



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 2:8-10

Ephesians

“Amazing Grace”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well, our text this morning in our continuing series in the book of Galatians is Galatians chapter 2 verses 8, 9 and 10. A brief passage, just three verses, but a passage which is filled with important doctrine, and I hope we have the time to cover it adequately.

[Audience] Ephesians? Not Galatians.

[Message] Did I say Galatians?

[Audience] Yes.

[Message] Well, let's try Ephesians this morning. We've done Galatians. I was talking to Doctor Mims about Galatians earlier. Well, I know you're not sleeping, at least not yet. Ephesians chapter 2, beginning with verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God/Not as result of works, that no one should boast/For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and bless our time of study together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God, and heavenly father, we are very grateful to you for the time we have together this morning. A time for your church, your people, the saints whom you purchased with the blood of your son from the foundation of the world. A time for us to come together, to assemble together and study your word together. To be instructed together. To be built up in the faith together. And so we pray, Lord, that that would be the end result of our time together as we look into this very significant book and this very significant passage within it and we study your grace, your sovereign grace, your

unconditional love, that was extended not to the deserving, but to the undeserving. To sinners, to men and women who were dead in their trespasses and sins, that no claim upon your goodness, your kindness, who really were deserving of the opposite; deserving of wrath and yet you have delivered us from that. Chosen us from the foundation of the world. Purchased us in history, past and through the blood of your son and brought us in our time to a saving knowledge of him through the work of the Holy Spirit and his irresistible grace.

Father as we consider those great truths which Paul unfolds for us in this book and in others we are reminded of the inescapable truth that salvation is of the Lord, it is not our doing, at any point, at in any way, but it is your work. And to know that should produce within us hearts that are grateful and full of praise with a genuine interest in living a life that honors you and reflects that glory in the midst of a dark and an evil age in which we live. An age of chaos, an age of great rebellion and yet an age that is by your grace moving on track and on time to be appointed in the great climax of history with the return of your son and the kingdom that he will bring. We look forward to that day, father, and yet in the meantime, we pray that you would bless us that we would live lives of faithful service to you. Bless us spiritually and bless us to that end, this morning as we study the Scriptures. But, bless us also father materially because we are a needy people. All that we have, our spiritual life, as well as our material goods they all come from you. And so we look to you for the continued provision of those goods.

We pray for those who are in need materially, those who are in need physically, the sick, the unemployed, the grieving. We pray for all of them and pray that you would give comfort, that you would supply mercy and grace and make provision. We thank you for what we have, we pray that you would continue to remind us of that and give us grateful hearts for the health that we enjoy, and the employment that we have, and the opportunities in all of life that we have to serve you and be a witness. Make us that. And give us boldness to be your witnesses. Prepare us for that this week with the time we have now as we study together. And bless us as we return this evening, that we would remember our Lord well, as we reflect upon his death and his burial, his resurrection and his coming again. And bless our time tonight and that our hearts would be well-prepared for the week that is to come.

We might go forth and the good witnesses. We pray for our land. We pray for this nation. We pray for our government, that you would bless those men whom you have

placed in authority over us. For every government ultimately finds its authority in you. You place the men there. You raise kings up and you bring them down. But those whom you have placed over us we ask, Lord, that you would bless them with wisdom. Wisdom to do what is right and we pray that justice would be established in the land. We pray for a prosperous nation. But a prosperous nation, a nation that is in order, so that we might flourish as your people and that we might do the work that you have given us to do and through that we pray that many, many men and women might come to faith and we might see great revival in this land. That is the great prosperity. We pray that for this country. We pray that for the world that you would bless those who go out with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bless us now, Father, as we study the gospel, as we study your word, bless us that we would have understanding of it, and prepare our hearts for it now as we sing our final hymn. May it be good preparation for our time together in your word. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] A few years ago, a well-known brokerage firm had an advertisement which boasted “We make money the old-fashioned way, we earn it.” Now that maybe a good slogan for a financial institution, but when it comes to spiritual matters it's deadly. And yet for many, it is their spiritual slogan. We gain God's favor and salvation by hard work, by moral effort, by ceremonies and rituals and sacrifices of our time and money for the church, and good causes. We earn it. But when we open the Bible and we turn to Ephesians chapter 2 and read what the apostle has to say for us, we read something very different from that. Paul says very plainly, “Not of works must any man should boast. Salvation is all of grace.” meaning it is all of God. And the Scriptures are very plain on that point. Old Testament and New Testament alike. Salvation is of the Lord. It is a gift of unmerited, unearned favor.

