

3. 13. 2011

Today's message is nothing new, but I hope that it would be fresh for us. In the beginning of Ephesians 2, Paul reminded us where we came from. We were dead in our sins and transgressions. We were sons of disobedience and of Satan. We followed the ways of the world and gratified our sinful desires. And we were destined for destruction. But God saved us from all this. Often we forget our former state and slip into an anti-God attitude, complaining about what God hasn't given us, and blatantly sinning despite His grace towards us.

In the Old Testament God faces the same problem with the forgetful Israelites. God refers to Himself as "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" 19 times, and "God of heaven" 20 times in the Old Testament. But He calls himself "The God who brought you out of Egypt" 85 times because the Israelites keep forgetting what God did for them and complained as they did in the desert. Thus God repeatedly reminds them of His gracious acts towards them.

We must also remember our former state in order to have the right attitude towards the God who delivered us from it. After telling us where we came from, Paul tells us why God saved us. In verses 4-8, he writes that God did it "because of His great love for us," His "rich mercy," and "grace," "to show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us," and "it is the gift of God." Paul uses words like love, mercy, grace, kindness, and gift to emphasize that God saved us from our former state because of His love for us.

But Paul also explains what exactly God did for us. Firstly, God "made us alive with Christ," (v. 5). Before, we were dead in our sins. We were full of decay and rot. But God turned us around. Now, our spirits are alive and reborn. Secondly, He "raised us up with Christ," (v. 6). Just as our souls were made alive, our bodies will be raised incorruptible, and immortal. Paul is so sure of this future resurrection that he counts it as something God has already done, in the past tense. And thirdly, God "seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus," (v. 6). Before we were not even allowed into heaven, but were doomed to hell. But now, God not only lets us in but gives us the seat of highest honor, with Jesus. All three things God did for us have this in common: they all connect us with Jesus Christ. God lets us enjoy this intimate union with His Son and our Savior. Similarly, God lets us enjoy a certain union with Jesus through baptism and communion as well.

But now, some might ask, “Why did God bother to create us if He knew we would sin and that He would have to sacrifice His Son to save us?” The answer is in verse 7: “...in order that in the coming ages, He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” God’s character is love and grace. And to show this, He let everything happen: sin, the fall of man, the incarnation of Jesus, and redemption through His death and resurrection. He did all that to show us His goodness, so how can we ever question it?

God did not show His goodness by giving us comfortable earthly lives, but by giving us an eternal destiny with Him. So we shouldn’t doubt God’s goodness because of material discomfort or suffering. And we shouldn’t tell others that the point of being a Christian is to live a better life. It is our eternal destiny that counts because God, to show His love, redeemed us for eternity and not for this temporal world.

We have heard verse 8 many times: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.” Paul emphasizes two things here. First, we are not saved by ourselves. No matter how good we think we are compared to others, we will never be good enough to be righteous of ourselves in God’s eyes. Secondly we are not saved by works. We cannot give enough sacrifices or offerings, prayers or good works to please God and merit salvation. Most religions rely on one of these two things for salvation, and Paul rejects both. It is only by God’s goodness and grace that we are saved.

In verse 10, Paul then tells us how we should react to this. Since God made us a new “workmanship,” (or a new “creation”) we should do good works that God prepared for us. We are not saved *by* good works, but saved *for* good works. We cannot do enough good deeds to merit salvation, but once saved by grace through faith, we can please God by doing good works. That is our purpose and mission in life. And that is our response to the unquestionable goodness of God. This message is not new, but I pray that we might listen to it in a new way.