

## “It Takes A Miracle” (Part 3)

Ephesians 2:1-10

Series: Ephesians [#7]

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### Introduction

This morning we are taking the last of three looks at Ephesians 2:1-10. These verses tell us that “*It Takes A Miracle*” to rescue us from our sin and bring us into fellowship with God. In the first three verses we heard *the bad news*—being “*down in death valley*,” and that we needed a miracle because we are ...

- dead in our sin;
- dominated by Satan and his forces;
- slaves to sin;
- condemned in our sin.

Then we moved to *the good news*—up to the mountain top of God’s miracle, of being transformed ...

- from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ;
- from being slaves to sin and Satan to being raised up with Christ;
- being condemned before God to being seated in the heavenly places in Christ;
- of being transformed for good works and to display God’s glory.

Now, we move to the crucial question of “How?” “How can, how does this transformation take place? How do we receive this *Miracle*? How do we receive the benefit of what God has provided in Christ?” Gift cards have become very popular. It is estimated that approximately \$80 billion of gift cards were purchased last year. That’s a lot! But, about 10% of them, or about \$8 billion-worth, will not be used. Paid for, but the intended recipient received no benefit. God’s miracle of salvation in Jesus Christ is available to everyone. But not everyone benefits from it. How we benefit from it is what we are looking at today.

### Receiving God’s Miracle.

To understand this we need to start with God, His motive and actions. God’s motive is His love. Go to verse 4, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.” We know that the word love has many different meanings and nuances. There is ...

- romantic love
- self-love

- selfish love
- godly love
- childish love
- lost love
- smothering love
- brotherly love
- redeeming love
- motherly love
- platonic love
- unreturned love ... etc. ...

We are not going to survey the varieties of love today. Our focus is on God's "great love with which He loved us" (4).

God's love is part of His character and nature. By nature He *is* love—two times in 1 John 4 we are told "God is love" (8, 16). When God tells us that He *is love*, He is not saying that love is all He is, or that love is God. The Bible makes it clear that, while this is one essential part of God's nature, He also is spirit, holy, light, truth, righteousness, etc. Let's grab a hold on two "handles" to understanding God's love.

The first handle is that God loves us because He chooses to love us, not because we deserve it. This is the point of verse 4 and the first part of verse 5, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgression." Romans 5:8 tells us that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God's loving you is not based on your family tree; your personality or standards; what you have done or have not done; how good or bad you are, or feel you are. God loves "the world"—every person, because God is love. His love does not have to be, and cannot be earned. Yes, in spite of being dead and condemned in sin, holy, righteous God has chosen to love you.

The second handle to understanding God's love is that it is an unselfish, giving motivation. Listen to the Scriptures:

- "For God *so loved* the world, *that He gave* His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
- Romans 5, "...Christ *died* for us" (8), that "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ *died* for the ungodly" (6)... that "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God *through the death* of His Son" (10).
- In Galatians 2:20 Paul writes of Christ, "...Who loved me and *gave* Himself up for me."

- Here in Ephesians, in chapter 5 as Paul tells us to live directed by God’s love, he writes, “...just as Christ also loved you, and *gave Himself up* for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (5:1-2).
- One more, 1 John 4:9-10, “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

God is love. His character and nature is to love, to give sacrificially for our good, for our best interests. Jesus’ death on the cross for us is the supreme act and demonstration of God’s love. The motivation for God’s *Miracle* for us is in His love.

While God’s love is the *motive* for our salvation, no one has been or will be saved by God’s love. God’s love had to be *put into action* to accomplish that. The *bridge word* to this action is the word “*kindness*” (7). The idea is of tender, compassionate caring. Because God loves us, His plans and actions toward us reflect that, i.e., He is tender, compassionate and caring. There are two sides of God’s kindness: mercy and grace.

