

This Is Your Life, Part 8

Ephesians 2:1-10

March 30, 2008

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We've been talking about and studying the issue of salvation—of what God has accomplished in our salvation. When you think about it, the biblical statements about how we come to a right standing before God—the biblical statements are completely at odds with everything in us and everything around us. We are born with an innate sense of confidence in our own capacity to earn the favor of God. If you don't believe that, ask the youngest children. They're born with, they think, the ability to please God, to be good enough for God. They have to learn and be taught that in fact, that is an impossibility. We're also surrounded by a culture that preaches to us the doctrine of self-esteem—that you can be anything you want to be, that you can do anything you want to do. And so, in the end, we have these powerful forces, both inside of us—our fallenness, and external to us, so that left to ourselves, we really would conclude that we are able to accomplish our own salvation. Or, if we can't accomplish it entirely, that we can at least contribute to it in some way. Kent Hughes, in his commentary on Ephesians, tells the story of a liberal preacher, who illustrated his view of salvation by telling of a frog. A frog who fell into a large milk can. And of course, as hard as he might try, the frog was unable to jump out of the milk, out of the can. And so, he just kept paddling until—you know the end of the story—the milk turns into butter. And then, he could jump out of the can from his own self-made platform.

This unbelieving preacher said that's how it is with salvation. You just keep working at it and working at it, as hard and as difficult as it may appear, and eventually, your milk will turn into butter, and you will be able to extricate yourself from the mess that you were once in. Hughes makes the point that that frog is a perfect symbol of American religion. If you were to go to the average man on the street, and you were to ask how that person plans to get to heaven—if he believes in heaven at all—you're going to hear most commonly an answer like this: "Well, you know, that's a good question. I, I try to do the best I can, and I try to be a good person. I look out for other people. I work hard. I go to church. Sure, I have weaknesses, and maybe even sins, but I'm not really a bad person. I think, overall, my good qualities outweigh my bad qualities, and when I stand before God and he puts them on the scale, He's going to find me, even with all of my issues, acceptable to Him." That is a horribly flawed view of God and of man, and it's a view that Paul is intent on utterly destroying in Ephesians 2. In fact, as we will learn today, part of the reason God chose to save man the way He did, was to humble human pride and to obliterate every possible ground for human beings boasting before God that their rescue, their salvation, has anything to do with them.

We've been studying Ephesians 2:1-10. In this passage, Paul describes how God rescued us, a rescue that was entirely of God from beginning to end. Paul develops and explains this dramatic change that has happened to us. He begins in verses 1 through 3 of chapter 2 by explaining what we were. He looks at what we were when God found us. And he describes a horrifically ugly picture of sin and slavery and death and wrath. In verses 4 through 6, Paul describes what God did. God intervenes. Those beautiful words that begin verse 4—"But God." And God steps in and He grants life and He brings forgiveness, and He brings faith, and He brings all the blessings that come with Christ. That's what God did. And then in verses 7 through 10 of this paragraph, Paul describes why God did it. Why God accomplished this dramatic change in us. Let me read for you this section. Ephesians 2:7-10:

...so that [there are those words of purpose. He did it so that] in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Now in those verses, 7 through 10, Paul describes three great goals that God had when He decided to save us, and He decided to do it solely as an act of sovereign grace. God had a plan, and behind that plan—beneath that plan--were these three great purposes. These three great goals.

A couple of weeks ago we looked at the first of these goals. Verse 7 taught us that it was to display the glory of His grace. God acted in our salvation in order to set Himself on display. He chose me in eternity past to be part of the grand demonstration in which He would put Himself on display. He decided that saving me would show and display His amazing grace. And the same is true for you. Today we come to the second goal that lies behind God's unique plan to accomplish our spiritual rescue. And by the way, if you weren't here for the first, I encourage you to get that, because that's so foundational. Go online and listen, because that is the cornerstone of everything else that we'll study in the rest of this passage--God's own glory. But today, we come to the second goal that lies behind God's unique plan, and that is to destroy all human boasting. And we find this in those familiar verses—verses 8 and 9 of Ephesians 2. If you've been a Christian any time at all, you know these verses. In fact, most people right after they learn John 3:16, learn these two verses. And they deserve their reputation. They deserve their popularity because they are, in many ways, the clearest, most succinct summary of how God has accomplished the spiritual rescue of sinners that's found anywhere in the entire Bible. Paul alluded to salvation by grace back in verse 5. You'll see in parentheses that he says "by grace you have been saved." It was just sort of a parenthetical statement, and now he comes back in verses 8 and 9 to develop it more thoroughly. In these two verses, Paul is making one

basic point, and it's this: God rescued us from sin in such a way that no one would be able to boast of anything before Him. In other words, God planned for our salvation to be completely His work and none of ours, with the goal of destroying all human boasting in His presence.

