

Salvation: By Grace Through Faith

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In theory the content of this sermon should change your life. I am also aware of this – that over the centuries, wars have been fought, and people have died defending what we are set to be looking at this evening. To those of us who are Christians, hearing this will be like drinking the sweetest of nectars. And if anyone in this room doesn't call themselves a Christian, this should make you go wow. So as I was typing away and just thought to myself “no pressure”.

LAST TIME – so just so we get back up to speed, we had a short hiatus on account of the lovely Harvest Service. Last time we were in TENETS we heard from Helen Johnson and our very own Rose, and we were looking at Christ's work on the Cross, and his Resurrection and Ascension. And today we're going to home in on what that means for us.

And to do that we're going to look at the key part of our passage again. Eight words that sum up what we're about; 8 words that have changed the world; 8 words that people have died for - **'By grace you have been saved, through faith'**

Lead In

In this passage we have the solution to something. This solution is salvation - “By grace you have been saved...” Paul is saying to the people he is writing to that they have been saved! Get-in!

The Grave

But we've got a solution - that means we also have a *problem*. Which we get to when we ask...

But saved from what?

I'm going to throw a few Bible passages your way because I want us to see if we can pick up what's at stake here...

John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not *perish* but have *eternal life*.

John 10:28

28 I give them eternal *life*, and they shall never *perish*; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

John 11:25-26

25 Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the *life*. The one who believes in me will *live*, even though they *die*; 26 and whoever *lives* by believing in me will never *die*.

Romans 5:21

21 "...just as sin reigned in *death*, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 6:23

23 For the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord

1 Corinthians 15:53-55

53 For the **perishable** must clothe itself with the **imperishable**, and the mortal with immortality. 54 ...then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

55 'Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?'

Colossians 3:1, 3

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God... 3 For you *died*, and your **life** is now hidden with Christ in God.

Do we see the point? Do we see why it is the early church was so excited? It's because they were among the very first to see God's new way ushered in. Death – solved. The Grave – solved. Eternal life – completed it, mate!

I don't think any of us really comprehend how big of a deal that is. That because of Jesus, death is no longer the only option. Everlasting life is now on the cards.

How does it all work?

Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension solve the problem. And you may be asking "How? - how does all of this work?" And we read earlier that if we want in on this everlasting life, it's through belief. Put like this in Paul's letter to the Romans.

Romans 10:9

9 if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

We'll come back to this later, but notice what it doesn't mention as a qualification for 'you will be saved'. It doesn't say "if you're good enough".

If you were here to listen to Emma's talk on 'Humanity' - you'd know exactly where this problem comes from. The word is sin.

If we think you can 'get in' because you're 'good enough', I'm going to let the Bible spell it out for us, what the criterion for eternal life is.

Romans 3:23

"For all have sinned and fall short of *the glory of God*".

THAT, right there, is the standard. The glory of God.

So, ask yourself - "Am I God?" Your answer to that should not be "yes". This isn't even a question necessarily of good and bad. I know that there is some preaching that basically tries to convince us of the need for salvation by

basically trying to get us all to think that we are more evil than we could ever have dared acknowledge.

Which *can* be true - how many of us go through our lives with our fingers in our ears regarding the things that we do wrong? How many of us would be comfortable letting other people see the whole of our lives as if it were a TV Show? We all have parts of our lives that we'd rather not let others see.

But we don't even need that, we just need the fact "*you are not God!*"

What is the qualification? - "*the glory of God*". And what's the most obvious proof that we can't meet that standard? Just back a bit - "for all have sinned." And this is where the problem starts. We've mentioned eternal life a fair bit already, and of course there's the opposite of that - "death". We've seen the word "perish" appear as well. Why does that happen? Where does death come from? It comes from sin.

We just read this out earlier as well

Romans 6:23

23 For the wages of sin is ***death***...

In the Bible, it's because sin is in the world that death is as well. And this is an idea that the early Christians get from way back at the start of the Bible – right back to Genesis, where it all started in the Garden in Eden. This goes right the way back to the very first story in the Bible. Remember what happened – what did God say would happen to Adam and Eve should they eat of the fruit from the tree he explicitly told them *not* to eat from?

Genesis 3:15

15 "...for when you eat from it you will certainly *die*."

And we know how well that turned. But do we see the pattern?

- 1) God gave a command
- 2) Adam and Eve broke the command.
- 3) They therefore sinned
- 4) They therefore 'died.'

And this isn't just about death in the physical sense. We're Adam went on to live until he was 930 years old. He did physically die eventually, but the moment he ate from the fruit, he died *spiritually*. And this just another reason how we know that salvation must be "*by grace*" and "*not of works*" (*i.e. being good enough to earn salvation*). Because **dead people can't do anything**. Do you see? - without Christ, we are to count ourselves as spiritually dead. And if we're dead, there's nothing we can do to earn our salvation.

But what this means is that God's grace to us - to save us, to give us a second option, eternal life - is REALLY powerful.

Barnacles And Limpets

You know I've sometimes heard this analogy for "salvation". Imagine you were on a ship, and you've gone overboard. It's dark, the waves are roaring, and

there's no chance you're going to make it without some help. And just when all hope seems lost, who should come along but Jesus. He throws you the life-ring, and you get can swim to the life ring for him to pull you in.

I think the Bible tells it slightly differently – before we meet Jesus, we're not barely keeping our head above water. And Jesus doesn't throw you a lifeline to keep you alive. Try this on for size. Jesus diving into the water, swimming to the darkest depths, the very bottom of the Mariana Trench. To find the remains of Andrew Kitcatt – what's left of him.

His flesh has long decayed (or been eaten by whatever is down there). His bones are somewhat scattered, now a home for any creatures seeking shelter, or a home for local barnacles and limpets.

