

Text: Ephesians 2:8-10
Theme: Amazing Grace

March 11, 2018

If you made a list of five things that you viewed as truly amazing, what would be on your list? If we compared lists, how often would we find God or, more specifically, the grace of God, mentioned? We live in an amazing world, yet the grace of God, the mercy of God is even more amazing than anything we can imagine. The words of our text focus on the grace of God as they make it crystal clear that salvation is all about God's grace toward us. Today, we focus on our theme: "Amazing Grace."

I. The grace of God is our amazing avenue to salvation. A. Yet, we often think we can save ourselves. 1. We think we can save ourselves by doing enough good works. Paul writes, "And this is not of your own doing." Yet, it's amazing how many people believe they can save themselves, that it's all about what they do. If we did a survey, we'd be amazed at how many people believe they can save themselves, that as long as they are a good person and do good deeds God will save them. First and foremost, that's not true, but beyond that, how would we ever know if we had done enough? If we never knew, we would likewise never know if we would spend eternity in heaven.

2. We think we can save ourselves by meeting God halfway. However, Paul says, "It is a gift of God, not a result of works." For those who understand they can't save themselves, this is the next popular notion, that they can help with salvation. It sounds logical, doesn't it? Doesn't it make perfect sense that God would expect something from us, that God would look our direction once we crossed a certain threshold of activity? It may sound logical to us, but, like saving ourselves, it's simply not true. We're told elsewhere that we were born blind, dead, and enemies of God. Since that is true, it's also crystal clear that we have not and cannot meet God halfway.

3. We also think we can save ourselves by deciding we're going to come to faith. If Paul's statement, "For by grace you have been saved," is true, which it is, can we decide when God is going to bestow His grace on us? Let's put things into a different perspective for a moment. How many dead mice decide that they are going to return to life? If we are blind, dead, and enemies of God, can we do any deciding? Do we have any capability of choosing when or even if we will come to faith? Grace eliminates us playing a part, meeting God somewhere along the way, and it eliminates us from deciding when God will act. That's what makes grace so amazing.

B. Since we can't save ourselves, what makes grace so amazing? 1. It's so amazing because love was His only motivation. You know the words from our Gospel, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son." In one sentence, that was God's only source of motivation, His one and only reason for saving you or me. God didn't look at our actions, our life, or anything else. He looked within His heart. Whatever we may dream up, whatever other ideas may be floating around, God extended His grace upon you for only one reason, and that reason has been His sole reason for saving His people since forever, and that reason is love.

2. Grace is so amazing because grace is God doing the unthinkable for the undeserving in an incredible way. Three words stand out in that statement. First, we are the undeserving. We haven't earned it or managed to get God's attention.

On a deserving scale from 1-10, we're negative seventeen. Amazing grace says, "You don't deserve it, but I'm doing it anyway." Second, God does the unthinkable. One look at the cross and we see the unthinkable. God, and only God, would do the unthinkable and send His only Son to save us. The third word is "incredible." Christ on the cross in your place, in my place. That's incredible.

3. Grace is so amazing because it arrives as a gift. "It is the gift of God," Paul writes. As we hear that statement, it sounds so logical, so clear, doesn't it? We know all about gifts. If a gift comes with strings attached, it's a misuse of the word "gift." If you have to be a good boy or a good girl before you can receive a gift, then it's "bribery" and not a gift. Gifts are free or they aren't gifts. Some translations say that it is a free gift. But we don't need the word free in front of gift, except for added emphasis. Grace is amazing because it arrives with no strings, no bribery, no, "If you do such and such." It arrives entirely because God chose to give.

4. Grace is so amazing because the cross made it possible. The bronze serpent in our Old Testament lesson was a foreshadowing of what Christ would do on the cross. As God gave His Son out of love, He didn't merely send Him into our world for a time and then allow Him to return. He sent Him into our world on a mission, a mission that led Him to the cross. God's grace is so amazing because it's the cross that brought God's plan of salvation full circle. If there had been no cross, there could be no crown of life. In the midst of the excruciating pain of the cross, in the middle of death, God carried out His plan for our eternal life. What an amazing God.

5. Grace is so amazing because it became accessible to us solely by faith. It's easy to think, "There it is. There's my part! I knew I played a part." Yet, before you carry that thought very far, we need to answer an important question, "How does faith come about?" Paul's statement is precise and correct, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Faith isn't our doing. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. While we were enemies of God, He stepped into our world at our Baptism and, as the Holy Spirit worked faith in our dead hearts, we came to life spiritually. Grace is so amazing because it requires faith to accept it, faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit.

6. Grace is so amazing because good works were clearly designed as a response. "Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand." Does God desire good works? Does He even go so far as to expect them? Absolutely. But the key is the order of events. When we believe good works earn God's grace, we have good works in the wrong order. Good works always follow faith and are always a response to God's amazing grace. God expects good works because, as we offer them, we acknowledge that we have the message straight, that it's all God first and then, in response, we offer Him our praise and thanksgiving.

7. As you look around, as you travel throughout the world, you will see some amazing things. Yet, no matter how observant you are or how many countries you visit, nothing, nothing will ever hold a candle to grace, to God's amazing grace. Amen.