

This is our last sermon in a series called 'Wrestling with God'

Where we are looking at different paradoxes in the Xian faith

Ideas that seem to be contradictory, but are somehow complementary

Today we are talking about the relationship between faith and works

But before we get into that

I can tell from the looks on your faces

That you sense that something is different about me

I'm a little more mature, a little wiser. A couple big things happened in my life:

A few weeks ago I officially finished seminary

I've found 3 gray hairs

And yesterday, I turned 30

I've got to tell you: I feel like I've finally reached maturity

Like, I've reached the peak of the mountain and now I'm enjoying the view

I have arrived.

I do remember being a kid and thinking that age 30 was ancient

Now I realize I'm still just a kid, only slightly less so

Birthdays are an excuse to reminisce

Yesterday I had breakfast with my parents

And they shared about what it was like the day I was born

I'll never forget the day I became a parent

Emily was pregnant with our first

And we didn't find out the gender ahead of time

We were excited, anxious to meet our child

After a long day of labor for Emily (and a long day of sitting around for me)

We met Libby

I looked at that face that I'd never seen before & I just loved her

They put Libby on the table to weigh her

And I got down sideways and we locked eyes

Such a wonderful moment

2 years later, we met Sam.

I brought Libby into the delivery room to meet her brother  
And the 4 of us sat together on the bed  
And I stared at these kids that looked like Emily and me  
And I was so full of joy

Adoptive parents share similar stories about those first interactions w/their kid  
Beginnings like this are so precious, so intimate  
There's a kind of holiness to birth stories & we always remember them

In Ephesians 1 & 2

The Apostle Paul tells a different kind of birth story  
He's recounting the story of how the Gospel first came to the Ephesians  
How they were born into the family of God

In Ephesians 2, Paul picks up the story

Story will set up our discussion about faith + works  
As we read, we'll see that the Scriptures are just so rich, so dense  
So we're going to slowly march through the text line by line  
And let it guide us this morning, pausing and reflecting as we go  
You may want to keep your Bible open, mark where we stop w/your finger

### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.**

Paul describes the Ephesians on their own, before they encountered Jesus:

Dead in their sins  
Disobedient, deserving of wrath  
He said "all of us" on our own are like this

This is a foundational idea of the Christian worldview—

That on our own, within our nature, something has gone wrong

This is not how God wanted our lives to be

Life as God intended it is SO MUCH RICHER than we can imagine

That Paul can say by comparison that life apart from Christ is like death

Humanity has rebelled and has unleashed a virus of sin

That has reached 100% saturation; we are all infected

That has led to guilt/shame/isolation/violence/sickness & ultimately death

Sometimes we call this original sin

Reinhold Niebuhr: “The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.”

Then there’s a “BUT...”

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

This “BUT” is the gospel

We were dead in our sins, BUT b/c of his great love...

We were disobedient, BUT b/c of his great love...

We were deserving of wrath, BUT b/c of his great love...

And then Paul pauses— “it’s by grace you’ve been saved”

It’s all grace.

It’s all God.

**And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

Paul reflects that though we were in the pits of death and despair  
In Jesus, we have been brought into places of honor  
Seated with him in the heavenly realms  
We have a place of belonging with God

Again, Paul uses the phrase “It is by grace you have been saved”  
We didn’t deserve it  
We didn’t earn it  
We didn’t have anything to do with it.  
It’s all grace. It’s all God.

Take note of who is the primary person doing the action in these verses  
GOD made us alive...  
God saved us...  
God raised us up...  
God seated us with Christ in heaven...  
God shows us his kindness through Jesus...  
All of salvation is grace. All of salvation is the work of God.  
It is by grace we have been saved.

But what does it mean to be saved? And what are we saved from?

To be saved is to be freed from the forces that work against life as God intended

There are 3 forces working against life as God intended it:

1. Guilt of sin- We have all rebelled against God (through what we’ve done and left undone); for that we are guilty before God; we have contributed to the spread of the sin virus in God’s world.
2. Power of sin- Apart from Christ, we can’t keep ourselves from sinning. Sin is our master. Paul says elsewhere “I don’t do the good I want to do, but the evil I don’t want to do, I do.”
3. Isolation of sin- The first thing Adam & Eve did when they rebelled against God was to go into hiding; they were ashamed; sin causes estrangement from God and estrangement from others;

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

We are *forgiven* from the guilt of sin

We are *liberated* from the power of sin

We are *released* from the isolation of sin; we are given a new family (church)

This is what Paul is getting at when he says we are *saved* by grace:

As the text continues, those next words are key: *through* faith

*Faith* is the means by which salvation is made effective in us

Faith says “I abandon all hope that I can fix myself & free myself from sin

And I trust that through Jesus, God will put me back together”

Through Jesus, God has done everything necessary for us to be saved from (guilt/power/isolation of sin)

Through FAITH in Jesus, that salvation is being made real in our lives;

We change as we trust Him; as we trust Him,

We develop capacity from God’s Spirit in us to live like God intended

As we continue in the text, Paul shows us the point of all of this

Where’s all this grace and faith stuff heading?

