

The First Presbyterian Church in Germantown  
Sermon Preached  
on  
April 25, 2010  
by  
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Are You Saved?

Psalm 25  
Ephesians 2:1-10

A man is sitting on his porch in a southern part of our country where it is prone to flooding. This particular afternoon there is quite a rain storm. In fact, it has rained so much that the flood waters have reached halfway up the twenty foot stilts upon which his house is built. The man is relatively calm though, sitting there in a rocking chair, drinking iced tea and watching the rain fall.

After a while, a motorboat approaches his house and the driver of the boat shouts to the man on the porch, "Come on, get in the boat, the water is rising. You'll drown if you stay here." The man continues rocking in his chair and yells back, "No thanks! God will save me."

A few hours later, the water has begun to spill over his porch. A second boat shows up and calls to the man, "You need to move to safety right away! Get in the boat!" Just as before, the man on the porch denies the offers of help, repeating, "God will save me." And so the second boat leaves.

Later, after night has fallen, the water has reached so high that the man is forced to escape onto his roof. A helicopter spots him and tells him he needs to evacuate immediately or he will not survive. Again, as he had done before, he told the people in the helicopter that he would be fine because, "God will save me." After several more unsuccessful attempts to convince the man that he must leave, the helicopter flies off.

Sadly and inevitably, the man drowns. As he then stands before his maker he asks, "God, before you judge me, I have one question for you: Why didn't you save me? I believed that you would help me, but you didn't. Why didn't you save me?"

God looks at him and answers, "I sent you two boats and a helicopter, what else was I supposed to do?"

"Are you saved?" That is our question of the day. Not a question that we are used to hearing in Presbyterian churches.

There was a good old fashioned revival meeting happening in a town one summer weekend. The theme of the revival was about salvation and the question was repeatedly asked, "Are you saved?"

After the revival had concluded, three local ministers were discussing the results with one another. The Methodist minister said, "The revival worked out great for us! We gained 4 new families." The Baptist minister said, "We did better than that! We gained 6 new families." The Presbyterian minister said, "Well, we did even better than that! We got rid of our 10 biggest trouble makers!"

You see Presbyterians . . . at least most Presbyterians . . . don't like to talk much about salvation. We cringe when someone asks us, "Are you saved?" One of our church members who is quite comfortable with salvation-talk has been asking me to preach a sermon on the subject, and last week said to me, "Nancy, before you go on your sabbatical, you need to preach that sermon we talked about." Now, I have to say that frankly I like to think every sermon I preach from this pulpit has something to do with our salvation, but this one is specifically on the topic.

So, "Are You Saved?" The scripture that best explains salvation is the one that Victoria read for us from Ephesians. This passage begins by telling us that we are all sinners. We were dead through the trespasses and sins which we have committed. Look then what is said, "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved."

The word "salvation" comes from a Latin root, "salus," which means "health" or "wholeness." We were dead and then our God "who is rich in mercy" and "out of great love" made us healthy . . . made us whole . . . made us alive again.

Look at those last few verses of our passage: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

There you have it! There you have the whole explanation of salvation! And it begins with God's grace: By grace we have been saved . . . !

By grace . . . I read somewhere this definition of grace: "Grace is what everyone needs, what no one deserves, and what God alone can give."

Our salvation . . . our health . . . our wholeness . . . is completely due to the grace of God. It is a gift! We don't earn it. It is a gift available to one and to all and it was made possible because of God's love for us and through Jesus Christ. By grace we have been saved. By God's infinite mercy and love for us we have been forgiven

of our sins.

What wonderful words to hear, “You are forgiven.” And we hear those words each week in our worship, as together and individually we confess our sins to our gracious and loving God. Then we receive our assurance of pardon: “Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!”

Are you saved? Yes! By God’s grace and God’s love for us, we have been saved!

When Edvard Schweizer was asked, “Are you saved?” he answered, “Yes, I was saved 2,000 years ago on a cross.” That is a true statement for each one of us! In that very familiar verse from the third chapter of John’s gospel we hear it said, “For God so loved the world . . .” God so loved the WORLD! Not just a few, but everyone. And because of God’s love, what did God do? “God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

So salvation begins with God’s grace. God’s grace is about the fact that God loves us so much, more than we ever deserve. Because of God’s grace we are saved us from sin and made healthy and whole. God’s grace gives us our life because God forgives us and all of this is possible through the gift of his son, Jesus Christ. Everyone of us has been given this gift of salvation. The crux of the matter is, what are you going to do with that gift? You see a gift needs to be received. A gift needs to be accepted and it is so sad that this gift of God to the whole world is so often refused.

We accept the gift of salvation given to us by our gracious God through faith. “For by grace you have been saved THROUGH FAITH.” Do you have faith? That is really the more important question of the day.

To truly understand the meaning of faith, you need to understand the meaning of trust, for that is what faith is about trust. Faith requires us to trust God’s love and mercy and grace so much that we are willing to put ourselves into the hands of God. Faith is a personal decision and it involves commitment. Faith is about more than simply saying, “I believe,” for we must also be willing to say and I trust God enough to dedicate my life to living according to God’s will.

Faith is more than intellectual acknowledgment of something in your head, but it is a trusting with your heart. Faith is more than acknowledging that Jesus died on a cross and even more than saying you believe Jesus rose from the dead. Faith takes you beyond acknowledgment of these things to living a life that is totally dependent of these beliefs.

