Opening Words

Yes, we live on a fallen planet, but God's promise is to renew the earth. John saw a new heaven and a new earth. The paradise that was lost through Adam's sin will be regained as we look forward to the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.

29 Eph The Four Faces of Salvation

When I was child, and after I had received Christ as my Savior, I had a very good understanding of the grace of God. I am not saying it was a thorough understanding as it is now, but I knew I was a Christian and had a right standing with God and this was largely due to Paul's famous words in Ephesians 2:8-9 which say *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.*

When I was a child, I understood the concept of grace as a gift and the difference between receiving it by faith and trying to earn it which was an impossibility.

But as I said, my understanding of the grace of God, was not as thorough as it is today, and I am sure what I understand now will not be as thorough an understanding as I will have twenty years from now and especially not as thorough as in eternity! Remember our previous lesson on verse 7? We learned that throughout eternity, God will show the riches of his grace to us in kindness in Christ Jesus. We will always be learning and experiencing more of God's grace.

I want to pass on to you a few things I have learned about the salvation that is ours by grace. I am afraid that for many of us our conception of salvation by grace is shallow, and I believe the reason for this is that our conception of salvation is shallow, and I believe the reason our conception of salvation is shallow is that we do not understand God's original purpose for us and what sin and death did to that original purpose.

A few lessons back, when we started Ephesians 2, I talked with you about the four faces of death. I want to review that with you just for a moment because it will set the backdrop for what I want to say about the four faces of salvation. Let's talk about what sin and death did first.

Face Number 1 was that we died in our relationship with God. We became guilty before a holy God because of our sin. The result is that we have fallen far short of the glory of God. We are not what we should be, even at our best and because of this we are naked, sinful, and full of shame before a holy God.

Face Number 2 is that we experienced death in our relationships with one another. Such is the nature of sin. It works on our minds and hearts so that it damages our relationships with one another.

The third face of death is we died in our relationship with nature. God put creation under a curse. God said, "Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil, you will eat of it all the days of your life." Nature is fallen and it now experiences death. Rather than the world being a cultivated garden

where everything works together in harmony, the earth is a place of sweat, pain, frustration, and death.

The fourth face of death is that we died in relationship to ourselves. By this I mean that sin has come into our minds and hearts and warped us. Shame, fear, running, hiding. These are the result of the first sin and is a slow working of death in us.

Death with God, death with others, death with creation, death within ourselves. And when Christ came, he came to deliver us from death in all its dimensions, or, to put this another way, the salvation that is ours by grace through faith is a salvation that restores everything that sin and death has destroyed.

What is the first face of death? It is death in relation to God. But Christ has come to save us from the judgment of God, and not just to save us but to restore us to a life of friendship with God, a life of love with God, and a life of joyful service for him. When we think of salvation by grace through faith this is what we normally think about. I have been saved from the judgment of God by the grace of God that I might come into a relationship of love with God. All of this is true and wonderful, but it is only the first face of salvation. Granted – it is the most important – for unless we have a relationship with God through Christ we will not have any of the other aspects of salvation, but we must not limit our thinking that salvation is only about my relationship with God.

God created us also to have relationships with one another and God created us to have dominion over creation and to have peace in our hearts. All these have been affected by sin and the salvation that is ours in Christ – by grace through faith – has affected all of them as well. Let's explore this a little bit more.

Sin affected our relationships with one another, but salvation has come to restore those relationships. This is why so much of the New Testament is about relationships – have you noticed? I'm sure you have! Think of this letter to Ephesians. After he sets the theological foundation, he then talks about using our spiritual gifts, living a holy life, and relating to one another with love. In fact, when he talks about being filled with the Holy Spirit, he does not speak so much about ecstatic spiritual experiences but he talks about how we speak to one another and how we submit to one another. God never intended for salvation to be an individualistic experience only. It is that but far more. God always intended our salvation to be a group experience which is why we gather in churches, worship God together, serve one another, and seek to to bring others into the family of God.

Sin affected our relationship with nature. We live on a fallen planet. As I have been preparing these messages I have been hearing about people dying from the West Nile virus carried by mosquitoes. I have been hearing about people dying from the Ebola virus in Africa. Meteorologists are watching hurricanes to see where they will land in the U.S. Some of you have been experiencing drought and it has been extremely damaging to the corn harvest.

Yes, we live on a fallen planet, but God's promise is to renew the earth. John saw a new heaven and a new earth. The paradise that was lost through Adam's sin will be regained as we look forward to the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven to the earth. Paul said in Romans 8 we have been

saved in the hope of receiving a resurrection body and when we receive our resurrection bodies all of nature will be released from the curse. This is part of the salvation we will receive by grace through faith.

Finally, sin and death affected us on the inside. Let's admit it. We are messed up on the inside. The other morning my wife and I spent a good two hours examining our hearts, talking to one another, praying for one another, and being open about our needs. It was a great time of prayer and sharing, and sure enough, some needy areas of our lives surfaced. We did this in an accepting environment. And we did this knowing that we are growing, need to grow more, and we will not have complete healing of our emotional and inward problems until Christ returns. But we are growing and we are experiencing his salvation by grace through faith because part of his salvation is to restore us inwardly. His salvation is to remake us in the image of Christ so that we will reflect the character of Christ.

And just as we walked in the flesh, in the world, and under the power of the evil, so today we are learning to walk in the Spirit, to live in this world without letting the world shape us, and to have victory over the schemes of the devil. That is part of salvation by grace through faith. And one day we will experience a complete walk in the Spirit, a new world in which only righteousness dwells, and a world in which the principalities and powers no longer harm the people of God but support God's righteous purposes.

Salvation is past – I have been saved by grace through faith, i.e., forgiven and justified by grace through faith.

Salvation is present – I am being saved by grace through faith as the Holy Spirit remakes me in the image of Christ and as he teaches me to walk in the Spirit.

Salvation is future – I will be saved by grace through faith when Jesus returns as King of kings and makes all things new.

I hope you can see how rich our salvation is.

In these two short sentences in Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul reinforces the concept of grace by making four more statements.

1. It is not of yourselves.
2. It is the gift of God.
3. It is not a result of works.
4. And all of this is so that no one may boast before God.

Let's look at these just for a moment. Salvation is not from you. Salvation is from God. Salvation was not your idea. It was God's idea. You did not come calling on God. You may have been searching for God but you would have never found him unless he revealed himself to you. God came calling on you as Isaiah 65: 1 says, ""I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask *for Me*; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' To a nation which did not call on My name." Salvation is of the Lord.

Salvation is the gift of God. It will not be passed out like a paycheck at the end of a work week. You earn that. But you could never earn salvation and that is why salvation is a gift. That is the good news and the wonderful reason why it is available to everyone. It is not something reserved only for the super spiritual elites who fast and pray all the time. It is a gift to every person who will receive it.

It is not a result of works. You are not climbing a spiritual ladder of success. Instead, God has come down the ladder to reach to you who could never climb up the ladder. Salvation is not the result of works.

And fourth, all of this is so that no one would boast. This is our core problem. We boast in ourselves. Paul tells us in Romans 1 that the problem with ancient civilizations was that they did not glorify God as God and did not give thanks to him. Instead, humanity boasted in its abilities forgetting that they all came from God. This attitude of boasting in self, plunged ancient civilization into ruin and darkness.

But God in his great mercy, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, even when we walked according to the world, the flesh, and the devil, came to us in the person of Christ, died for us, was raised for us and was enthroned for us so that we might die to sin, live to God, and prepare for our destiny of ruling the new creation for God's glory. For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is a wonder of the spiritual world!