that God's righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness is first and foremost an attribute of God, but it is also an activity of God. He is in the business of making us righteous. God desires fellowship with us, and in order to enjoy that fellowship He makes believers right. How is this righteousness imparted? Not through works! Paul has already denied that works is the means to righteousness. Faith is the answer to the question and is the key to salvation. Faith is also an important part of the theme of the letter (Rom. 1:17), but this is the first time Paul explicitly referred to Jesus Christ as the object of faith.

The offer of salvation is available by faith, as to all who believe indicates. The word for believe and the word for "faith" in the Greek language are from the same root. To "believe in" is to "have faith in" something or someone. The English word believe is inadequate to convey the force of the Greek word. Faith involves intellectual assent as well as a thorough commitment of a believer's life. The early church wrestled with the question of how Gentiles were saved. Paul had seen clearly that God offered salvation to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. There is no distinction in the matters of sin and judgment (Rom. 2:11), and there is no distinction in the manner of salvation. God makes it available on the basis of faith.

3:23. Paul repeated the need for salvation. People of every race and gender need to be saved because all have sinned. God's righteousness is pure. Our sin renders us completely incapable of reaching Him. The task of righteousness, of accessing the glory of God, is completely beyond our ability. Glory is a difficult word to pin down but essentially means "the full weight" of God's attributes. Glory is God's splendor. It defines, in part, who God is. In Jewish thought Adam and Eve possessed God's glory before they sinned. Now, through Jesus Christ, God is restoring His glory in His people.

3:24. This verse clarifies the result that "all who believe" (v. 22) enjoy. Justified means "to be declared right with God." The context is judicial; the scene is a courtroom. The divine judge declares all who believe to be innocent. Freely translates a Greek word meaning "gift" and underscores the difference between the attempt at salvation by works and the free offer of God. This offer of salvation is the pinnacle of His grace. Nothing surpasses it, and nothing is more important than for us to experience it. Being declared right with God comes only through His grace. Knowing we have this gift relieves our fear and grants us peace. The means by which God grants justification is through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Redemption has a twin focus of deliverance or emancipation on the one hand and payment of a ransom to secure that freedom on the other. The image portrayed by this word is that of a condemned prisoner whose freedom is secured and who is then declared innocent. The word clearly emphasizes the freedom from sin that believers enjoy.

3:25-26. Propitiation is a term borrowed from the sacrificial system and the temple. The Greek word hilasterion was used for the cover of the ark of the covenant. Luther translated it as the "mercy seat" (Heb 9:5). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle blood over the ark to atone for the nation. By this rite sins were deemed expiated; people became reconciled to God and God's wrath was averted. But human sins could not literally be atoned for by the death

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of animals. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). Thus Jesus came to accomplish what no priest slaying an animal could ever hope to accomplish: full satisfaction of God’s requirements for atonement. God the Father “made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). This involves a double imputation. Our sin was imputed to Jesus on the cross, and His righteousness was imputed to us. Justification is not a legal fiction; Christians are made righteous by the imputation of God’s own righteousness in His Son.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

2:1. People are not willing to be found (saved) until they know they are lost. Paul reminded his readers of the awfulness of sin that results in every person being lost, separated from God. As long as they are still unbelievers, sinners are in fact best described as dead people. The terms translated “trespasses” and “sins” are similar in meaning. The first term means falling from a known path, that is, actively breaking a boundary or rule. The second means falling short of a required standard. Both refer to the universal human failure to do what is right, either actively or passively.

2:2-3. Another way to describe the helplessness of sinners is to think of it in terms of a lifestyle, step by step, headed in the wrong direction. No person can blame the world or the devil for their sinning. We have only ourselves to blame. It was our fleshly desires that we indulged. It was the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts that have been the source of our disobedience to God. God’s righteous judgment against sin is settled. In our sinful nature, we all deserved eternal condemnation. We were born into this fallen condition. Without God’s grace, all human beings are spiritually helpless and hopeless. We need salvation because of what sin has done to us.

2:4-5. Paul turned from diagnosing our spiritual death to describing our new life in Christ. He began by piling up three overlapping terms that describe the divine basis for our salvation. We owe everything to God’s character. First, notice the reference to God’s “mercy.” Mercy is “the disposition to act compassionately in response to the plight of someone in need.” Second, notice the reference to God’s “love,” His sacrificial concern. Paul stressed the abundance of God’s love just as he had noted the abundance of His mercy: it was great. The third term Paul used to express the basis of salvation in God’s character is “grace.” Grace is similar to mercy and love but with a special distinction. The emphasis in the term grace is a person’s showing undeserved favor toward someone who has sinned against that person. The first benefit of receiving salvation by grace is that God made us alive. When Christ was raised from the dead, God saw all believers as united with Him.

2:6-7. The second benefit of receiving God’s salvation by grace through faith is that God raised us up. Thus when Jesus visibly ascended from earth to heaven, God saw believers as being spiritually united with Him in His ascension. We are now citizens of heaven (see Phil. 3:20). We no longer have to live as those bound to the sinful world, the flesh, and the Devil. Our true identity is in the heavens. The third benefit of salvation Paul named is that God seated us. After His resurrection and ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God (see Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2). He is there now, and God considers believers already to be sharing Christ’s eternal victory.

2:8-9. It’s too often typical for us humans to suppose that our actions can help earn our eternal life. Paul wrote that this is never true. But then he went on to explain the role that good works have in the life of those who are saved. Trusting wholly in God’s provision is the opposite of trusting in one’s own contribution to salvation. The whole of our redemption—past, present, and future—is God’s gift, by His initiative. For this reason, no one can boast about a personal contribution to salvation. Heaven will be filled with the praises of Christ’s glory and His works. No human display of works can compare to the riches of God’s grace toward those who once were dead in their sins but now are alive with Christ.

2:10. One of the goals of salvation for us is the fruit of Christlike character and of good deeds. In

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eternity past God prepared ahead of time that His redeemed people would do these good works as evidence of His grace. Here is His power not only in giving us new life but also in helping us to walk in good works throughout this life and into eternity. We cannot do anything to earn salvation. Yet God means for us who have received salvation to produce good works. If we have been given new life, raised with Christ, and seated with Him, we will certainly do good works as evidence that we have received this great salvation.