

Ephesians 2:1-10

When the grace of God is all you've got, it's more than enough.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of time. I felt like I had finally arrived. Refusing to be someone who peaked in high school, I poured myself into the undergraduate experience (all six years of it!)

I was popular. Student president. Forming connections, serving students, I had the best parking spot on campus. It felt like I was everyone's friend (except the Lambda Chis, they hated me). I was in the executive suite at my schools hockey games (our big sport), I sat behind the governor at Husker football games as a regent of the university system in our state.

It was pretty amazing for a kid in his early twenties. Top of the world, my world anyway.

Then... following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, living in the passions of my flesh... I got drunk, and attended a home football game in nothing but a kilt (the last day of that fraternity tradition!)

Poor behavior alone would have been written off as youthful indiscretion. But we were playing our Division II rival, and winning, so I had to taunt the opposing fans.

Next thing I know, I am pinned to the ground being arrested for inciting a riot. It was the only moment the fans in the visitor's sections cheered of the whole game.

What followed was a gut-wrenching few months. When I thought I was untouchable, I lost what I thought was everything. Access, friends, position... that parking spot! I was humiliated. A failure.

I wish I could say that was the last failure in my life. The last time I hit rock bottom. But it was just one of the vital experiences the Lord used to start loosening the grip of the trespasses and sins in which I onced walked.

I didn't live up to expectations. I wasn't good enough. Not just according to the world... but religion.

Maybe you have an experience, or a few, like that. Where it felt like things have been stripped away, taken. Where you felt like a failure - where you didn't live up to the standard.

I want you to know that you are in good company! All of us!

All of humanity finds ourselves here. Once children of wrath. Dead in sin and performance.

Into this reality comes Jesus.

“What we bring in - death, burden, the weight of or sin and shame.

What are we given? We are made alive together with Christ, raised up with him, and seated with him in the heavenly places.”

If you are in Christ - by grace you have been saved.

Two verses for today, show us that the life of faith is all grace.

When the grace of God is all you've got, it's more than enough.

This second chapter of Ephesians is a magisterial text. Essential for us. Following the worshipful song of the first chapter flowing into the cosmic reality of life without Christ and life united with him.

Those belonging to Jesus share his resurrection, his ascension, and all that is to come.

Ephesians 2:7 “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (ESV)

Here is the anchor of these riches.

Ephesians 2:8–10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (ESV)

Grace, good works.

Grace

My least favorite fable sermon illustration - a preacher passes by a farm that is exquisite, beautiful fields, manicured lawn, pasture, stables, and a stunning farm house.

Eventually the preacher rolls up to the farmer and says “Sir, what an amazing farm God has given you.” To which the farmer responded, “that is true and I am grateful.” Then he paused for a moment and said... “But you should have seen it when God had it to himself!”

Used wrongly, this illustration would be followed with a call to get to work... clean up your life. As if God doesn't transform, unless you labor. Puts things out of order...

It is the human condition to see it through a lens of personal effort and achievement. Everything is transactional. Earning. Scratch my back and I will scratch yours. Merit. And we carry that into relationship with our Creator. We need to earn our way.

Salvation however is not some we achieve, it is rescue from all that produces death, even our inability to live up to the standard required to be in the presence of a holy God.

It is grace. Given what we could never earn or deserve.

“What is grace? It is unmerited favor—the love of God going out toward the utterly undeserving. It has reference here to forgiveness of sin and the riches that Christ brings. It is a lavish, sumptuous, joyous word. But the great and transcending emphasis of our text is that grace is a free gift. The idea of, “this is not your own doing” is that “By God's grace you are people who have been saved

through faith, and this whole event and experience is . . . God's free gift to you."
Hughes

How contrary to the spirit of our age this is—especially American culture (“We make our money the old-fashioned way. We earn it!”). Such a mentality is proper to its realm, but in regard to salvation it is deadly! “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (v. 8). It is all of grace.

God who blesses us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, who chose us before the foundation of the world, given adoption as children of God, given redemption and the forgiveness of sin.

Given inheritance, the Holy Spirit, hope, knowledge of God, power and new life. All of it, a gift. God grace.

And that isn't one way, it's the only way. By grace through faith.

We read that and maybe we think “aha, faith must be what I bring to the table, it is my part of the equation.”

“Paul says this in case the secret thought should steal upon us that “if we are not saved by our own works, at least we are saved by our own faith, and so in another way our salvation is of ourselves.” Thus he added the statement that faith too is not in our own will but in God's gift. Not that he means to take away free choice from humanity ... but that even this very freedom of choice has God as its author, and all things are to be referred to his generosity, in that he has even allowed us to will the good” Jerome

“The grace that results in salvation is received “through faith.” Note that we are saved because of or on the basis of grace, which is attained by means of or through faith. We are not saved because of or on the basis of faith. Faith does not save anyone. Only the grace we receive because of Christ's atonement saves us.

Faith is merely the instrument by which grace is received—similar to a syringe that delivers life saving medicine. A person is “saved” because of the medicine, not because of the syringe. And yet, without the syringe (i.e., faith), salvation would not be possible. Faith is the response by which salvation through the

perfect work of Christ is received. Faith is not a meritorious work; it is simply trusting in what Christ has accomplished on our behalf.”

What, then, is faith? Faith is not the mere intellectual reception of Christian truth, nor is it belief alone. True faith is belief plus trust.

