

Well, hey, if you take your bibles and open to Ephesians. Last week we came back to our study in this great Epistle - Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus - we came back to our study that we've entitled "The Truth, The Way and The Life". And again, just a reminder to you on that, you may be joining us for the first time or you may be new to this study, "The Truth, The Way, The Life". We've entitled it this because, as some of you in the room know, the first three chapters of Ephesians deal with THE TRUTH ABOUT SALVATION. In these first three chapters, we learning the reality of what God has accomplished; the reality of what God has done; the reality of what God has provided in redeeming us. The first three chapters - all about the great TRUTH OF SALVATION. The next three chapters, 4, 5 and 6 - and we'll get there, we'll get there, 4, 5 and 6 - teach us and help us understand THE WAY in which we are to live that salvation out, in the practical everyday of our lives. The TRUTH of our salvation, the way that salvation gets lived out - all of that when married, leading to - I don't want you to miss this - leading to THE LIFE - real living! The best life; the most meaningful life; the fullest life you could ever imagine when the truth about what God has done is married to the way in which He's called us to live, we get to live a life worth living.

Last week we came to Chapter 2 and we entitled our message last week, "The Best News Ever". You may have gotten some good news lately and that's a good thing - it's great when good news comes our way. Spiritually and eternally speaking, we saw last week THE BEST NEWS EVER. And we saw that "Best News Ever" in light of the worse thing that had ever happened - the fall of mankind - the introduction of sin into our lives and this world. And it was a huge encouragement to me - obviously to many of you - the response over the week was phenomenal. I'm so thankful for the kind and encouraging notes you send for the e-mails, for the text.

Let me read to you, can I? Would you stand, in honor of God's Word? Let's look at that "Best News Ever". The best news ever, my friends, was the gospel. And here we found in verses 1 to 7, maybe the most, the clearest, most powerful, graphic, descriptive presentation of the gospel in all of scripture. "And you were" - it says in 2:1 - "You were dead" - that's what sin had done - "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too, all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature" - the seminal transference of sin because we are sons and daughters of Adam. The scripture taught us last week that we are "by nature", it's just who we are, "children of wrath, even as the rest. But God" - thank God for Ephesians 2:4, amen? "But God, being rich in mercy" - that being the reality - "because of His great love, with which He loved us, even when were dead in our transgressions, made us" - what? "Alive. Made us alive together with Christ" - and verse 6 - "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, so that - so that in the ages to come, He might show" - He might put on display - "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Father God, these are powerful words of truth and as we revisit them this morning and move on in this passage, we pray, God, that Your Word and Your Spirit and that You, God, would remind us of truth forgotten. Introduce us to new truth that can change our hearts and minds; God, that we would be solidified and fortified and built up and ready in our hearts and spirits, Lord, to face all that You'll bring across our paths in the days to come because of our time together here with You this morning. God we gather to encounter You. We pray, God, that as we encounter You in this text this morning, that You would do a miraculous thing in our hearts and lives. We pray that, God, we believe You can and will do that. And all the people in room agreed and said, "amen".  
You can be seated.

Well, The Best News Ever - the Gospel - we saw last week where we are without the gospel and, again, this is just by way of review. You can take some notes if you weren't here last week or look on your note sheet from the previous week - where are we without the gospel? Ephesians 2:1-3 told us "we are dead". We're absolutely flat-lined; we're gone; we're done; we're lifeless; we're corpses. Without the gospel, "we are dead". The passage there, verses 1-3, taught us that without the gospel, "we walk according to" - you remember that word I taught you, "k-a-t-a", "we walk according to the course of this world - we walk according to the prince of the power of the air." The word "kata" means to be controlled by, to be dominated by. We are, without the gospel, controlled by, literally dominated by Satan; dominated by the course and the philosophy and the thinking of this world - this world, not His world. This is the reality; this is where we are without the gospel.

We looked at why God delivered the gospel. Why is it? What motivates a gracious, loving God to rescue dead, sinful, depraved people? We were really clear. It wasn't your good looks; it wasn't my usefulness; it wasn't anything that we had merited; it's nothing that we had earned. It was simply and only the absolute, everlasting

love of God. "But God, being rich in mercy because of the love with which He loved us made us alive." We were dead and controlled by the course of this world in Satan without the gospel. God delivered the gospel because He loved us and only because He loved us.