Versus 8 and 9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God/Not as a result of works that no one should boast.” And Paul has already made it very clear that it could be no other way. Our spiritual condition is utterly hopeless. Notice how he begins the chapter, what we looked at last week. And you - and Paul would include himself in that. Though he could say “And we were dead in our trespasses and sins.” That was our condition. We were dead. Dead in our trespasses and sins, unable to respond to the truth of God. It had no attractiveness to us. We were unable to live a way that is pleasing to him, and through that which is pleasing to him of ourselves. “But God” Paul writes in verse 4, “being rich in mercy, because of his great love with

which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.”

That is - at least to my mind - the New Testament equivalent of Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones of Ezekiel 37. Ezekiel was given of prophecy of Israel’s future conversion and restoration. And it shows that vision, that Israel’s restoration, the great revival in the awakening of the Jewish people in the future will not be because of law keeping. Because of their obedience to the law of Moses or anything that they do it. It will be solely the result of the power of God, the sovereign grace of God. Ezekiel sees a valley full of bones, “and they were very dry,” he says, utterly lifeless. But God tells them to prophesy over the bones and say, “Behold, I will cause breathe to enter you, that you may come to life. And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive, and you will know that I am the Lord.” For them to know that he is the Lord, they must be given life and the vision ends with the words, “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.”

Now that’s Israel’s future. It is the house of Israel, Ezekiel says, that he is speaking of. But it gives a picture of every believer today. Every believer in every age, for that matter. Because we were all, at one time, lifeless. As lifeless and as dead as dry bones until God’s Spirit breathe life into us, and we came to life spiritually. Now that’s grace. That’s the power of God’s love. And Paul felt it very important that the Ephesian’s realize the greatness of that power that was working for them, and in fact working in them. The power of their salvation, the greatness of their salvation and the greatness of their Savior. In order for us to live proper Christians lives - and he’s writing to Christians, he’s writing to men and women who have experienced that. He’s not telling them how to become Christians, though this is how we become a Christian. He’s telling them how they became Christians, how they came into this new life. And in order for us to live that life properly we must begin in the right way. This is where we began, realizing how we began, realizing the great power of God, realizing the grace of God, and so he magnifies the grace of God in these verses of Ephesians 2 versus 8, 9 and 10. And in them he gives us a summary of the gospel. We can’t earn salvation it comes to us as a gift. Verse 8, “For by grace you have been saved.”

Now that’s the second time that he has stated that in this chapter, as you saw earlier and just a moment ago, he mentions it in verse 5, where he interrupts his thought, “To

declare by grace you have been saved.” so obviously Paul wants to fix that idea firmly in our minds. Salvation is all of grace. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, the professor of theology at Princeton theological seminary at the beginning of this century, wrote “The whole gospel turns upon its hinge on this fact that salvation is of pure grace.” And he writes about Grace, he goes on to point out that there are three ideas communicated in the word grace. First, the idea of power. “It does not instruct” he says, “It energizes. It gives life.” Grace raises the dead spiritually and it will raise the dead physically as well. So, grace is, first of all power, but goes on to state that it’s not bear power, it is also love. It is power directed by love and that’s the fundamental meaning of the word grace; favor, love. And then the third idea he says, is “gratuitous. Gift. Grace is free, just because it is love” he says, “It is free for sinners.”

And so he defines grace as, love to the undeserving. Grace is unmerited favor. It is power. It is love. It is free. Paul says, “It is not of works.” We do nothing to deserve salvation. We can do nothing to win the forgiveness of our sins, to gain deliverance. And that’s really what salvation is. It is deliverance from the wrath of God, the eternal penalty upon our sins. And it is deliverance from the power of sin in the present life. We can do nothing to earn that, that’s a free gift of God. Salvation is his gift and we can only receive it by faith. And faith, very simply, is trust. A fuller definition of faith can be given in three words. And if Doctor Johnson were standing here this morning he would tell you that it is, *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. But he’s not here, I’m here and since the little bit of Latin that I had long ago has basically escaped me I’ll stick with English.

