

Ephesians 2:8-9

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[0:00] Please open up your Bibles again to Ephesians chapter 2. We'll be focusing on verses 8 and 9. I used to be really into art and painting when I was younger.

And at one point in my life I actually wanted to be a painter. That was my dream. I think I might take it up in retirement. And I used to love in particular the Impressionists, and I still do. I love them. They were a style of painters in the 19th century. And Monet was one of my heroes. And I remember going to the National Gallery for the first time as a teenager. And they have a room full of Monet paintings.

And I remember when I first entered that, and I saw a real-life Monet close-up. And I was just blown away. I felt this, I kind of felt it in my stomach. I think my breath actually was taken away. And my first thought was, this guy's a genius. How on earth did he do this? Yes, I loved the painting. It was gorgeous.

[1:04] But it sent my mind to the artist. The painting said so much about Monet. His mind, his skill, his craft, his genius. You look at the work, and it displays what the artist is like.

And up close in the National Gallery, you can see all the details. How he painted the brushstrokes, the subtlety of colour, the contrast, the shape, the light.

You actually see how he's done it. You see the details. And you can't help but think, man, Monet is a genius. Well, that is like God's work in salvation.

If salvation is the artwork, if God has done work in this world, a masterpiece, and it's called The Salvation of Sinners, then that masterpiece tells us what God is like.

You can study that painting, look up close, and see exactly how he painted it, and then know of the genius and the character of God.

[2:14] And that's what I want us to do tonight. I want us to stand right by the masterpiece and see just how exactly God saves us. I want us to see the brushstrokes of salvation.

And these two verses we're looking at tonight, verses 8 and 9, this is the up close of the masterpiece. This is the very heart of Christianity. I've said before that Ephesians 2, 1 to 10, is quite possibly the best summary of the gospel.

Well, these verses are the summary of the summary. This is the heart. If you want to memorise a verse about the gospel, verse 8 would probably be it. By grace, you have been saved through faith. In the gospels, Jesus speaks of weightier matters of the law. So all the law, all the Bible is important. There isn't a word you can take out of it. But some things are weightier.

Some things in the Bible matter, and some really, really matter. And these verses we have in front of us, these are some of the heaviest.

[3:21] If you could carry these verses in your pocket, you would hit the deck. And so we need to stand up close to these verses. And I want us to just to take in the brushstrokes.

And this is for two reasons. Firstly, because this verse is about how we are saved. How the dead are raised to life. How this dark world can be rescued.

So if you take this verse away, if you ignore this painting, if you compromise on this, then salvation itself is at stake. But secondly, and this is an even bigger reason, we need an up close of this painting because this verse tells us about the artist.

So do you remember from this morning the goal of why God is saving sinners? What is the purpose behind why anyone here is raised from the dead? Look back to verse 7.

So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace. God is saving people. He's saved you. He's painted this canvas in this way to show the world who he really is. [4:34] To show that he is gracious. The painting of salvation even exists at all so that the world would know how gracious the artist really is.

And so this is about God's reputation. And so if we miss these verses, if we compromise on this, we will get God all wrong. And it will be like setting fire to a Monet.

And so if you're not a Christian here tonight, I want you to hear these verses not only because this is how you need to be saved, but also because you need to know who God is. You may be wondering what kind of God is out there, what God is like.

But well, come take a look at this masterpiece. And see what he's like. And if you are a Christian here, then we need to hear this because we need to know the artist who made us.

So let's look at the brushstrokes. And let's see exactly how God has done all this. And the first thing I want us to notice is that salvation is all from God.

[5:44] Salvation is all from God. Let's read our verses again. Verse 8. And did you notice, as we read all the passage earlier, that this isn't the only time Paul says this in the passage?

Look back to verse 5. Even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. And raised us up with him and seated us with him.

So twice in the space of 10 verses, he tells us the exact same thing. By grace you have been saved. In fact, the first time, Paul even kind of interrupts his own thought, doesn't he?

