

**Woodlawn Chapel Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday March 14, 2021**  
**The Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**“Saved?”**  
**Carol Stepp, Youth Pastor**

Our scripture reading today comes from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1-10. Hear the Word of the Lord.

**2** You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. <sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ<sup>[a]</sup>—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup>not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Wow, that says a lot about salvation, wouldn’t you say? Today I would like to explore three ideas people have about how we are saved.

The first idea is that we are saved by good works...

From my experience, salvation by works is the predominantly held viewpoint of Christians. Why do so many people believe that we can be saved by works?"

One Answer is that salvation by works seems right to the eyes of many when you apply the Principle of cause and effect; After all, don’t we desire to be in control of our own destiny? Salvation by works draws on our pride and our desire to be in control. We also have an inherent sense of justice. Most of us believe in some type of justice and have a sense of right and wrong. Therefore, if we are to be saved, our “good works” must outweigh our “bad works.” It is understandable that we would create a religion that would involve some type of salvation by works. After all, we are used to working for everything we get, because most of us have inherited the good ole “Protestant work ethic.” Many support this belief of “salvation by works” with what the book of James says in the Bible.

James 2:14 says "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?" Then verse 17 James says that this kind of faith, "if it has no works, is dead." And later in verse 24 he concludes again, "A man is justified by works and not by faith alone."

I'm not saying Good works are not important, but I can't agree with James on this one. There are many more scriptures written by the Apostle Paul that attribute salvation to something different. But let us talk about that idea a little bit later.

So, we have the first belief that Salvation is achieved through works. Or to put it another way we can earn our salvation by how many "stars earned in our crowns." But I am wondering just how many stars are enough over a lifetime...hundreds, thousands? How many are required to be saved? I don't think that is the road to salvation...but there are many who do.

Now a second possibility is saying you must make a public confession of faith to be saved. This also supports the idea that you must have an epiphany and be "born again."

Some even go so far as to say, *"If you are a [born-again] Christian, you will go to heaven; If you're following another religion, then by default you will go to Hell."* Whoa! That's quite a statement! life is to repent from my own strivings which the Bible calls dead works (Heb. With this idea being saved is achieved by praying what is known as "the Sinner's Prayer" which you've probably heard on television. It goes something like this:

"Dear God, I know I'm a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe that He died for my sin and that you raised Him to life. I want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as Lord, from this day forward. Guide my life and help me to do your will. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

You can also pray it online. You read it and then it will ask – "Have you made a decision for Christ because of what you have read here? If so, please click on the "I have accepted Christ today" button below."

I have accepted Christ today

<https://www.gotquestions.org/now-what2.html>

After this someone will contact you so you can make a public profession of faith and you then be officially declared "Born Again" and thereby saved.

Some get this idea by a quoting a passage in the tenth chapter of Romans (verses 9-12) which reads:

<sup>9</sup> because<sup>[b]</sup> if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

This passage is given much weight by many fundamental Christians. It relays the idea that thinking is insufficient and to gain salvation that one must actually speak the thought out loud. This kind of goes

back to the first premise we talked about-that there is something that is required of us to achieve salvation.

Finally, I will present a third way that salvation happens, and I will claim this one.

Afterall, if Paul repeats himself in today's scripture, thinking that people will forget the point...so I will repeat it too. Indulge me as I read it once more and see if you can pick out his main point. Here we go:

Ephesians 2:1-10

2 You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ<sup>[a]</sup>—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

So, what do you think Paul is trying to relay here?

Maybe the point is that salvation by faith through grace is wholly and completely a gift from God and there is nothing we can do to earn it!

It is said that “salvation by grace through faith” is the hallmark of the Protestant reformation. It is taken directly from these words of scripture.

Salvation is ours because we are first drawn by God by grace and it is irresistible. In other words-God's calling may be able to be resisted for a period, but that this resistance will ultimately be overcome by God and all will be drawn into God's circle of grace. But that is another sermon!

Now you might say “How does salvation by grace work if people have free will?” If salvation hinges on whether individuals choose to be saved or not, is salvation based on grace or works? If we must choose for or against God, then doesn't the credit for our salvation ultimately go to us? Along the same lines, the Bible teaches that no one can choose to confess Jesus as Lord unless empowered by the Holy Spirit this is supported again by Paul in his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians in chapter 12 verse 3 in part b which reads that “no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.” There you go again-it is a gift from God!

There is another letter in Romans 5 where Paul says *"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."*

Again, there are numerous other scriptures that support the tenet that "Salvation is a gracious unmerited gift from God!" So, today's reading in Ephesians is what will hang my hat on. Listen to how this letter to is summed up in Eugene Peterson's version of the Bible "The Message."

"Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing."

THANKS BE TO GOD. AMEN.