Faith is first of all understanding. A person must first understand the propositions of the Bible. Must understand the meaning of the gospel. That there is one God who subsist in three persons. That’s where we begin. It’s not enough to believe that there is one God. Moslems believe in one God. But the one God of the Bible is Trinity. God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. And the son of God became the Savior by becoming a man, Jesus, who is without sin. And who offered himself as the sacrifice for sinners, he became the substitute. And he died in our place. He bore the wrath of God that we deserve so that all who believe in him might be saved. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”

We understand that, that's where faith begins. It has a knowledge of that, it understands what that means. But it's not enough to simply understand it, we must also give assent to it. And that's the second aspect of saving faith, assent. The recognition that gospel is true, we understand it, recognize it is true, but then having recognize that it is true that Christ alone is the Savior, that he is the eternal son of God, become man, the God man who died in the place of sinner, then a person must put personal trust in him. And that's a part of faith, personal trust.

There is a story that is often cited to illustrate this third aspect of faith - and I guess all three aspects for that matter - but it's the story of John Françoise Rabelais, who was known as Blondin. He was a French acrobat who became famous for crossing Niagara Falls on a tight rope 160 feet above the water. And he crossed a number of times. On one occasion he took the stove onto the tight rope and cooked an omelet above the falls. On another occasion took a wheel barrel across blindfolded. And then on another occasion he carried a man across on his back. Well, after bringing his passenger safely to the other side he turned to the crowd and he asked a particular man, “Do you believe that I can do that with you?” and the man said, “Of course.” And so he said, “Well hop on.” and the man said, “No.” He refused. And the point is often made that that's not genuine faith. Genuine faith not only believes that it's possible, it hops on, it involves trust. Now, I wouldn't have hopped on either, as good as Blondin evidently was, he was not immutable. And so I wouldn't have trusted my life to that, but Christ is. He is immutable. He cannot fail because he is God.

And the work that he has done on the cross is a finished work, it is completed. It's not tenuous. The end result doesn't hang in the balance. It is a finished and completed work. It is the work of God, and we are saved by trusting in him. Without faith there is no salvation. What must I do to be saved, the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, and they both answered “Believe the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

Spurgeon tells the story of an old unbeliever who was dying, a great Scottish preacher named Innis came to see him. He inquired about the man's faith in Christ and was told, “Mister Innes, I'm relying solely on the mercy of God. God is merciful and he will never condemn a man forever.” When he became worse and was near to death Mister Innes went to him again and this time the man said “Oh, Mister Innes, my hope is gone. For have been thinking that if God is merciful, he's also just. And what if instead of being merciful to me he should be just to me? What would then become of me? I must give up my hope in the

mere mercy of God. Tell me how to be saved.” Well, the minister told about Christ, told him about his words and his deeds and how Christ is coming to the world to save sinners. He told him how he had promised to do this by going to the cross, dying in their place and how he had done that and how Jesus had promised that none of those who had been given to him by the father should ever be lost. “Ah Innis,” he said, “There is something solid in that. I can rest on that. I have found that I cannot rest on anything else.”

And that’s saving faith. That’s what it involves; we rest on him. We rest our confidence in Christ. We trust in him. That’s faith and that is our unnecessary response in salvation. But it is not a response that we can take credit for. And to deny any suggestion of personal merit in our faith Paul quickly adds, “And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Now that brings us to a very important question of interpretation in this passage. In fact, it’s the main question of interpretation, and that is, what is the gift of God? What does the pronoun that, refer to? It would seem to refer to faith, since faith is the word that is closest to the pronoun and generally pronouns refer to what is called their nearest antecedent. And that simply means the nearest word preceding it, and that would be faith. And that would fit Paul’s purpose very well. His point is to show the free nature of salvation. That it is not something that we do. There is nothing that we do that we can boast in. And the most effective way to do that is to show that we are not only saved by faith, apart from any works that we do, but also that the very faith itself is a gift of God. That makes a great deal of sense. That’s a very forceful argument.