As he's telling us God is rich in mercy, even when we were dead, God made us alive together with Christ. Oh wait, hold up. You need to know, by grace you've been saved. Okay, now where was I? Oh yeah, God raised us up, seated us with Christ. First, it's like if he's talking about salvation, about God, he just needs to get this in. It's like he's tapping on the canvas, saying, look, look, do you see how God has done this?

[7:01] Look at this brush stroke. And in verse 8, he says it again, but this time, not in passing, but he stops. And he kind of puts big neon lights around it.

And what is he pointing out? What is it about salvation? Well, how does this verse begin? By grace you have been saved. We're being told all this, all your salvation, all your being made alive from the dead, you're being raised up, you're being seated in heaven, all of this is by grace.

Grace is the brush stroke that we need to see. And if we look closely, it's all over the canvas. Now what is grace? Grace is God giving us something we don't deserve.

It's God's undeserved kindness toward us. So mercy, we thought about mercy last week. Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve, not giving us wrath.

Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. Grace is God being kind to the undeserving.

[8:18] And so if this is the close-up. If Paul is pointing at this on the canvas, what does this world need to see? This world needs to know salvation is all, all by grace.

All of salvation is God's undeserved kindness towards sinners. Now remember, salvation tells us what God is like.

If the masterpiece tells us what the painter is like, what does grace tell us about the painter? If you're in Christ here today, what does God's grace in your life tell us about God's role in salvation?

Grace tells us salvation is all from God. If salvation is by grace, if that's how this masterpiece was made, then grace points us to the artist and grace tells us all of this salvation is from God.

It's all God's initiative. It all began with God, from God, because of him, by his power. Grace tells us God and God alone is your saviour.

[9:32] Salvation belongs to the Lord alone. So think of us being dead in our sins. Lying stone cold dead in that mortuary.

Who raised us? Who was behind that? Who reached down and breathed life into you? That was only God.

By grace you were made alive. Who sent his spirit and united you to Christ? Who raised you up into heaven and gave you heavenly life? Who seated you on his throne?

Who was the only one that could possibly do that? It was all God. By grace you have been saved. Amen. Grace is God butting into your life.

Grace is God pulling you back from the cliff edge. Grace is God finding you when you were lost. When you had no interest in him. You're back to him.

[10:34] Middle finger up. And bringing you back from the dead. Look at the painting. This is all from God. There is only one artist in the room right here.

which means something important. The flip side of this. This means none of this is because of us. Look what Paul adds, verse 8. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. For those of us in Christ today, if you're a Christian, our salvation, the fact that we are alive, the fact that we are a part of this church and know God and have a new heart, this wasn't our own doing.

This wasn't from us. We weren't dead in our sins, running away from God, and then in ourselves, we kind of mustered up some strength and some godliness and some common sense and brought ourselves back to God.

No, it was not your own doing. Can, think of this, can a dead body, think of a dead body in a mortuary, can a dead body muster up its own strength and some extra will and make itself alive?

[11:59] Can a blind man just try really hard and just stop being blind? Can the deaf just decide to start hearing again? No.

Something from outside ourselves, outside our world, needs to break in. And so salvation cannot be our own doing. Salvation is not us coming to our senses and building this bridge back to God.

No, salvation is God coming down to you, picking your corpse off the floor and raising you from the dead. And so look closely at the painting.

If we are saved by grace, then grace means none of this is from us. It is all from God. And for some of us here, we can look back at our lives and we can see exactly that.

If it wasn't for God's initiative, if it was just up to me, then I would be so lost. I would still be in that relationship. I would have gone down that dark path.

[13:12] If it was my own doing, it is terrifying to think where I would be right now. But praise God it's not.

Because by grace, you have been saved. Which also means salvation is not about deserving it. That's my second point today. Salvation is not about deserving it. What does Paul call salvation? Verse 8. It is the gift of God. So think about a gift.

A gift is undeserved, isn't it? You don't earn a gift. Now a paycheck, your salary, that is earned. You work hard for a paycheck.

It's based on how you perform. You do well, you get more money. But a gift, you don't earn a gift. A gift is given to you undeserved.

[14:13] So think of your birthday. I know there were a few birthday parties yesterday. Think of those gifts that you got. You didn't earn them. We don't deserve gifts, but people, out of their kindness, decided to give you that gift.