What did the gospel accomplish? We got here toward the end of our time last week - what did the gospel accomplish - verses 5 to 7: It revived us. It's the one thing dead people need. We talked about that divine CPR. All of a sudden what was dead and gone is alive and active. The gospel revives us. "It raised us up and seated us" - verse 6 - "It raised us and seated us with Christ in heaven" - you see that there in verse 6 - that's really true. We ended with this last week, my friends. That's really, really true - it's who you are. You have been saved; you are in Christ; you are not alone; you are not so low. You are "in Christ" and when you fully surrendered your heart and life to Him, that means that the moment He redeemed you, you went to be with Him in the heavenlies. You are in Christ; you are seated with Christ in heaven. That is positionally and really - Webster - Steve Webster talks about, couple two or three weeks ago - he talked to us about the real world and the real - your real world - the reality of where you really are is: You are with Him, sealed in Him. What a great truth.

It revived us; it raised us up and seated us with Him. And this is new for you here this morning. Here we jump in at verse 7: It revealed - would you write that down: It revived us, it raised us up, it revealed salvation, my friends, the gospel revealed. It put on display God's grace so "that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Now I really, really don't want you to miss this because I know you, like me, we have a lot of thoughts and we've got a lot of things that we believe, we understand to be true about redemption and salvation and I understand where your mind goes. I know where my mind goes and I want to make sure that we say this as clearly as we can. Salvation, my friends, - contrary to what many of us think at times and contrary to what many say - salvation isn't primarily about us. Do you understand this? Salvation is not primarily about us. We're not the big deal in salvation. God is! **God is the big deal in salvation.** God's saving work is the miracle. The great glory of redemption isn't "Look what God did for me.", although all of us understand the sentiment there. We're all grateful for what God did for us, amen? But the great glory of redemption, the great story here isn't "Look what God did for me." - the great story of redemption is "Look what God did." - period! (Congregation applause). You can clap your hands and you can say "amen". Look what God did. Really, the **great glory of redemption is look at God**, period. Enough said.

Somebody once said, "He didn't have to." You know it's true don't you? He didn't have to; He shouldn't have; He had no reason to. And that He did simply and only shows the unimaginable depth and breath of His goodness, His kindness and His grace. The reality of salvation should leave us on our faces, crying out, "How great and glorious is the God of our salvation. Great is His name and great are His merciful deeds which saved us." That's the great story of redemption - GOD SAVES! Period!

Now, how did we receive the gospel? Again, just moving on from where we were last week - how did we receive the gospel? And I know - again - I understand myself, like many of you, there came that point in time when you bowed the knee of your heart; you prayed a prayer; you thought some really clear thoughts and you surrendered everything to Him; and you might have been six; you may have been sixteen; you might have been sixty. And we've talked about how God, even though He chooses us and redeems us, He lets us participate in that moment where we fall on our faces, just literally or figuratively, and we give ourselves completely and totally to Him.

How in the midst of that, though - I want you to think about this - how did we receive the gospel? Ephesians 2:8-9. Many of you know it; for others of you it may be new truth. I'll tell you what: It is great, great truth. How'd you receive it? "For by grace." Say it with me: "For by grace". Anything else? "For by grace." How did you? How did I receive? How did I get to experience and benefit from the effects of the gospel? "For by grace you have been saved, through faith." The text says that, "For by grace we have been saved" and that this has been accomplished through faith. And we've talked about this before but just be really clear about it. Was this a faith that you mustered up? Is this a faith that you brought to the equation?

We're closing on our refinance this week and the guy called me the other day and said, "Make sure you bring -", and he rattled off like six things and I want to bring all those six things 'cause I want this transaction to go through, right? Because there's some things I've got to bring to the table for it to work. So what did you bring to the table for this redemption transaction to work? Go ahead - answer. Congregation response: Nothing. The faith that energizes this transaction - even that was a gift.

By grace alone - God's. Through faith alone - from God - so no one can boast. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that" - that faith - "not of yourself." "It" - the faith - "is a gift of God." This salvation, this redemption, is "not a result of works so that no one may boast." Let me just say this to you. I felt compelled to say it to them the first hour and I feel compelled to say it to you again second hour here. Many of you in the room don't necessarily need me to say this to you to teach you something new but I want to remind those of you who already know this but I want to say this to those who might be just coming to grips with this: **There is no work you can do to save yourself.** There is no church building you can walk into; there is no tradition you can be a part of; there is no ritual that you can give yourself to; there isn't anything you can do - there is nothing you can do - there is absolutely nothing you can engage in; there is nothing you can be disciplined in; there is no habit you can form that can ever come close to saving you. **It is not by works.**

Here's what the text says: But it is "by grace." By the - listen - by the gracious gift of God alone. If God doesn't graciously gift us with salvation, we don't get saved.