The problem with that interpretation is that there is what we might call a, gender gap. And what I mean by that is, the two words, faith and that, differ in gender. In the Greek language as another languages words have gender. Nouns, pronouns, adjectives or either masculine, feminine or neuter. The word faith is feminine and here the word that, is neuter, and usually pronouns agree in gender with the words that they referred to. And so we would expect a feminine pronoun if it is referring to faith. Now that’s not always so, there are examples in Geek literature where the pronoun doesn’t agree in gender with the word that it refers. But generally that is the rule. Generally we would expect to find agreement between the two words.

And so many others, Calvin for example, understood that, as referring to the whole preceding sentence. By grace you have been saved through faith, the whole event of salvation in every aspect about it is not of yourselves. And that does account for Paul’s use of neuter pronoun. It refers to the feminine words, grace and faith and it also would refer to

the masculine participle, have been saved. If there's a problem with that interpretation it is that it does seem somewhat redundant. That was Charles Hodges objection. Grace is free, it is an unearned act of God. And so to say that salvation is of grace is to say that it is free and so to then add that it is not of yourselves is, Hodge says, saying the same thing over and over again without making any progress.

Now think he makes a good point and he's not the only one that makes that point, but grammatically it is probably safer to understand, that not of yourselves, as referring to the whole work of salvation. And either way we come out at the same place, with faith being a gif. Which is the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere. Let me give you just a few examples of that. In Philippians 1:29, Paul writes, “For to you it has been granted. For Christ sake, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Granted means, given. And so to believe has been given. Their faith has been given to them. In Acts 18:27, Luke writes, that “When Paul arrived in Akaya, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace.” Now he doesn't say those who believed in grace, but those who had believed through grace. In other words grace was the means by which they believe. Their faith was the product of grace. It was a gift.

In Acts 11:18, Peter explains the conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles. And he says that “God has granted.” Well that's our word again. “God has given to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to faith.” Where do they get the repentance that leads to faith? They got it from God. He granted it to them. It is a gift. Perhaps the clearest example of this in the book of Acts, is Acts chapter 16, with the conversion of Lydia.

Paul and his companions had arrived in Philippi. And on the first Sabbath they went down to the Riverside where a small group of God fears was meeting. Gentiles who were practicing Judaism and Paul began to preach to them. And Luke writes, that as he was preaching one of the ladies in the group, Lydia, was listening and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. As a result of the Spirit's work upon her heart she understood and she responded. She didn't open her own heart. God opened her heart, he gave her the faith. And if we look at faith in all of its aspects, he gave her an understanding of what was being said. She understood what he was saying and it made sense suddenly. She said, “That's true” and then she trusted in what he said. That was the work of God.

He gave her the spiritual life that issues inevitably in faith. And so because of the work of God, because he opened her heart she responded. And that's true of every one of us who have believed in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it is not because of anything in us, we're

dead in our transgressions and sins. But God in his amazing grace, in his life-giving power, comes upon us who don't deserve it at all, but comes upon us because he has chosen us for himself and he opens our heart to understand the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Causes us to see the truth of it, and we believe as a result of that. Our faith is not of ourselves. It and the whole work of salvation is a gift of God.

As John Stott says, “We must never think of salvation as a kind of transaction between God and us, in which he contributes grace and we contribute faith, for we were dead.” And of course for a dead person, spiritually dead person, to have faith it must be granted, it must be given to him of God. And I should add to this, when we think of faith we must not think of it as it is so often thought of as the cause of salvation. It is not. We sometimes think “I'm saved because I believed. My faith caused my salvation.” That's not the case at all. Christ is the cause of salvation. We are saved by his death. “He himself is the propitiation for our sins.” John writes in 1 John 2:2. We can find that same point throughout the Scriptures.

In Revelation 1:5, John writes that, “It is by his blood that we are released from our sins. It is the death of Christ that obtains our salvation.” He has saved us. He has purchased us. Is a finish work. What our faith is, is merely the channel, it is the instrument, the means of receiving what Christ has already accomplished and obtained for us. It is not anything that we can take credit for. And then to make certain that there is no question about this, Paul adds verse 9, “Not as a result of works that no one should boast.” Not as a result of works of any kind, whether they be good deeds, acts of morality and kindness, acts of philanthropy or religious ceremonies like baptism or taking the mass or teaching a Sunday school class. Salvation is free. And Paul makes a great point of that so that he says “We won't boast.” And that is one of the reasons that the gospel is such an offense to men. The men and the religions of the world want to boast, they want to say “We earn it.”