He tells us in v. 10

Beginning with the word “For...”

That word marks intention, offers an explanation for what we’ve discussed

“For we are God’s handiwork”

Gives us the image of a craftsman, someone skilled to create

Reminds us of Gen. 1: Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth

We are God’s handiwork, God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

For what purpose?

To DO GOOD WORKS, which God prepared in advance for us to do

Some people struggle with the idea of works—or how faith and works interact  
This is our paradox, what this series is all about  
But Paul makes it clear  
We are not saved BY works, but we *are* saved FOR works

Let's think about it this way:

I love my kids unconditionally—and if they never do anything productive in their lives, if they never mature, I will STILL love them

But like all parents, my hope is they'll grow up  
To become mature and responsible adults  
That they'll contribute to the lives of others  
That they'll multiply my investment in their lives  
I want them to do good and meaningful work in the world

In a similar way, God loves us like a parent  
And God wants to see us grow up and get to work!  
And he knows that for us to grow up is what's best for us  
And what's best for the world

God has shown us his grace, saved us from the guilt/power/isolation of sin  
So that we can join him in getting to work in remaking  
The world as he intended

But b/c of our own life experiences, we sometimes find this faith/works  
Tension to be challenging

It IS challenging b/c 2 ideas are simultaneously true:  
We are offered salvation as a true gift, no strings attached  
But the logical, natural outflow of salvation at work in our lives  
Is that we will grow in maturity, demonstrated through outward activity

We often relate to this paradigm of faith/works or faith/activity in 2 extremes:

Low/No Activity- You prayed a prayer, come to church, you believe in God  
You may *really* respond to the grace side of the equation  
But your faith is not being confirmed by outward obedience  
You have yet to discover those 'good works' God prepared for you

*Pulseless Electrical Activity*- electrical activity on EKG, but no pulse/life  
This describes the spiritual condition of many Christians  
God is at work in your life, but you are not cooperating; you're dead!  
And God would say to you, "Wake up! Get moving! Get to work!"  
Sign up for the Day of Service, invite your neighbor to dinner, read Bible  
Get shaking!

God has put within you the same power that rose Jesus from the dead  
The Holy Spirit  
And if you will cooperate, say yes, to the Spirit's work in you  
You too will come to life

Hyper Activity- You are a hard worker by default  
When I read the Scriptures, your eyes jumped to the "good works"  
You are a doer; you're a task person; you love lists;  
You're hard on yourself; you never meet your standards of perfection  
You tend to think that perfection is required of you to be accepted

To you I say: We know we come to Christ thru faith in the beginning  
Based on his work and not our own  
But it is STILL through faith that we must LIVE in Christ  
Accepting that we are STILL God's workmanship  
That we are STILL being recreated in Christ Jesus for good works  
And these works flow out of acceptance that in X we are accepted

To tell you the truth, I am definitely in this latter category

I am constantly self-criticizing b/c I'm unable to meet standards of perfection  
Even this week, I was feeling inadequate for the tasks on my plate

And as I was throwing a pity party, thinking about all this while washing dishes  
The HS called to mind the Scriptures from this morning  
Reminding me that I am STILL God's workmanship  
That I am STILL being saved, being recreated in Christ  
And that I am called to cooperate w/the work GOD is doing in me

I wonder where you are this morning:

Perhaps there are some this morning who would say

"I'm dead in my sin"

I feel cursed with guilt; I feel powerless to live differently

My choices and thoughts have left my feeling isolated from God/others

Others of us have found salvation through faith in Christ

You prayed a prayer a long time ago

But you're living a half-life in Christ

God's Spirit is at work in you, but you haven't been cooperating

And you're spiritually dead

Others are taking the call of Christ seriously

But forget that God is STILL

As Paul said, the author and perfecter of our faith

And this morning you need to trust that God is still recreating you

And you STILL don't have to save yourself or try to impress God

What better way for all of us to respond this morning

Than to come to Christ's table?

To retell the story of the Gospel

To see the price God has paid to offer us salvation as a gift

To recall that God equips us w/his power

That we might be for the world the body of Christ

As we come to the Table

Come in confidence that the Lord Jesus has in himself all that you need

Do you need forgiveness? Christ the forgiver is here

Do you need a spiritual resurrection? Christ the resurrected one is here

Do you need find rest in God? Christ the comforter is here