Now, that may not seem important to you, but it better be. It ought to be because it's important to God. This is one of the three great goals God had in mind when He put together this plan of rescue. To make sure he's clear, Paul makes this point positively in the first part of verse 8—for by grace you have been saved through faith—and then he restates the same point negatively beginning in the middle of verse 8 and running through the end of verse 9. Notice all of the 'nots' in the second part of this passage. So he states it positively, and then negatively. Or to say it differently, the first half of verse 8 explains what we must affirm about salvation, and the rest of verses 8 and 9 explain what we must deny about salvation. This passage is the litmus test of a true Christian faith and of a true Christian gospel.

Now, let's look at what Paul says in this monumental text. First of all, let's look at the positive: what we must affirm about salvation. Notice verse 8 again. "For by grace you have been saved through faith." There is, in that brief statement, several specific truths we must affirm. First of all, salvation is a spiritual rescue accomplished by God. We must affirm that salvation is a spiritual rescue accomplished by God. You see this in the meaning of the Greek word translated here as 'saved.' We've looked at this word before--it means to deliver, to rescue. And in its context Paul is clearly talking about spiritual rescue. Remember back in verse 1? Those who are dead, spiritually. Verse 2, those who were enslaved. And those, the end of verse 3, who are deserving of eternal wrath. That's what we need rescuing from. He's talking about spiritual rescue. And notice the passive voice—been saved. The rescuer is not identified in verse 8. This is what's called the divine passive. The rescuer is clearly God, and in fact, if you look back at the subject of this sentence—remember, beginning in chapter 2 verse 1 and running all the way down through verse 10 is one long sentence in the Greek text. And the subject of the sentence comes in verse 4, God. God is the rescuer. So salvation is a spiritual rescue effected by God.

Secondly, we must affirm with Paul that not only is salvation a spiritual rescue accomplished by God, but secondly, it is a past event with continuing results. Look at the expression 'you have been saved.' Now, the key question is, what do we need to be rescued from? What do we need to be saved from? The short answer is --we need to be saved or rescued from God. From His just verdict against us, and from the looming execution of the sentence that our sin deserves. But the Greek text says it in a very interesting way. In verse 5 and verse 8, the Greek text could literally be translated like this: "You are having been saved." Now, that sounds strange to us, but Paul intended to emphasize two basic truths here. One, that salvation was a past event. But that salvation has continuing results. It is a continuing reality. We could say, we were saved in the past at a point in time, but the results of that event continue forever. That's why the New Testament speaks of our salvation in three tenses. Here it's a past event. You have been saved.

It happened in the past and the results continue. This speaks of our salvation as deliverance from the penalty of sin that had been pronounced against us—from the guilt and penalty of sin. This counters the idea that salvation is a process throughout this life. It was an event in the past. You have been saved. If you're a Christian, it's in the past, a reality, a past event. But the Scripture also speaks of our salvation as a present reality. First Corinthians 1:18 says that we "are being saved." We are being saved. This refers to salvation as the ongoing deliverance from the power and practice of sin. In the past, as an event, we were saved from the penalty of sin, and the guilt of sin. In the present, as an ongoing reality, we are being saved from the power and practice of sin. It's a process ongoing in our lives. This counters the idea that salvation is only a past event without repercussions on how we live today, à la the Antinomians—those who were opposed to the law and who wanted to live however they wanted to live.

A third tense that salvation is put in in the Scripture is a future certainty. Romans 5:9 says we will be saved--future. "We will be saved from the wrath of God through Him." That means that when God's wrath is unleashed in the future, we will be rescued from it. We will be saved or delivered from it. This speaks of deliverance from the future display of God's wrath against sin and the very presence of sin itself. Understand, in the past, as an event, you were saved or rescued from the penalty and guilt of sin. In the present, you are being saved from the power and practice of sin. And, in the future, you will be delivered or rescued from the wrath of God when it breaks out against all of those who are opposed to Him. Ephesians 2:8 is affirming the past reality of the event and the continuing results, both now and in the future. You are having been saved. This is a summary of what God has done in our lives to rescue us.