And so salvation as a free gift, the grace of God and the gospel goes completely contrary to man's natural way of thinking about salvation. All of the religions of the world are based on works and are based on human effort or something that man supplies in one way or another. That is true of all of them. The primitive savage who lives in fear of his gods. And so offers a sacrifice to appease them and gain their blessings as doing that. Supplying something for his welfare and his blessing. Judaism became a religion of law keeping, of human effort, of obtaining merit with God. Islam is the same. It's no different. The Muslim must say the simple creed, “There is no God but God and Mohammed is the

prophet of God.” must say prayers, abstain from certain foods and if it’s possible go on a pilgrimage to Mecca at some time in his life. Every religion. It comes down to the same thing. It’s all a question of what one does.

And it’s no different for the Protestant who believes that he or she is going to heaven because of his or her works or the Roman Catholic that believes that it is the mass that is going to save. It all comes down to we earn it. Salvation is not of works, it is only for those who can say we receive it. It is a free gift. Our Lord gave very clear illustration of that in his parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. It’s found in Luke chapter 18. Both men went to the temple to pray. As the Pharisee prayed he drew attention to the evils of others, and the evils that he had avoided and how he tithed and he fasted and he did all these things, and no doubt he did all of that. Had a life full of works. Of external obedience to the law. And then he expresses great, thanks. His thanks was that, “I am not like that tax collector over there.” While the tax collector had no good works to boast about, nothing to commend him to God. He was a sinner, and he knew it and he knew that God knew it. And all he could do was beat his breasts and cast himself upon God’s mercy and pray “God be merciful to me, the sinner.” The sinner. He didn’t try to lighten the load of his guilt at all. He recognized that he was an unworthy sinner. And then Jesus said, “I tell you this that man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled. But he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Salvation is all of grace. A free gift of God. Not of works, that no one should boast. Now that doesn’t mean that is no place in salvation for works. There certainly is a place for salvation, for works and salvation. And Paul makes it very point in verse 10. He says, “We were created for good works.” Holiness is not an option for the child of God. And Grace does not preclude good works. It does not preclude a life of holiness. We were created for that very thing. Back in chapter 1 in verse 4, Paul says, “That we were elected. We were chosen by God from all eternity, to be holy and blameless before him in love.” That’s what we were chosen for. That’s what we were saved for. Paul makes the same point. Titus 2:14, where he says that “Christ died for us that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds.”

He purchased the people that he could purify through his death. And to the work of the Holy Spirit and give them a zeal for good works. We’re not save our good deeds but we are saved for them. They are the object of our salvation. If we are saved, then we are have a desire to do them. If we are saved we have a desire to strive for good deeds, we are zealous

for those good deeds, that’s what Paul says. Luther put it very well. Luther’s a great champion of justification by faith alone. And he said “Justification is by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone.” Now what he means by that is we are saved by grace through faith through no work of our own. We add nothing to the work of Christ on the cross. He completed the work of salvation, we simply receive it, but the faith by which we receive it is a living faith. It is a vital faith. It is an act of faith, and it is seen in the deeds that we do, in obedience we show. “If you love me” Jesus said, “you will keep my commandments.” Works of the evidence that we have a vital faith. Works are the evidence that we are his disciples, and that we do love him.

Paul doesn’t let us escape from grace for a moment. Not even when he takes us into the subject of works. Notice how he describes us. “We are God’s workmanship. We are what he has made of us. We are his workmanship, we can’t lay any claim to what we are, not even in the works that we do.” We can claim no more merit for those works, those good deeds, than we can for putting away our sins. It is all of God. He is the one who is the workman. And he is the one who is active within us, like a kind of artist who is fashioning us. God is sometimes described in that way. See in the book of Isaiah, in the book of Jeremiah and Romans, chapter 9, he is described as a potter. And we are described as clay. And out of that clay he fashions us into vessels. He makes us what we are. And we see that here, we are his workmanship.