There was a survey taken among members of various Christian churches about the significance of the cross. The question was asked: "Would it make any difference

in your life if Christ had not died on the cross?" Great question! It is a faith question. How would you answer? "Would it make any difference in your life if Christ had not died on the cross?"

Here are the results of that survey: 45% said they didn't think it would make any difference in their lives. 25% said they thought so, but when asked what the difference would be, they weren't sure. 20% said it made all the difference in how they lived and believed. 10% said they didn't know, because they didn't understand what the cross was all about.

Sadly I must say that these results don't really surprise me. Again, they sadden me, but don't surprise me. Only 20% felt the cross made a difference in how they lived and what they believed! Only one in five have true faith! Would you be among that 20%? Can you honestly say that what happened on the cross over 2,000 years ago has an impact on your life, on decisions you make, on what you say and what you do? "Would it make any difference in your life if Christ had not died on the cross?"

The cross is at the very center of Christian faith. It has been noted that Christ's crucifixion is mentioned in every book of the New Testament except Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John. That is a statement about the centrality of the cross to the Christian faith. The cross is a constant reminder of what God has done in our behalf. It is why it is so prominent in our sanctuaries. It is why people wear it as jewelry and some even have it tattooed to their bodies. The cross is the symbol of our faith and for good reason because it is the symbol of God's act of graciousness done on our behalf for the forgiveness of sins. It is a symbol of salvation.

Does this symbol mean something to you? "Would it make any difference in your life if Christ had not died on the cross?" Do you live as one who has accepted the gracious gift given to us through Christ's death and resurrection?

Which leads us to the third aspect of salvation that is mentioned in these last verses of this morning's passage: good works. Clearly we are told that salvation is not ours as a result of our good works . . . as a result of us doing anything to earn this gift . . . but look what we are told: "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works."

It has been said, "Good works are not the root of salvation, but they are the fruit of salvation. They are not the price of salvation, but they are the proof of salvation. Good works do not produce salvation, but salvation produces good works. Works follow faith just like heat follows fire."

We don't deserve salvation. We didn't earn salvation. It was given to us, as an undeserved gift that comes from the hands of our loving and merciful God, because of God's grace.

Verse one of this passage tells us that we were dead. Verse five tell us that we are alive. And verse ten gives us the reason why: to do good works. This is the purpose that God "prepared beforehand to be our way of life." So what do we do with our new life? We need to dedicate it to doing good works. Not just hit-or-miss efforts at charity, but good works as a way of life.

In 1999, best-selling author Stephen King was hit by a car while out walking near his home. The accident left him with severe injuries. In an article in Family Circle magazine, back in November of 2001, King wrote that having a close brush with death taught him to think about the real meaning of life. . . . As he urged others to do the same as he wrote, ". . . I want you to consider making your life one long gift to others. And why not? All you have is on loan, anyway. All that lasts is what you pass on. . . . Giving isn't about the receiver or the gift but the giver. It's FOR the giver. One doesn't open one's wallet to improve the world, although it's nice when that happens; one does it to improve one's self. I give because it's the only concrete way I have of saying that I'm glad to be alive . . . "

Listen again to that last sentence: "I give because it's the only concrete way I have of saying that I'm glad to be alive . . ." Are you glad to be alive? Are you grateful for the grace and the mercy that God has shown you? Do you have faith and trust in this living God so that you are willing to dedicate your life to following God's will? Then let that motivate you to do good works. Pass on the love and mercy that God first gave you. As Stephen King wrote, "Consider making your life one long gift to others." It is what Christ did for us. It is what we are called to do for others.

Our good works will not earn us a thing. Look again at what it says in our passage from Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works." For some reason people still do not get that. Salvation is about grace . . . faith . . . and then good works, not the other way around.

There was a man who was on trial for murder, and the tide seemed to be running against him. So he tried to bribe an elderly juror to hold out for a verdict of manslaughter, which would lessen his sentence. Well, the elderly man accepted the bribe because, quite frankly, he was being offered a great amount of money. The jury was out deliberating the verdict three days . . . four days . . . five days . . . six days. . . and the accused man found the tension unbearable. But then on the seventh day, the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter. As the relieved man was being led out of the courtroom, he happened to get a chance to whisper in the old man's ear, and he said, "Thanks so much. Did you have much trouble getting the others to vote for manslaughter?" The elderly juror replied, "You bet I did. They all wanted to vote for acquittal!"

So often we try to bribe God. We usually try to do it with good works, but what we need to remember is that our good works won't get us anything. Don't let

anyone tell you differently. We worship a loving God . . . a God who is gracious . . . a God who forgives us regardless of how unworthy we are . . . a God who gave his only son to prove this to us.

Are you saved? You bet you are! You . . . me . . . all of us . . . just have to accept that fact and trust our lives to this loving God . . . TRULY trust our lives to God. Which means we must be willing to risk . . . to go against the tide . . . to live lives that are counter cultural. It means that we need to live lives that go beyond simply saying, "I believe." . . . Words are cheap. Actions are where the proof lies.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

For by grace . . . through faith . . . for good works . . . is what salvation is all about.

Thanks be to God! Amen.