Thirdly, we must affirm that salvation is entirely by grace. This is the thrust of verse 8. "For by grace you have been saved." God saved us, He rescued us. Why? Because of grace. Because of something in His nature. Because He is gracious. Now what does that mean? Listen carefully, because I don't think we fully grasp what Paul is saying, often. There is, in God—if you and I could see God, if we could see who God is and what makes God GOD--there is a quality that permeates the being of God—that causes Him to delight in showing favor or doing good to those who deserve His wrath and His anger and His fury. Now think about that for a moment. There is a quality that permeates God that gives Him real pleasure—real delight—in doing good to those who deserve exactly the opposite. And it was that quality, and that quality alone, that prompted God to act to rescue us. This is what the reformers meant when they said salvation is *sola gratia*. Maybe you recognize that from the great cry of the reformers. *Sola* is the Latin word for alone. *Gratia* the Latin word for grace. Grace alone. *Sola gratia* means that what moved God to act to rescue us was solely this quality in God; it had absolutely nothing to do with what was in us. Salvation springs from what's in God--from the quality in God called 'grace.' Pascal writes "grace is indeed required to turn a man into a saint, and he who doubts this does not know what either a man or a saint is." It is entirely by grace, because God is who He is. Because He finds pleasure and delight in doing good to people like you and to people like me.

The fourth truth about salvation that we must affirm is that it is through faith. Not only do we see that salvation is a spiritual rescue accomplished by God, it's a past event with continuing results, it is entirely by grace, but fourthly, it is through faith. Now when the Scripture speaks about faith in salvation, it always uses one of two expressions. It either speaks of salvation being by faith, or through faith. By faith emphasizes that faith is the means or the instrument that takes hold of Christ. Through faith speaks of faith as the channel through which salvation flows to us from God. But Paul uses both of those expressions synonymously. In fact, they are both used interchangeably in Galatians 2:16. Salvation is by or through grace. Now this is absolutely essential. Maybe you've never thought about this. Why is it important that it be through faith? Because salvation would not be by grace if it weren't through faith. That's what Paul says in Romans 4:16. He says "for this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace." If it weren't through faith that we received it, then it would be our own efforts; it wouldn't be grace. And if it's going to be grace, the only way we can get it is through faith. They go together as a package; they can't be separated. You see, faith—think of it like this—faith is merely the hypodermic needle that God uses to deliver the medicine of salvation to our souls. John Calvin said "Faith brings a man empty to God that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ." Spurgeon, in his excellent book *All of Grace* defines faith as "believing that Christ is what He is said to be and that He will do what He has promised to do and then to expect this of Him."

Now, I don't have time this morning to fully develop the concept of faith; I encourage you to listen to our study of faith if you haven't had the opportunity to do that. It was about a year ago on Sunday night when we looked at it extensively. The Bible teaches us that there are three elements of saving faith. Three elements--let me just briefly give them to you. If it's by faith, what does that mean? Well, there are three elements of faith. Number one is knowledge. *Noticia* is the Latin word. This is the intellectual part of faith. It's the factual content of faith. Saving faith is always based on knowledge. You cannot believe what you do not know. Faith starts with divine revelation. You have to understand the truth. Paul says in Romans 10, how shall they have faith unless what?-- they hear the message about Christ. There has to be knowledge. Number two. Not only knowledge, but assent. *Adensus* is the Latin word. This is the emotional element. The emotional response to the facts about Christ and salvation. This is being convinced that the knowledge you gained about Christ from the Scripture and about yourself is factually true and that Christ is what you need. Both of these are absolutely essential to faith. There must be a knowledge of the facts about Christ. There must be an assent to the truth of those things; but that is not saving faith. There is a third element that is required for it to be saving faith. It is trust, or *fiducia*. This is the volitional response to Christ. And this, folks, is the heart of faith. This is the difference between saving faith and non-saving faith. In fact, if I had time I would take you back through a number of Old Testament references, because this is the heart of Old Testament faith. Over and over again the word 'trust' is used. It's reliance.

John Murray in his excellent book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* says faith cannot stop short of self-commitment to Christ. A transference of reliance upon ourselves and all human resources—that's trust in ourselves—to reliance upon Christ alone for salvation. This is faith. It means transferring all of your reliance for pardon and righteousness away from yourself and your own resources in complete and total abandonment to Christ. Resting entirely upon Him, and Him alone, for salvation.