Now I've read this story probably a hundred times over the years. It shows up in all kinds of different forms and all the different books that guys like me read when they think about messages like this. I just decided this week to read it to you. It's a powerful story; it's a great, great illustration of this truth. It's important for you to know this:

Suppose a drunk driver kills a child. That individual is arrested, tried, found guilty, sentenced to a term of imprisonment and a fine. After this individual who, while drunk, has killed this child, after he has paid the fine and served the imprisonment, as far as the law - as far as the rules - as far as the law is concerned, the matter is over, right? Correct? As far as the law is concerned, as far as the rules go: The penalty has been paid; the imprisonment has been completed; the fines come in - the matter is over. But not so much with the father of the child killed. He can never put things right with that father by serving a term of imprisonment or paying a fine. The only thing which can restore his relationship to that father is an act of free forgiveness on the part of - who? That father. That is how it is between us and God.

Realize this: It's not God's rules that have been violated. It's not God's law that got broken. YOU SINNED AGAINST GOD. You sinned against God's heart and, therefore, only an act of free forgiveness by the grace of a good God can put us back into a right and meaningful relationship with Him.

My buddy, Jason, gave this to me just this morning. Dallas Willard said that "Grace is opposed" - I love this - "Grace is opposed to earning, not to" what? "Effort". "Grace is opposed to earning, not to effort." By the grace of God we have been saved, all of which should lead us to - I hope you'll write this down this morning - and the gospel lived out.

You say, "What does this look like? What does the gospel lived out, look like?" Well, the whole passage leads to Chapter 2, verse 10. Everything we've read from 1 to 9 leads us to verse 10. Here we have the gospel lived out. What does it look like? It looks like this: "We are His" - it says in verse 10 - "For we are His workmanship." What a great word. Works of art, divinely crafted - works of art! "Created in Christ Jesus for good works." The scriptures teach us this morning that the reason He saved us was so that we could do these "good works". We're a workmanship, created in Christ, to do good deeds, good deeds which God - into the verse - "which God prepared beforehand" - before the foundations of the world - so "that we should walk" - important word - "that we would walk in them."

My friends, whenever you see the word "walk" in the epistles, you can always bank on the fact that what it's referring to is "everyday activity". These good deeds that you got redeemed to take part in, are good works according to the scriptures that we are to walk in everyday activity. Your daily life should be characterized, the scripture says, by these "good deeds prepared before the foundation of the world".

What a contrast, verse 1 and verse 10. Look at that: In verse 1, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." Now, you're not dead anymore, now you're a work of art! Now you're a new creation; a new, alive, redeemed, hopeful, forgiven, blessed, gifted, piece of divine work. You're a piece of divine work! You are a piece of divinely crafted art, uniquely crafted in Christ so that you would carry out pre-ordained good deeds. Listen - when you embrace and experience the heart-changing, life transforming power of the gospel - have you done that? Many of you in the room this morning have; some of you haven't yet. But watch what happens: When you do - when you

embrace and experience the heart-changing, life transforming power of the gospel, you do good works. It's just how it works. It's just what comes out of one who has been redeemed. The good works don't save you because what did I just tell you? I just told you that there's nothing you can do to get saved. The good works don't save you, right? The good works don't save you.

I had the conversation this week with somebody and had to remind him there's good people - there's good people who did benevolent things in their life who are in hell today because being a good person who does benevolent things doesn't get you saved and it certainly doesn't get you to heaven. Those who go to heaven are SAVED people NOT GOOD, BENEVOLENT people. Is this making sense? Somebody nod your head. Alright - good! Good deeds simply prove that you really are saved: They validate; they give testimony to Christ's' redeeming work.

So what's a good work? I hope you'll write this down, I really do, this is so important for us this morning. What's a good work? What is a good deed? Any activity or service - I wrote it down for you: Any activity or service - everybody should know this - any activity or service offered from a heart filled with an attitude of love. It's not a heart filled with benevolence; it's not a heart filled with social justice. This is a heart filled with an attitude of Godly love. Any kind or loving deed - here it is - that embodies or represents the heart and character of God - and we've been teaching you and we've been proclaiming to you for the last couple of years, that we long for you, in this family, to be priests: Priests that go; priests that pass along the heart of God; priests, that in the way that you live, you pass along the attributes of God. These are good works; these are good deeds that embody and represent the heart and character of God.