“A story that comes from the last century makes this clear. During the 1900s Jean Francois Gravalet, better known by his stage name, Blondin, was a world-famous acrobat. Born in France in 1824, Blondin became well-known while still a child. As he grew older, his skill and showmanship brought him fame throughout Europe and America. Once in London he played the violin on a tightrope 170 feet off the ground and then did a somersault wearing stilts. His most spectacular feats were the crossings of Niagara Falls on a tightrope 1,100 feet long and 160 feet above the water. On one occasion he took a stove onto the tightrope and cooked an omelette above the roaring falls. “Bon appetit!” On another occasion he pushed a wheelbarrow across while blindfolded. On still another he stood on his head on the precarious wire. That is why today in London there are Niagara and Blondin Avenues.

Once, in an unusual demonstration of skill, Blondin carried a man across Niagara Falls on his back. After putting his rider down he turned to the large crowd and asked a man close by, “Do you believe I could do that with you?” “Of course,” the man answered, “I’ve just seen you do it.” “Hop on,” said Blondin, “I’ll carry you across.” “Not on your life!” the man called back. There is no real faith without trust.”

We believe Jesus saves by grace... and we live trusting his way. His purpose, for his glory, all by faith that is given to us.

All of this is the gift of God. So no one may boast.

“Our text gives us one reason salvation is not by works—“so that no one may boast.” If salvation came by works, eternity would spawn a fraternity of rung-dropping, chest-thumping boasters—an endless line of celestial Pharisees... In Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, the goats on his left do all the boasting and are sent to judgment (Matthew 25:46; cf. 7:22). The sheep on his right (the saved, who go on to their heavenly reward) cannot even recall their good deeds (Matthew 25:37-39; cf. vv. 40-46), for salvation does not come

by works. No one who is saved will have grounds to boast before God—or will even want to.” Hughes

Grace is the most humbling thing. Meets us where we are and keeps us humble, not in despair but with the right perspective of where salvation and life come from.

1 Corinthians 1:26–31 “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (ESV)

Humility that smells like Jesus. Should be a mark of Christians.

Takes the pressure off. This is where rest is found. This is what fuels walking with Jesus.

"Thus we hope that the point is clear,—salvation is altogether of grace from first to last. The plan of salvation as originally devised, the Saviour who wrought it out for us, the acceptance of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf, and the faith whereby we are made partakers of his sacrifice, are all the gifts of free and sovereign grace: the foundation and the superstructure are wholly of grace.”
Simeon

Grace that leads somewhere.

Good Works

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (ESV)

There are two works in mind here. God’s and ours.

God's workmanship is us! We are literally his masterpiece! His best work.

Believers are God's "workmanship" (poiēma), a term that occurs only here and in Romans 1:20, where it refers to the works of God at creation. Here it designates God's work of the new creation.

"The transformation of believers from death to life is so radical that it is considered a new act of creation (4:24; 2 Cor 5:17). The scope of this new creation is more than the individual. It also includes the community of faith (vv. 14–16; Gal 6:15), and, together, the new creation of the individual and the community anticipates that of the cosmos (Eph 1:10; Rom 8:18–25)." Carson

The best translation by far is that given by F. F. Bruce: "his work of art, his masterpiece."² We are God's works of art. I do not think there is any more exalted description of a believer in all of Scripture. You and I are God's works of art—his masterpieces!

Are you valued by God? Absolutely. So much so that he pours out his grace upon you and makes you his workmanship, his prize. The Father is so fond of you that he gives his son to make you his.

Augustine was known to say that man stares at mountains and stars in wonder but passes by real masterpieces all the time. I want to see you as God's poiēma.

His work flows into ours. We are workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.

That which has been prepared beforehand, essential to the plan. Not good works earning a place with God but living from the salvation that is a gift, grace for the glory of God.

Good works... wide category. Likely look like the life Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus encourages his listeners to love their enemies, to forgive others, and to care for the poor and marginalized. He also emphasizes the importance of humility, telling his followers not to worry about material possessions or outward appearances, but to focus on living a life of righteousness and integrity.

“A good work is a divinely prescribed action that benefits others in such a way that God is glorified (see Matt 5:16). Many Christians are unfulfilled and miserable because they’ve never gotten around to doing the works God has for them.” Tony Evans

All of us are God’s “workmanship,” and as such we have been given “good works” to do that were appointed before our existence. And when we do them, he gives us the necessary power and a marvelous sense of the Holy Spirit in our sails.

This is what the church exists for. “For we are his workmanship...” Proclaiming the grace of Christ, walking in good works (it is our life.)

We once walked in death (2)... and now walk in good works. New life, of grace and faith, the gift of God for his masterpieces.

Salvation, from beginning to end—even the good works believers perform—is a result of God’s grace. There is therefore no boasting before God, since he is the author and perfecter of our faith. And what a gift it is to us!

When the grace of God is all you’ve got, it’s more than enough.

Get Grace - It is all we have and it’s more than enough. It is dripping from every page of Scripture. Ask the Spirit to highlight it for you. It is his power for salvation to all who believe.

1 Corinthians 2:1–5 “And I, when I came to you, brothers and sisters, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (ESV)

Get to Work - Tethered to each other in the church, love, serve, sacrifice. It really is the best life - it’s what you are meant for.

You are not your worst moment, or year. You are not even your best moment apart from Christ.

In Jesus you are God's masterpiece created for the work of renewal wherever the Father has put you. That's better even than having the best parking spot! Let's be about it.