We must have faith. The question is, in what? Whenever Scripture identifies the object of saving faith, it is never the truth in general, but always the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, look back at Ephesians 1. Here, Paul doesn't say faith in Christ, in Ephesians 2:8, but in Ephesians 1 he does. Ephesians 1:15, he says, "for this reason, I, too, having heard of [your] faith in the Lord Jesus." That's where faith rests. John 1:12, "As many as received Him." John 3:16, "Whoever believes in Him." Galatians 2:16, "We have believed in Jesus Christ." The key issue about your faith is what is its object. I've counseled a number of people through the years, including even a pastor of many years, who have become introspective about their faith. They looked back at that experience they had many years ago, and they ask themselves questions like this: Did I have enough faith? That's not the question. The question is, what's the object of your faith? One of my favorite Puritan quotes is this: "It is not the quantity of thy faith that shall save thee. A drop of water is as true water as the whole ocean. So, a little faith is as true faith as the greatest. It is not the measure of thy faith that saves thee. It is the blood that it grips to that saves thee." Spurgeon wrote, "The weakness of your faith will not destroy you. A trembling hand may receive a gracious gift." You see, it's the object of your faith that matters, not the amount. It has to be in Christ.

I remember that night as a high school student when I came to faith in Christ. I had made several professions of faith before, been baptized a couple of times—or at least gotten wet--and that night, as I met with my pastor at the time, God gave him great insight. Because I sort of explained my spiritual odyssey to him and explained how unsettled my heart was, and I'd prayed a prayer in the past, and I'd gone through a plan of salvation and embraced that. And God gave him great wisdom and he said this to me that night. And I've never forgotten it, and it comes back to me often. He said, "Salvation is not in a prayer, and salvation is not in a plan. Salvation is in a person. It's in Jesus Christ." And the Holy Spirit just used that to remove the blinders from my eyes, and I saw that it was all about Jesus Christ. It was all about Him and my following Him, my being devoted to Him, receiving Him, believing in Him. You must have faith. You must affirm that salvation is through or by faith. So those are the truths that we must affirm about salvation. When you think about salvation, you must embrace the fact that it is a spiritual rescue accomplished by God. It is a past event with continuing results. It is entirely by grace, and it is through faith. You must affirm that. That is the gospel.

But Paul, being a very wise teacher, and knowing that our hearts are prone to stray from the truth even with it put that clearly, moves ahead to tell us what we must deny about salvation. That's what we must affirm about salvation, but then he says, "Here's what you must deny about salvation." If you're going to embrace the biblical teaching about salvation, here are several statements we must deny. Number one: We must deny that anything in us is the source or cause of our salvation. Look at verse 8. "For by grace you [are] saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Now, there's a problem in this verse, and one that you're probably familiar with. The problem is with the demonstrative pronoun 'that.' The question, since the early days of the church is "What does 'that' refer to?" And essentially, for 2000 years, three answers have been offered. One answer says that 'that' refers to grace. Now, I think this one seems the least likely, because grace by definition is not of ourselves, so it makes no sense to say 'grace which isn't of ourselves.'

A second option or answer that has been proposed through the years is that 'that' refers to salvation. And the third is that the word 'that' refers to faith or believing. Now, these last two views, salvation and faith, there have been good men, and continue to be good men on both sides of this issue. In its grammatical context, and I'm not going to explain to you all the intricacies of the Greek involved here, but in its grammatical context there is a growing consensus that the demonstrative pronoun 'that' refers primarily to salvation. Paul means, then, that our salvation is not of ourselves. Literally, he says, it is 'not out of yourselves.' So, with that, we could paraphrase it like this. Let me paraphrase the verse to sort of give you the sense. Paul's saying this: By grace you have been saved, through faith, and this salvation is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. In other words, there is nothing in you or in me that is the source or the cause of God's rescuing us. You and I, if we're going to come to embrace a biblical gospel, must deny that there is anything out of us, anything in us, that makes our salvation more likely. We must reject the idea entirely that who we are – that is, our background, our family heritage, our spiritual heritage, our personal righteousness, anything about us – contributes in the slightest degree to a right standing before God. We must absolutely deny that salvation finds its cause or source in anything in us.