Let’s look first at *mercy*. Verse 4 tells us that God is “rich in mercy.” God’s love in action moves Him *not* to treat us with the full force of what is due us. He withholds and pardons. There is a story from the Napoleonic Wars about a young, battle-weary, totally exhausted French soldier who fell asleep on guard duty ... *and ...* was caught. He was tried and sentenced to death. His mother was a widow. Somehow she managed to arrange an audience with Napoleon, and begged him to spare her son’s life. She loved him and he was her only means of support. Napoleon was not impressed. “Madam, your son does not deserve *mercy*. He deserves to die.” “Of course, sir,” she replied, “you are right. That’s why I am asking you to show *mercy* to him. If he deserved it, it wouldn’t be *mercy*.” Napoleon, touched by her answer, pardoned her son.

Never forget for a second that if God gave us what we deserved, it would be hell—eternal punishment for our sin. God’s love in action, His *mercy* sent Jesus to us, to the cross for us who were lost, hopeless and helpless in sin. The objective basis for God’s mercy to us is Jesus’ death, which satisfied His righteous and holy demands. Titus 3:4-5,

“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His *mercy*, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit ...”

The second side of God’s kindness, His love in action, is *grace*. It has often been said that in His mercy God does not give us what we deserve, and in His grace He gives us what we do not deserve. Let’s go back to verse 4.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us

alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (4-5)

Now verse 8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is, as Paul told the Elders from Ephesus and Miletus in Acts 20:24, “the gospel of the *grace* of God.” God calls us through His grace (Galatians 1:15), He justifies us as a gift by His grace (Romans 3:24, Titus 3:7). In His grace He gives us “the free gift... [of] eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”

The point of all of this is that God’s motive for providing salvation, for saving us, is His great, matchless love. His love in action, His kindness in mercy and grace provides the miracle, the salvation we need.

Now we turn to receiving God’s miracle, which is through faith. In chapter 1 we looked at God’s side of this.

- God “chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (1:4).
- God “predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself” (1:5).

Now we turn to our side. Salvation is received through faith. Go to verse 8 again.

“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.” (8-9)

Faith, here, means to believe, to put your trust in, to commit yourself to. Knowing you are dead, enslaved and condemned in sin; *knowing* that God loves you and has provided the miracle of salvation through Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection will not save you. Faith is more than knowing; it is more than agreeing that all of this is true. Faith means to make a conscious, deliberate decision to trust Christ and what He has done for you; to trust yourself and your eternal destiny to Him. That is *faith*.

Charles Blondin was the stage name of a very talented and entertaining tightrope walker of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was known for his extraordinary crossings of Niagra Falls on an 1,100 foot-long cable 160 feet above the water. He walked the cable; walked it blindfolded; on stilts; in a sack; stopping mid-way to sit down and cook and then eat an omelette; carrying a man on his back; and, pushing a wheelbarrow. One of his favorite things was to cross pushing a wheelbarrow and then ask the audience, “Do you *believe* I can do it again?” Of course, the crowd would excitedly shout, “*Yes! Yes! You can do it!*” “Alright,” he would say, “then who will get in the wheelbarrow and ride across?” His question always was answered the same way... with silence.

True faith means *getting into the wheelbarrow*. It means trusting God with your life, all that you are, all that you have. Personal, true faith in God is essential to Christianity. Without it we can think of ourselves as Christians, but we cannot be a Christian, a redeemed child of God. Romans 5:1 tells us “... having been justified *by faith*, we have peace with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again in Philippians 3:9 we read that we do not have “a righteousness of [our] own derived from the Law, but that which is *through faith in Christ*, the righteousness which comes from God *on the basis of faith*.”

Faith is so critical that the N.T. uses the phrase *the faith* to describe the truth of the Scriptures and all of the Christian life. Now, it has been said that in salvation “grace is God’s part, faith [is] our[s] [part].” At first hearing that may sound correct, but it is only accurate to a very limited degree. You see, salvation actually is all God’s work. Two times in verses 8 and 9 any works by us are ruled out as having a part in accomplishing salvation. While there are some technical questions on the phrase “it is the gift of God” in verse 8, I believe it logically—and in line with Paul’s writing style—refers to all of this section, verses 4-8. This gift” includes our faith.

