**“BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED”
Ephesians 2:1-10**

This morning we will be looking at a very familiar passage…

In his letter to the Ephesians up to this point Paul’s been talking about our salvation, what it means to be a Christian. In Ch 1 we saw God’s plan for us as part of His church. In Ch 2 we’re going to see how we became a part of His church. Paul’s going to talk about the salvation process itself. Before we get started I want to share with you a few statistics that I came across from the Barna Research Group while I was preparing this lesson.

Considering the claims to be a Christian --

What pct of people in this country identify themselves as Christians, say they are “a Christian”? **73%**

Of those who identify themselves as Christian what pct attend a religious service at least once a month and say their faith is very important in their life? **31%**

Considering the age most people in America saved --

Pct who accept Jesus Christ as their savior before reaching age of 18 **64%** -- before reaching age of 13 **43%**

Pct of current population who initially embraced Christ as their savior after their 65th birthday **1%**

Considering whether a person is saved by works or by grace --

Pct of adult population who believe eternal salvation can be earned thru personal goodness or by doing good deeds **25%**

Pct of adult population that believe salvation cannot be earned **20%** [the remaining 55% either don’t know, are unsure or don’t care]

What drives people to make a salvation decision? --

“Just as our nation’s culture has changed dramatically in the last 30 years, so has the way in which people come to Christ. The weekend church service is no longer the primary mechanism for salvation decisions; only one out of every ten believers who makes a decision to follow Christ does so in a church setting or service. On the other hand, personal relationships have become even more important in evangelism… most salvation decisions [come] in direct response to an invitation given by a family member or a friend.”

So now that I have completely depressed you, let me give you the point of all this. There are a lot of voices out there in our society, ideas, new concepts, philosophies, opinions and a lot of them may sound really good. Even Christians can be influenced by them. It’s so important that we believers in Jesus Christ, we the church, stay rooted in the truth that is found in God’s word and that we let this truth mold our minds, shape our world view, dictate our priorities, guide our behavior. Paul gives this word of warning to Pastor Timothy and to us, the church, at the very end of First Timothy: “Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge. Some people have wandered from the faith by following such foolishness.” (1 Tim 6:20-21) And what was true in Paul’s day we can see (based on the statistics I just gave you and from our own observation) remains true today!

So with that, let’s see what truth God has for us this morning as we talk about our salvation. Let me read the passage all the way thru…

READ Ephesians 2:1-10

Paul sees the whole process of salvation as taking place past present and future. Remember who Paul is addressing. He is talking to the saints, believers in Jesus, those of us who have already been saved.

V 1-3 “And you…” This was you! “…were dead” past tense “in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” You were spiritually dead. Not just sick, you were dead! How did you come to be dead? You were born that way. You were born with a sin nature, a bent toward sin, nobody had to teach you to sin. You were spiritually dead. Now, can a dead person make themselves come alive? No. It’s going to take divine intervention. Let’s define terms. To “sin” means to miss the mark, miss the target. To “trespass” means to go in the wrong direction, to go the wrong way, to do the wrong thing. So then, we missed the mark, what is the mark? What is the right way? God’s perfection, God’s holiness. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23) Jesus said, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt 5:48). Peter said, “It is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Pet 1:16) A quote from the OT, Leviticus 11. That’s God’s perfect standard.

Just like our ancestors Adam and Eve, we followed “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Satan, the devil). And just like Adam and Eve we “lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” We did what we wanted to do, in order to gratify self, rather than do what God wanted us to do. This was our nature. We “were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” That’s where we were. That’s who we were.

BUT GOD, v 4. Our great and awesome God, patient, rich in mercy, love and grace – He did something for us. V 5, He made us, dead people, LIVE. “even when we were dead in our trespasses, HE made us alive together with Christ.” Just as Jesus was raised physically from the dead back to life, so were we who were spiritually dead raised back to life. A spiritual resurrection when we were saved and someday, the Bible teaches, we will experience a physical resurrection. So God saved us! He saved us by His grace. There are so many wonderful metaphors about salvation in the Bible – lost but then found, blind but then could see, in darkness but then in the light, enemies of God now children of God, slave now free, dead but now alive! “God demonstrated His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He saved us right where we were, lost sinners, dead people spiritually.