By grace, you are given those gifts. And what is salvation? It is God's gift to you. Because what do we deserve?

If it was based on a performance review of your life, what do we deserve? What does Ephesians 2 tell us? We deserve wrath. We are by nature children of wrath.

A world running from God, a world dead in their sins, that world deserves wrath. That world has earned nothing from God.

Nothing. If the world were to get a paycheck, it would be zero. In fact, it would be worse than zero. It would be negative money. We are in debt to God.

[15:21] If it were up to pure, cold, hard, mathematical justice, the only thing we deserve is hell. So let's just be very, very clear about this.

God owes us nothing. When I was lost, when I was a foolish teenager, when I was going down that dark path with my back to God, God owed me nothing.

But God has broken into this world and reached down to you and given you a gift.

He has come down and given you his son. The Lord Jesus coming down to this forsaken earth, that is God's gift to you.

The Lord Jesus hanging on the cross, that is God's gift to you. The Lord Jesus leaving the tomb, rising into heaven, seated on the throne, that is God's gift to you.

[16:29] Because when God saves you, he says to the hell-bound sinner, in all your debt, in all your sin, he says to you, have all of this. Have it all.

Have my son, have his death, have his life, have him all and have him forever. And this, this is grace.

This is God's undeserved kindness. And so we cannot think, well, God made me alive because, well, I was one of the better ones, really.

I wasn't too bad and so, so that's why I'm here today. No, we can't even dare to think like that. We are only, only here by grace.

And so just look at this masterpiece. What is the artist like? What is our God like? He is gracious. And just think, no one else is like this.

[17:35] We struggle to give gifts to people we like. We don't give gifts to strangers and we certainly don't give gifts to people who hate us. But God, God gave us, us of all people, the gift of everything.

And so if you're here tonight and you want God, and you know you need God, but you think, your past is too messy, you think you can't come to God with the things that you've done, if you think that you need to get your act together before God can do anything with you, I'm so glad you're here tonight.

Because you need to know, salvation, it's not about deserving it. It's not about earning your way to God. If you come to him now, sin and mess and all, if you just come to him now, trust in him, he will simply gift you everything.

look at the painter. God is gracious. But I want us to see another detail.

I want us to see another brushstroke. If this is grace, if this is how we are saved, then salvation is not about doing. It's about receiving.

[18:54] If this is not our own doing, if this is not about earning or deserving, if this is all grace, then specifically, this is not about you doing anything.

Look at verse 8 again. For by grace you've been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works.

Think back to that paycheck. If what we deserve on that paycheck is not even zero, it's negative. If we're in debt to God, how much are we in debt to God?

How much does sin against an infinitely holy God put us into debt? What is the negative number on that? We have infinite debt to God.

So what can we do? Just think about this. What can we do to pay that back? What work can be done? Nothing. There is no good deed, no change of behavior, no impressive lifestyle, no nice good life that you can just live that is valuable enough to pay back your debt.

[20:08] It's simply impossible. No, the only way to be free from that debt is for God to pay it for you. And that is precisely what has happened on the cross.

That is the gift of God. Paying your debt for you. The cross, that is grace. It's not a result of works because Christ has done all the work for you.

It is finished. It's all from God. And so if it's not about doing, then it's about receiving.

Salvation, it's about faith. Now, faith is something that we can be confused about. Some people think faith is just, faith in God, it's basically just kind of thinking that he exists.

But that isn't faith. No, faith is receiving. Okay? Faith is receiving. Faith is God coming to God empty-handed and saying, I have nothing.

[21:23] But I trust you to give me everything I need, Lord. And that is how God gives you everything. It's not by deserving.

It's not by working for it. But actually, the opposite. It's by recognizing God owes us nothing and so we simply come to him empty-handed. Trusting that Jesus has everything.

It's not by works. It's by empty hands. And that is how we're saved. And we can't think, oh well, our faith, well God looks at our faith, realizes, oh, they're the believers and then he saves us.

No, firstly, even then, God still doesn't owe us. But secondly, look at verse 8 again. what is the gift of God? What is it referring to?

Verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. But what is this referring to? This is referring to the whole phrase beforehand.

[22:36] For by grace you have been saved through faith. This whole thing, the grace, the saving, the faith, this is all not your own doing.

It is the gift of God. Grace is the gift of God. Saving is the gift of God. Faith is the gift of God. The fact that you ever came empty-handed to God, that is because God gifted that faith to you.

And this makes sense in all that we've seen in Ephesians so far. How can a world by nature running away from God, how can that kind of world turn to God to receive from him?

How could a world that thinks it's fine without God realise it needs God? How can a world that thinks it's rich realise it's actually in debt?

If we were dead in our sins, no spiritual pulse, how can the dead have faith? God needs to gift us that faith.

[23:42] Look at that MRI of your soul again. That pulse that you now see. That pulse is a sign of faith. That warmth you see, that is faith.

And where did that pulse come from? Where did that warmth come from? That is all from God. And we can look back at our lives and we can even see that. If God had not opened my eyes, I would never have realised how needy I was.

If God had not given me life, I would have never realised how dead I was. I was trapped in sin. and I didn't even realise it. Well, you realising that, that is faith.

That is God turning you around, raising you from the dead. That is the gift of God in your life. It's not about doing, it's about receiving. And this is a huge comfort for us.

Because if how well you lived then never got you salvation, then how well you live now can never lose you salvation.

[25:01] We can worry when we fall into that spiritual slump. or our faith can be rocky and we can wonder how am I going to last through this? How is my faith going to last?

I feel like I'm hanging on by a thread right now. If that's you, just realise how did you get that faith in the first place? How were you brought here?

By grace. It was all by grace. grace. And it is still all by grace. It is not on you. However weak you feel, however rocky your faith feels, it is not on you.

It's all from God. And so come to him empty handed right now and you will receive exactly what you need. So if you're not a Christian here tonight, you must know you don't need to make up for your sins.

If you're unsettled by your past and you're needing to be right with God, the answer is not about paying for your sins. The answer is not doing something, it's faith.

[26:11] It's coming empty handed to Jesus and he will do all the work for you. Think about the cross, it is finished. The American preacher, John MacArthur, you might have heard he died last week, and a few years ago he was on the Larry King chat show in America, and he was being asked by Larry King, isn't going to heaven about being a good person?

It can't just be about faith. How can a bad person with faith go to heaven? Where's the justice in that? And John MacArthur, he interrupts him as Larry saying that, and he says, Larry, we don't want justice.

Justice sends everybody to hell. We need grace. grace. That man knew his painter. We need grace. And it's here for everyone.

And I just want us to end with this thought. Why has God done all this? Why is none of this on us? Why is all this from God?

Why is the painting painted like this? salvation is about boasting in God. That's my final point today. Salvation is about boasting in God.

[27:31] How do our verses end? For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

just think, what if our salvation was on us? What if it was about me making the right choices and working hard enough and living a good enough life?

Then if that was the case, what do I get to do then? I get to boast. Well done me. I get to pat myself on the back.

Then I get to stand at the finish line of the new creation and I can look around and I can say, yeah, this is because of me. And even if it is 1% me and 99% God, I still get to boast.

But why grace? Why is this canvas painted like this so that no one may boast? So that no one here can say it is because of me, but so we can say this is all because of God.

[28:48] Every single thing, we can look at the masterpiece, the work he has done in our lives and know this artist is a genius. Our God is gracious.

And I want us to end on that thought tonight. I want us to go home tonight. I want us to look back on how God has shaped your childhood, the friends he put around you, the churches he placed you in, that friend at school he gave you, that Christian at uni that you met, those conversations, those Bible studies, those sermons, that dark period of your life, that made you realise you needed something more.

All those dark paths that we could have gone down but didn't. I want us to look back at the painting of your life and realise I didn't paint that.

That wasn't from me. That was all from God. Christian, just look at the brush strokes that make up your life.

That is all God's grace. Look back on it and just praise God. It is not from us. It is not because we are deserving.

[30:07] It is not because we did anything. It is because the artist is gracious. Let's boast in him. Let's pray. Let's Thank you.