And so even though this is the subject of works at this point in the subject, it is still grace. The works that we do. That which we are in terms of our character is the work of God. We are his workmanship. And in the Greek text, his, is the first word in that sentence emphasizing the fact that it is God who has done the work, and he has done a good work. The Greek word for workmanship is the word, poiéma, from which we get our word poem. And so this is sometimes translated, “We are God’s work of art. We are his masterpiece.” We who were dead in our trespasses and sins have been transformed. We have been made into new creatures, in to works of art by the Lord God. We’re new creatures. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the old things have passed away. You are new creature in him and that’s the greatness of his grace. That’s the wisdom and the power of his grace, that he could take one such as us, dead in our transgressions and sins and make us into living creatures, works of art.

One of the greatest works of art of the Renaissance is Michelangelo’s statue of David. It was originally commissioned to stand on one of the buttresses of the Cathedral of

Florence. But when it was completed it was so magnificent that the officials decided that it should stand in a place of greater prominence and so they put in front of a palace where the government was seated. Now he produced that great work of art at a very young age. It was one of his early works of art, which shows his genius. And what underscores the genius of Michelangelo is that he sculpted it out of a block of marble that was flawed. In fact, a block of marble that had been rejected by another artist who had worked on it. It had been discarded as useless. And yet, Michelangelo took that useless piece of marble and he sculpted one of the greatest works of art that there is.

Now that is a picture of us, flawed and useless, but God in his infinite power, wisdom, skill, and love has retrieved us from the rubble of sin. He purchased us with the blood of his son and he is presently making us into his works of art. The world is God's workshop. And he uses the circumstances of life, like the hard blows of a mallet and a chisel to do his work and to form the image of Christ in us. Now it's not those circumstances that make us into the image of Christ. He uses those, but it is the power of God, it is the life of God within us that transforms us and that changes us. The life that we have that comes from the Holy Spirit who has sealed our hearts. “We are his workmanship” Paul says, “created in Christ Jesus.” It is because we are in Christ.

Is because we have been placed in him, we have been joined to him, we have been united with his life that we have his life within us, communicated to us through the Holy Spirit, and that is a life-changing life. It is presently going on in you. It is changing you. Changing the way you think and giving you understanding. Changing your affections, giving you different ones than you have in your days when you were dead in your transgressions and sin, and giving you the deeds that God would have you to live in.

As Paul said back in chapter 1, “He enlightened our minds.” He's the one that gives us an understanding of Scripture. He's the one that gives us a desire for the truth. He's the one who cause us to long, not only to understand it, to know more of it, but to live in conformity with it. It's all him. He's doing that within us. He's transforming us and it is his constant work of transformation, a work in which he is continually working to detach us from self and from self-interest and make us more like Christ's. Fill us with the disinterested love. Love that is not oriented towards self, but oriented towards him, and toward his people. That's what God's doing. And so in doing that God is making us into something that is genuinely valuable. Something that is good for all eternity.

A Christian should never think that he or she is not significant. We are. And we are significant because we are in Christ. Because we have been purchased by him, and we have been placed in him, and we have his life in us, so that all that we do is of eternal value. Wherever he has placed you, you are of value. What you do is of value. Perhaps you listen Doctor Johnson this morning as he expounded 1 Corinthians and talked about the judgment that we will pass through and the fire that will judge our works and some will be burned up and come to nothing. But there will be those, those who have been faithful, which will have gold, silver and precious stones. There is infinite and eternal value to what we do because of what he is doing within us, and that's true of every child of God.

Now he is doing that now. He is making this his workmanship, his poems, his masterpieces, but it's a long process and it is a lifelong process that God will not stop until he has completed that process. “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus,” he tells the Philippians. Nothing can prevent him from doing that. He will accomplish his work in us. Salvation is not based on works, but it results in works and it results in change character. It results in works, in fact, Paul says, our works were prepared beforehand. Appointed to us before our existence, that we should walk in them. And that again, is the grace of God.

Paul asked the boastful Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “What you have that you did not receive? That's a rhetorical question. The answer is, well, there's nothing that I have that I haven't received. That's the point. They may not have thought that, but that's Paul's point, and that's what he's teaching in that question. “What do you have that you have not received? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you have not received it?” We have received everything from God, and there is no ground for boasting and what we are or what we do. It's because we have received it, though, that there is room for praising God. And room for doing. God is given us works. He has given us faith and the ability to act and so we are to be doing that, we are to be acting, we are to be as, Paul says, “Walking in them. Walking in those works that he has before ordained or appointed for us.”