But when we WERE raised from the dead God didn’t just leave us in the graveyard, did He? No. Look at v 6. “And raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Back in Ephesians 1:3 Paul says that God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” So, just as Jesus ascended physically from this earth back to heaven, so we were spiritually raised up positionally in Christ into the heavenly places. A spiritual ascension when we were saved, and the Bible teaches that one day we will be with Jesus in heaven and that one day we will physically reign and rule with Him when He returns to this earth. So we were raised up and seated with our Lord spiritually, positionally and in the future physically. The same great and mighty power that God demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead and taking Him back to glory (Eph 1:20) that same power is demonstrated in God raising spiritually dead people like us and seating us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ.

Why does God do all of this? V 7, it wasn’t primarily to keep us out of hell. It was so that He could shower His blessings on us – “in the coming ages [in the future] He might show [display to all of creation] the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us.” God wants to manifest His glory and one of the ways He does that is to us and through us, His church. We are His glory. Ephesians Ch 3 closes with this refrain: “To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Earlier in his letter to the Ephesians Paul discussed the role of the Father, Son and Spirit in our salvation. He briefly mentioned our part in the salvation process, Eph 1:13 – “when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him.” This is what he refers to again here in Ch 2 and v 8. “For by grace [God’s love toward us] you have been saved through faith.” Paul mentions the element of our faith in the salvation process again. We believed by faith the gospel message we heard. Yes, we had a choice to believe or not. It was a free will choice on our part. We took God at His word, we believed Him, and we accepted His love gift to us.

So, let’s all pat ourselves on the back for making such a wise decision. Hold on now. Before you do that, read the rest of v 8 and v 9. “And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Now wait a minute, Paul. I thought I decided to follow Christ. I thought it WAS my own doing. Well may have appeared that way from our perspective at the time. But the reality is, while we made the choice by an act of our faith to believe in and follow Jesus, we never would have done that had God not worked out the circumstances in our lives that led us to do it. Left to our own devices, to your own human reasoning, we would not have been saved on our own. God had to initiate it. The Father made the plan, the Son carried it out, obedient to His Father’s will, paid the penalty for our sins on the cross, the Spirit convicted us of our sin and our need for a Savior. It was God’s gift TO US! You and I didn’t do anything to earn it, no works on our part. Just simple childlike faith. And even that was a gift from God.

Well, a lot of people want to stop at v 9, but Paul has one more point to make in his discussion of the salvation process. V 10, “For we are His workmanship [we are God’s masterpiece], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand [before the foundation of the earth], that we should walk in them.” Let me remind you what Jesus told His disciples in John 15:8, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” Everything we do as saved people, as the redeemed of the Lord, is to bring glory to God. We are “created in Christ Jesus for good works.”

Romans 8 talks about us being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ (8:29). In other words, we are to become more like Jesus. And what did Jesus do while He was here on this earth? Peter summarizes Jesus life on earth this way in Acts 10:38: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” Our salvation was a part of God’s plan and so are the good works that it produces in our lives as believers in Jesus. All are a part of God’s wonderful plan for us, His church!

So how are we doing?

*[show slide “God made all of us perfect”]*

For many years hanging up in my office was this little poster. It reminded me of a truth I heard preached years ago about sanctification, the biblical concept that after we get saved God continues to work on us. Positionally we are perfect because we’re in Christ. But God, like a master sculptor, chisels away little by little all those parts of me that are not like Christ. The idea being that thru my life experiences which He allows, I mature in my faith and become more and more like Christ (that’s what God desires, that’s the idea). This poster reminded me that God’s still at work. He’s not quite finished with me yet! His masterpiece is still a work in progress!

My friends, don’t get frustrated. God’s still working on you too.

Whenever I ponder the subject of my salvation there is one hymn that inevitably comes to my mind – Amazing Grace. So, let’s close by singing that great hymn out to God as a praise offering for what He’s done and is continuing to do for us.