How would you describe - question for you: How would you describe the heart and character of God? Oh my! That's a six week series but I'll tell you what: Kind, loving, thoughtful, merciful, sacrificial, gracious, sympathetic, tender, come to mind.

Question number two for you: Who do we know from history that best embodied the heart and character of God? Who do we know from history that most clearly embodied the heart of God in the deeds or works that this person did? Who is it? Jesus! Jesus! Did you get that? Nobody on earth has ever embodied in the deeds that He did, more clearly or powerfully the heart of God, than Jesus, Who interacted with and served needy people in a kind, loving, thoughtful, sacrificial, gracious, sympathetic, tender way.

And I got a note from a buddy this week. I was going to kind of redo it and kind of fit it in my own way, and I just kept reading it and thought, "You know. I'm just going to read what he wrote." It's really good. He says, as we're talking about this back and forth on a couple of e-mails, he says: "It's inconceivable" It's absolutely inconceivable to consider oneself a disciple of Jesus, an imitator of the Lord, someone modeling their life after His if there are only a few or periodic good deeds.", he says. He goes on to say here to me: "Deeds matter; works matter - not to save you but to give evidence of. They were the final" - he reminds me here - "they were the final answer. According to Jesus in Matthew 25, good deeds to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned, the earthquake victim, they were good deeds. They were the answer." he reminds me. "People who hadn't done them went to hell." Go ahead, turn there. You go, "Wait - Really? It says that?" Yeah, it says that.

Go to Matthew 25. Let me hear those pages turning, Blackhawk. Come on! Come on! Turn them! Matthew 25:34: I want you to read this with your own eyes, I want you to see it right there in your own bible: "Then the king" - Matthew 25:34, it says - "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" We're talking about heaven, here; we're talking about eternity; we're talking about being in. And He says, "Come on you - all of you - you're in. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him" - the righteous, can you see them? The righteous sitting there going "Hey. Listen. Like we're really glad we're here. This is all like "Whoo! This is good! We're happy to be here but what in the world are You talking about? Like, can You just tell us 'cause we never did any of that to You." And He says, "Yeah, you did. Yeah, you did." He says this: "When did we see You a stranger? When" - verse 37 - "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you" - truly - "to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the" - what? Say it out loud! "the

least of them, YOU DID IT TO" - who? - "ME."

For times sake, I'm going to just tell you that the next part of that passage - you can read it - but then there's just another whole group that He looks at and says, "Hey, you know what? You're out! You're not coming in." And they like, "What are You talking about? We did all kinds of things." And He says, "You know what? You didn't feed Me; you didn't clothe Me; you didn't heal Me when I was sick; you didn't come to Me:" - He goes through that whole thing again and they say to Him: "What are you talking about. We never did - we never saw You like that. What are you saying?" And He says, "You know what? To the extent that you didn't do it to the least of these - if you didn't do it to them, you didn't do it to Me. And if you didn't do it to them, and something's not right in here, you're not of Me, you're out!" Wow.

"In an effort to escape", A.W. Tozer said this: "In an effort to escape the error of salvation by works, we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience." I'll read that to you one more time: In an effort to escape the error of salvation by works, we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience." We're supposed to feed them if we're His. Do you understand? We're supposed to give them water; we're supposed to give them clothes. Somebody said to me after the first hour, "Yeah, but they take advantage of it." I said, "Yeah, you're right, they do. Sometimes that's how that goes, but I didn't think we were talking about them. I thought we were talking about you." And he said, "Oops. Have a good day, pastor."

I'm supposed to; you're supposed to - WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP. We're these works of art that God created to do these things and we don't do them - Matthew 5:16 says, "Do your good deeds before men so that men can make much of you?" NO! So that when they see your deeds, they'll make much of who? God. It's what the children of God do; it's what we were redeemed for. And I want you to watch this, this morning. We did this a couple of months ago but we brought it back today. I want you to watch this closely - listen. We're His workmanship, created in Christ to do good works" - and it's so very, very important that you understand that that, my friends, entails you and I being willing to have God - day in and day out - prepare us for that. There are things God needs to do in me - believe me. There are things that God needs to do in you and as His workmanship, I hope you'll watch this and listen. I hope you'll be willing to follow suit. What a great picture you're about to see. I'll come back up in just a moment but watch and be encouraged.