Let me try to summarize the things we have seen in an illustration. In an illustration I take from Doctor Donald Gray Barnhouse, who, a number of years ago did the film entitled “Geography of salvation” In which he explains how we must be saved. In his presentation, he makes an analogy between the state of California in which he was born and the state of death into which we are all born and how we get out of it. He begins by

pointing out that in the state of California is Mount Whitney, which, at that time was the highest point in the United States at 14,495 feet above sea level. This was a film that he made before Alaska and Mount McKinley were brought into the equation. But at that time, California had the highest point in the nation, and it also had the lowest point because Death Valley is also in California and Death Valley is some 280 feet below sea level.

Now imagine that there's a man living in Death Valley and he becomes restless. He's tired of the desert and so he decides that he is going to leave the state of California. And so he goes up to the coast. And there's a real change. A change in altitude, a change in the environment, in the atmosphere. The climates very much different. But he's still in the state of California. And so he moves up to higher ground. He goes up to the mountains and the air is even clearer and he's even higher up. And then from there he goes up to Mount Whitney, up to the very top, so that he's at the highest point he can go, but he is still in the state of California, because you can't leave the state by going up. And it's the same with the state of death.

There are men who live in the Death Valley of society, in the lowest part. Thieves, murderers, men on skid row who have lived dissipated lives, men on death row, in our prisons. Many who are obviously sinners, there's no question about that. But most people live on higher ground morally, they live on the coast. They are more respectable, but they too are sinners. Their sins just aren't as obvious. They may cheat on their insurance claims or they may cheat on their tax returns. They may be on higher ground than those who live in Death Valley but they too are in the state of death. And then there are those who are the most respectable and who have genuinely won our admiration. The men who live on the highest ground, the Mount Whitney of society. The judge who upholds the law of the land, the teacher and the doctor who contribute to the good of society and the benefit of mankind. But as good as they are compared to the others, they too are in the state of death.

Isaiah tells us that Isaiah 64:6 “That all our righteousness are as filthy rags. All of them. The best that we can do in the eyes of God is filthy rags.” And Paul says “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” All are equally without salvation. “Because salvation is not a way up” as Barmhouse says, “it is a way out.” And the only way out of the state of death is by renouncing our citizenship in it. Recognizing that we are sinners. That we are enemies of God and looking to God for mercy. And we do that by trusting in Christ.

He is the way out of the country of death. He is the door into the country of life and with faith in him God issues our passport into his land of the living with justification, with a declaration of righteousness and the forgiveness of sins. Now that is the way out of the state of death and into the state of life then Barnhouse says, “Is time for Christian living. Then is the time for mountain climbing, not in the state of death, but in the state of life, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved.” And that is what Paul is saying right here. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

It’s nothing that we do, it’s not by going up. It’s not by becoming more and more morals and trying to clean up our lives. It is by the grace of God. It’s the gift of God. It’s through faith in Jesus Christ. But then come the works. Then comes a life of righteousness, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Are you doing that? Can you say that you are his workmanship? You can if you believe in Jesus Christ. That is the first great work that God does in us. He makes us aware of our sin, and he enables us to see the solution in Christ, who died in our place. And he enables us to believe in him. He regenerates us that we might believe in Jesus Christ. Have you done that? If not then believe in Jesus Christ, trust in him. Rest your confidence in who he is and what he has done. And then rejoice in what he has done for you and what he is doing for you and what he will continue to do for you as his workmanship. May God help all of us to respond in the proper way. If you are not a Christian, I invite you to believe in him. And as a Christian, may we all rejoice in the grace of God. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly father, we come to the passage such as this and realize that we can never say enough and we can never teach it well enough. It is one of those mountain peak passages of the Bible. We are reminded of your grace. Amazing Grace. What a thought, Father, that we who were dead in our trespasses and sins have become the object of your grace, have become your workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. We thank you for the change you have brought in us, the transformation of making us new creatures, of giving life where there was death, giving us faith where there was unbelief, making us your children when we were children of wrath. Thank you for that great truth. We thank you for the gift of life in your son. It’s in his name we pray. Amen.

“ Amazing Grace” by Dan Duncan

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