There's a second denial that Paul makes here. Not only that anything in us is the source or cause of our salvation, but we must also deny that saving faith originates in us or is the cause of our salvation. We must deny that saving faith originates inside of us or is the cause that lies behind our salvation. Now, if our salvation in its entirety, as he's just said, is not out of us, he is also saying, at the same time, that faith is not out of us either. Because faith is part of the salvation God grants. I think that's why there's been so much of a split in the interpretation of this passage—what Paul means here. Because I think the grammar argues for 'that' referring to salvation, but the context and the syntax argue that 'faith' is included as well. So, in other words, I think Paul intends to say both. Let me paraphrase it again for you with that understanding. Here's how we could paraphrase the verse. For by grace you have been saved

through faith, and that entire package of salvation, including saving faith, is not out of you, it is the gift of God. Faith, like salvation, does not originate in us. It is a gift God gives. The Bible teaches that all true Christians believe in Christ--but we do not, in fact we cannot believe on our own initiative. Acts 13:48 says “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Acts 16:14—“A woman named Lydia... [you remember Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics there in Philippi, a worshipper of God] was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” Acts 18:27 speaks of “those who have believed through grace.” But perhaps the clearest and most direct statement comes in Philippians 1:29 that says “to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake...to believe in Him.” Faith is a gift. It does not originate in us. It is a gift from God to us. Neither does our believing in Christ become in any way the cause of our salvation. Faith is not the reason God accepts you. In other words, God didn’t decide—“Well, you know, that person doesn’t really have righteousness, so I’ll accept their faith instead.” Scripture always speaks of salvation being by or through faith, never because of or on account of faith. Grace is the cause—faith the means. B.B.Warfield, the great American theologian, writes this: “It is not faith that saves, but faith in Christ. It is not strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively not in the act of faith but in the object of faith. We could not more radically misconceive the biblical representation of faith than by transferring to faith even the smallest fraction of that saving energy which is attributed in the Scriptures solely to Christ Himself.” Faith doesn’t save. Lloyd-Jones puts it like this: “We must always be careful never to say that it is our believing that saves us. Belief does not save. Faith does not save. Christ saves. Christ, and His finished work; not my belief, not my faith, not my understanding, nothing that I do.” Get that in your head. Your faith doesn’t save you. Your faith is merely the channel through which you receive salvation from God. At the conference, I gave an illustration that I think puts this clearly. Let me share it with you again. Imagine that you were traveling across country but your car failed out in the desert somewhere, and you suddenly found yourself stranded in the desert, and after a couple of days, dying of thirst. But in God’s good providence, I happened to pass you, and driving past, found you, saw the car, recognized it, and in my car I had a container with all the water that you needed to survive. But you had no container to hold the water. So I go back in my trunk and I fish around, and I found a cup, and I gave you the water that you so desperately needed. That cup did not merit the water I gave you; it was merely the means by which you received it, and I’m the one who gave you the cup. That’s exactly how it is with faith -- it doesn’t merit anything; it’s just the means by which we received the gift of a right standing before God, and God even gives us the cup. Faith has been granted to you, the Scripture says.

A third flawed view of salvation that Paul denies here, that we must deny as well, is that any human work, even obedience to God, contributes in any way to our salvation. Verse 9, “Not as a result of works.” Paul uses two expressions to describe this reality. One is, “by the works of the law.” And the other is, “by works.” “By the works of the law” refers to earning salvation by obeying the Bible—by obeying the commands of God. And he says it can’t be done. You can’t

earn salvation by obeying the Bible—by obeying the commands of God. First of all, you don't obey them. You can't obey them. It can't be done. Then he uses the expression "by works." This is a more general expression. It includes obedience to the law, but it is much more inclusive. It refers to any human effort—not just obedience to God's law, but any human effort, work, or achievement designed to earn a right standing before God. Paul here says in Ephesians 2 that salvation does not result from our own efforts of any kind. Paul makes this point over and over again. In Romans chapter 3 he talks about the first of them—the works of the law. Romans 3:20, he says "by the works of the law [that is, by obeying the law of God] no flesh will be [declared righteous] in His sight; for [by] the law comes the knowledge of sin." In 2 Timothy 1:9, he uses the other expression. He says God saved us "not according to our works" – that is, to our general efforts, to anything we've done. So the bottom line is, whether you're talking about obedience to God's commands, or whether you're talking about some human effort of any kind, nothing will give you salvation. Nothing you have done or can do—listen carefully—nothing you have done or can do or ever will do will earn one step toward a right relationship with God. Humanitarian efforts, generosity, baptism, church attendance, prayer—you fill in the blank. Nothing. In fact, think for a moment about the very best moment you've ever had in life. The most righteous thing you have ever done. The one thing that your mind goes to as the most altruistically motivated, the most clearly evidencing the love of God—think about that event for a moment. And let me then tell you how God thinks about that event. Isaiah says "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." The very best you've ever done is to God like a menstuous rag. And me as well. Our obedience, our efforts can never achieve salvation.