And Jesus gathers what's left of Andrew, brings him to the surface, and by his power and will alone breathes *life* into Andrew. I'm going to paraphrase an old friend of ours, the prophet Ezekiel here...

Ezekiel 37:4 - "Jesus made breath enter Andrew, and Andrew came to life. ⁶ He attached tendons to Andrew and made flesh come upon him and cover him with skin; He will put breath in Andrew, and he will come to life. Then Andrew knew that Jesus is LORD.

Grace

And how does belief achieve this eternal life for us? What happens when we believe? Remember earlier when we saw 'the wages of sin is death'. It's peculiar I think to imagine death as if it were the owed salary for sin. It's as if sin becomes our employer and our payment is death. But we don't want to miss the point here – death is inevitable. Unless something, or someone, can overcome sin. And we know the qualification – the glory of God. We're looking for someone who is equal with God, who has the same glory that we all fall short of, and who is immune to sin. And 2000 years ago, we get exactly that,

when Jesus is born. God incarnate. The Word made flesh. God's eternal begotten Son, who the angels worship and praise day and night, became someone that could be killed.

You will be very hard pressed to find a more beautiful story in the Bible than Jesus' trial. The judge and jury are given a choice – choose to execute Jesus – sinless Jesus - or to execute a known criminal. Barabbas. They opt for Barabbas, he gets off Scott free, whereas Jesus gets killed on the cross. This captures salvation by grace so perfectly. Jesus, taking our place.

Remember, we need a solution to death. There's a wage to be paid. Part one of the solution – Jesus dying, instead of us.

But if we just stopped there, we'd run into a problem. If Jesus just died, then nothing really special happened. All he would have achieved is an incredibly nice thing for one man – Barabbas. But notice how nothing has changed about death. He's just doing something that's going to happen to everyone else.

What changed? What's different about this death? It's that it's not final. We needed more if we're to have any hope. And three days later that hope was realised - when that stone was rolled away, and Jesus walked out. And not only that – he ascended into Heaven to go back to the Father. Death is beaten.

What does this mean?

Now this is really important because what it means is that Jesus sets out exactly what his plan is for us, he's inviting us to do the same. He's given us a map, a route. When it comes to eternal life, how do we get in on the action?

We need to do what Jesus did. But as I've said countless times, we can't, because dead people can't do anything. So how does belief solve this problem?

Thankfully, Paul has the answer in Romans 6 -

Romans 6:3-11

³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

What we have here is the gift of believing in Christ.

And so in belief, our old self, the body that is enslaved to sin, dies. And so that is how we get eternal life. Remember, sin has one job – to bring death. “The wages of sin is death”. But it’s power is gone, because when we believe, the old self joins in Christ’s death. And so, sin no longer has that job – it’s got nothing to kill, because when we believe, we share in Christ’s death, and that means the power of sin is completely destroyed.

And Paul explains that when we die with Christ, as he did, we also get new life. As he did. And we shall also ascend to be with God, as he did.

Growth

And Paul actually tells us that we are already there. Just go back two verses from our reading. We read...

Ephesians 2:6

⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

Did you notice that? – it’s not “will raise us up”, but “has raised us up.” If you are a Christian, your spirit is already there. That which died in Eden, is raised with Christ, enjoying every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. It’s enjoying the presence and the glory of God. And the day will come where we, leave our bodies (our *flesh*) behind, and are united with our spirits in heaven.

And I want to use this opportunity to just lavish us in comfort. Such great comfort.

For any of us who may doubt God's love for us – we say this verse a lot don't we? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son..." (John 3:16). And there's another verse, which I think shouting from the rooftops doesn't do any justice at all.

Romans 5:6-8

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I have come back to that so many times – Christ proves his love – by dying for the sinner, the ungodly. I was a sinner, I was ungodly. Christ died for me. And guess what – I'm still ungodly, and I'm still a sinner. We fall short of his glory. And in your life, even as a Christian, you can be in some pretty dark places. Have you got a recurring sin in your life that you just can't shake? "I did it again Lord. What's the point of even coming to you? I know I'm just going to do it again. I feel so hopeless. I feel nothing for You, I am unmoved by You." **Your acts and your feelings** cannot change the past. He still died for you.

Colossians 2:14 put it like this, that our sins were nailed to the cross, and they went down with him and they stayed down – whilst you were ungodly. Whilst you are ungodly - the very thing that disqualifies us from eternal life, is also our qualifier. Can you come to Jesus? Are you ungodly? YES! So you can! You can ALWAYS go to him, for comfort.

So for those who may ask “am I good enough for God to love me?” Christianity turns this on it’s head. “Am I good enough?” - no. “Can I do enough to get into heaven, or God’s good books?” - no. But rather than being a reason for God to turn away, it is precisely the reason we can go to him, unashamed. Because instead of giving ourselves that work, we put the work on him. Who does not fail, who does not falter. Because we are sinners, we can always go to him. Jeremiah 2:13 – the fountain of *living* water. Never runs out, never runs dry. For all our sin, his grace will always runs deeper.

For any of us who may doubt our purpose in life – if you’re a Christian you’ve got it. Our friends and family who have gone before us knew it so well – The The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it this way.

“What is the chief end of man?

Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

That is what your spirits are doing right now, in heaven. And in a couple of weeks we’re going to go into this in a lot more detail, but in short, we cannot even begin to conceive the glory of that – what it means to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, and ever and ever and ever. It’s your purpose.

In truth, I have absolutely no idea how to stop this talk. I could just go on and on and on. I think I will close with an invitation. Come to Jesus, give your life to him. You can do this even if you’ve been a Christian your whole life. Give your life to him, and get in on life to the full. Get in on the very reason you were really put on this earth.

Let’s pray.