Philippians 1:29 tells us “...to you it *has been granted* for Christ’s sake, not only to *believe* in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” *Believing*, having faith, is something God *grants*, or *gives* to us. As the Holy Spirit gets our attention, convicts and convinces us, He gives us faith—the ability to believe and trust God and all His truth. God’s miracle of salvation is received through faith.

There is only one way to God’s salvation. Look at verses 8 and 9 again.

“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.”

To our way of thinking it is difficult to accept that grace is the sole means of our salvation, and that there is only one way to God. Our own thinking tells us that we *must* have to do something. And certainly, we feel better if we do something we think will contribute to become acceptable to God. This kind of feeling, this way of thinking is part of false cults and man-made religions. Remember, we were *dead* in sin. We had no spiritual life, no spiritual ability to do anything that pleased God until we were made alive, until we were saved by God’s grace. We cannot contribute anything to our salvation.

Also, our own thinking tells us that one way is too narrow, too exclusive; it’s not fair to me, to others. Jesus made it clear, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; *no one* comes to the Father *but through Me*” (John 14:6).

As well, in the earliest days of the church, Peter declared,

“... there is salvation *in no one else*; for there is *no other name* under heaven that has been given among men *by which we must be saved*.”

Acts 4:12

Again, 1 Timothy 2:5 declares “For there is *one* God, and *one mediator* also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” The apostle John summed it up this way,

“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this

life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12).

Yes, God has provided one, and only one way for helpless, hopeless, dead, condemned sinners to be transformed. That one way is Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion.

*It takes a miracle*” to rescue us from our sin, to make us acceptable to God, and bring us into fellowship with Him. As we come to a few moments of quiet time with God, please bow your heads now. First, to you who have not yet experienced the miraculous transformation in Jesus Christ. Take note of, and don’t allow false ideas to keep you from God any longer.

- Don’t depreciate your sin; i.e., “I’m not really that bad. There are a lot of people of worse than I am.”
- Don’t value the good things you have done. Spiritually you are dead; you cannot do anything to please God.
- Don’t *overvalue* your problems and sin. You may think
  - “I’m not good enough.”
  - “I haven’t cleaned myself up enough yet.”
  - “I’ve got too many problems.”
  - “I’ve blown it too often.”

The Bible tells us that “*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (e.g., Acts 2:21).

God, in His grace, has made it simple. This reality is pictured in a story from a small, old church in Germany. On this building is a stone lamb. When workmen were up high, building the church, one of them fell. His friends rushed down, expecting to find him dead. They were amazed to find him shaken, but not injured. A lamb had been grazing by the building and when the man fell, he landed on that lamb. The lamb was crushed to death, but it saved the man. That workman was so grateful he had a stone lamb carved and placed on the building as a memorial to the lamb that saved his life by dying in his place.

Jesus died for you—the just for the unjust; the One who knew no sin became sin for you. God offers you forgiveness and His own everlasting life as a free gift through Jesus, the Perfect, Eternal Lamb of God. It *is* quite simple. “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:12). God *loves you*. His love moved Him to offer you His mercy and grace in Jesus. Right here and now, you can accept His gift. Talk to God now, pray to Him,

“God, I know I am a sinner. I know there is no hope for me on my

own. Thank You that Jesus died for me, that He is *my* Lamb of Life. I accept Your gift of forgiveness and life in Jesus. Thank You for Your love, mercy and grace to me.”

*If* that is your prayer, or if you have questions and want to talk about this, take your stand by coming to the front when we sing our closing song in a few moments. You come, and I’ll meet you.

Then for you who have been transformed, have received God’s miracle and have life with God,

- Thank God for His immeasurable love, mercy and grace.
- Thank God for all that He has saved you from and saved you to.
- Thank God for the certain promise that He will keep on leading and changing you to be like Christ.
- Thank God for the certain hope that You will one day stand complete, without spot, stain, or wrinkle in His presence—all because of His mercy and grace.

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