There's a fourth and final flawed view of salvation we must deny: that the true gospel leaves any ground for boasting before God. Verse 9 ends with, "so that no one may boast." Here we get to the point behind these two verses. Why did God accomplish salvation the way He did? He did it, not only according to verse 7, to display the glory of His grace, but in verses 8 and 9 we learn that He did it to destroy all human boasting. God designed the true gospel and true salvation to do this. That means that the true gospel will always demolish and destroy boasting. Any view of salvation that has its source in man or some contribution by man is not the gospel. Whenever you hear the gospel supposedly presented and it allows man to boast, it cannot be the true gospel because God has constructed the true gospel—the true message--so that no one may boast. And if we contributed even the smallest ounce to our salvation, we would have cause to boast. That's what Paul says in Romans 4:2. He says if Abraham was declared righteous by his own efforts, "by [his] works, he has something to boast about." But then he says, "but not before God." In other words, he's saying, that's impossible. God has made sure that doesn't happen. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul puts it like this: God's chosen all of the weak and foolish and ignoble and base things of the world—why? Verse 29: "so that no [one] may boast before God. By His doing you are in Christ Jesus," so that, verse 31, "let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." God has achieved everything in salvation so that our only boast is in God, and not in ourselves.

This is a clear indication of whether someone understands salvation by grace and has become truly saved. Ask yourself this question: Has the salvation that you claim destroyed in you every possible cause for boasting in yourself? False believers boast in their own merit and in their own efforts. True believers see nothing in themselves or their own works that make them acceptable to God. In fact, let me show you that this is exactly what will happen at the final judgment. Turn with me to Matthew 25 as we finish our time together. Matthew 25. At the judgment—here we have a glimpse of the judgment that is probably the judgment that occurs at the end of the tribulation period with those who survive it—called the judgment of the nations. This is Matthew 25:31:

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the [peoples] will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, [the sheep] ‘Come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

And then He gives this explanation that evidences a changed life. He says:

“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; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ [Verse 37] Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when...’”

When did we do that? What I want you to see is that the righteous not only don’t claim their works as the grounds for their acceptance with God. They downplay them, and frankly, seem unaware that they’ve done anything good at all. But contrast that with how the unrighteous respond. When Christ says to them, you didn’t do these things, look at verse 44. Then they themselves also will answer, Lord, when did we fail to do this? You see the difference? They’re saying, we’ve done what we ought to have done. In fact, they even challenge Christ’s assessment of their character and who they are and of what they have done in their lives.

Here’s the point. The only people who will point to their works at the judgment are those who have never known the depths of their own sin or the riches of God’s grace. It’s how the Christian life begins. You remember what Christ said in Matthew 5? Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the beggars in spirit, for theirs—to them belongs—the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who realize their spiritual bankruptcy for only they inherit the kingdom of God. That’s what Christ said. That’s where relationship with God starts—is when you realize you have absolutely nothing to offer God. You are bankrupt and all you can do is beg. And beggars don’t boast

about what they've been given. They give thanks and praise to the One who's given them everything.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You for this powerful passage that reminds us of what we must affirm—that You have acted in grace to save us and that there is nothing in us—no good works, not even faith itself that we take any credit for. We come to You as spiritual beggars with nothing, begging that You will give us grace, that You will give us mercy, that You will give us forgiveness. And Father, that's exactly how You wanted it, because You wanted us to give You all the glory and to boast not in ourselves, but in You. Father, I pray for us who know You through Christ that You would give us a fresh sense of this reality. That we would love You and adore You and praise You for the grace You've shown us in Christ. And Father, I pray for the person here this morning who is still clinging to something in himself—something he's done. Some good deed that he thinks earns his way into Your presence. Father, open his eyes. Help him to see himself as You see him--a beggar with nothing to offer, and may he or she cast themselves upon You for the grace that you offer. Thank You, Father, that You delight in doing good to those deserve Your wrath. For it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.