

2015_03_15 Passion 4
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Its Not about You, It Is for You

Ephesians 2:1–10

INI

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Amen.

Ephesians 2:1–10

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This Word of the Lord was spoken for you.

You couldn't help overhearing your name. You're standing by your locker at school and just across the hallway is a group of friends talking. Your friends. They're smiling; laughing even! And they are talking about you. Suspicions are stirred.

We are by nature insecure; a bit or even a lot suspicious of others. High school, especially, seems to exaggerate this attitude where we think everything is about me. Everyone is looking at me. Everyone is talking about me. Everyone is against me. Does she like me? Does he even know I exist? Did they notice my new earrings? We are by nature insecure, and when we find people talking behind our back, it leads to all sorts of suspicions. What are they saying? Are they plotting against me?

Well, it turns out they were talking about you. But it was not really about you as much as it was for you. You see, next Friday is your birthday. And your best friend has gone to great lengths to plan a surprise party for you. He asks you to stop by his house after school and you walk right into it: a group of people who care for you, jumping out with streamers and party hats, yelling: “surprise!” They weren’t gossiping about you; they were planning something for you.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Without even knowing what we were doing, we walked right into it. A gift of God. A planned salvation and God’s creation of something new; you’ve walked right into it; into Him. This gift is not about you at all; “And that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God.” This is not about you; it is for you. It is not about you it is about Christ, in whom we are raised up a new creation. It is not about you, it is for you.

But there is something in us that isn’t so easily convinced. There is a part of us that still has suspicions. A sneaking feeling that this cannot be so simple. There is an insecurity in us that keeps thinking this is about me. And so we begin asking questions.

Today we’ll explore three questions that relate to our sneaking suspicious about the grace of God has saved us:

- 1) But what about the rest?
- 2) But what if I don’t feel it?
- 3) But what if I haven’t done enough works?

Let us pray, O Holy Spirit, seal in us the sure and certain promise of our salvation. Amen.

1) But what about the rest?

Sneaking suspicions. Greedy gossip. Wicked whispers. It fills the air. And it leads us to all sorts of crooked thoughts and evil places.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

So we ask the question: well, what about the rest? Who are they? Why does God save some and not others?

And so our suspicions are stirred. Greedy gossip. Wicked whispers. It permeates the air. We get into little groups around the lockers at school and start calling people names. We call out politicians and celebrities. We point at the news anchor who lied and say, "Can you believe that?" We gawk at the congressman's scandal. "Those politicians, they are all corrupt." We whisper about the couple who is getting a divorce. "I would never let that happen to my marriage."

And we think this text is about us vs. them. And we plot against them. We plan for their down fall. And it permeates the air we breathe. The prince of the air has polluted our oxygen and we are breathing it. The same insecurities and suspicions have led us into our own selfish lusts, unloving attitudes, and sins against others. For we too were once dead, by nature children of wrath.

But the truth is, this is not about the rest. And it is not about you. This is about Christ. God has planned and prepared a surprise gift; and he endeavors to give this to you not because of who you are or what you've done, but because of who Jesus is and because of what you believe and because he loves you.

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,
9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

It is not about you, it is for you.

2) But what if I don't feel it?

Suspicion and insecurity can be detrimental to a relationship. When trust is lost, we see all sorts of bad fruits that follow. You've overheard them mention your name. But you don't feel so good about it. Because you think it is all about you; you jump to conclusions: why am I not laughing along with them; why am I not experiencing what they are experiencing; what have they got, that I ain't got?

And so you ask another question: "But what if I don't feel it?"

This is what Erik was wondering. Erik went to his first Christian rock concert, excited to see what the fuss was all about. Erik had been a Lutheran his whole life, and now, as

a college student he was interested in exploring what other Christians are up to. And so he went with some of his college friends to his first Christian rock concert.

It was exciting. The music, the energy, there was a vibe in the crowd that everyone seemed to be feeding off of. Then a young man came to the mic. He figured he was about the same age. And he told a story.

“Five years ago, I was an alcoholic, addicted to heroin, and homeless. I had hit rock bottom. But it was at that point, the lowest experience of my life, that everything changed. As I was pan handling along the bridge where I used to sleep, someone stopped by and gave me this.” And he held up a Billy Graham pamphlet with the title, ‘How to receive Christ.’ “It was then that everything changed. I received Christ into my heart and turned my life around. Now its your chance to do the same. As Jesus said, ‘You must be born again!’ If you haven’t done so already, come forward and accept Jesus and everything will change.”

And while everyone else seemed enthused and joyful, Erik was troubled. He had been a believer his whole life, at least he thought; but he had never had an experience like that. He had never felt that moment when everything changed. As a Lutheran, his experience was supposed to have happened when he was a baby. That was when he came to faith. But now he wondered. As he went home, he kept wondering, why don’t I feel as excited as these other Christians? Suspicions are stirred.

They hand out pamphlets as he leaves. So he opens it up and reads it that night. In order to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior you must 1) admit your need (I am a sinner). 2) be willing to turn from your sins (repent). 3) believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave. 4) through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit.

But why can’t Erik stop after 3? Why does he need to do something? Is there something about repenting and believing that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave that is incomplete. Suspicions and insecurities.

When we think this is about me, it leads to all kinds of suspicions and insecurities. Suspicions of God: how can babies be saved when they can’t do step four? Suspicions of others: how can they be saved when their worship service seems so boring. Suspicions of ourselves: how can I be saved when I don’t always feel so certain or so excited. How can I be saved when there are times I down right hate myself for what I do. How can I be saved when Jesus doesn’t seem to be controlling my life. And what does this pamphlet suggest in effect? Rinse and repeat.

But in our text, we discover the answer we need: its not about you, its about Christ. God is not plotting something against you; or measuring your commitment or prayers or decision or experience. This is not about you at all; it is for you.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

We walk through that door into a celebration of God's grace without us even knowing it. As babies for Christians like Erik; as adults for others. It happens before we ever get to step four; before we ever have a chance to invite Jesus in, He's already there. You who were once dead, God has made alive. In a moment, in an instant, in the heavenly places, God created life. Yes, we may pray for Jesus to enter our heart and life, and yes we should be excited about this; but these are only fruits of faith. This text before us is pure gospel.

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent, so all who turn to the cross of Christ and see there God's only begotten sacrifice of salvation will be saved. It is not about what you feel or what you do. It's not about you; it is for you.

3) But what if I haven't done enough works?

Despite your suspicions, your insecurity, your been brought right into it. Little did you know that all along, they've been planning, not plotting. Devising a plan to celebrate, to rejoice, to join you in the love you have for one another. Your friends, your Christian family, and your God are welcoming you together into the gift which is Yours in Christ Jesus.

But that sneaking suspicion creeps in and you ask, what if I haven't done enough works? What if I don't deserve to enter that door, and join the celebration?

That is sometimes how we speak of our works. As if they are something that happens before God gives us the gift. As if they are something that proves our readiness to enter the banquet celebration of heaven.

But the truth is, we're already there. We're walking in it. As Luther puts it, "faith does a good work, before there is any asking as to what work needs to be done." Before we even know it, we're walking in this new creation.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

When God creates something, he doesn't need our help or cooperation to accomplish it. He doesn't need us to invent works or imagine greater works. Down to the last detail, God has planned and executed this work. He has created you, given you a vocation, and in Christ Jesus, all is complete. There are no demands or expectations for what you need to do to get in the door. You are already in His house, His celebration, His joy; you are seated in the heavenly places. You are God's creation. There is nothing more for you to do than to walk right into it.

As a teenager or young adult, you are God's creation. Your parents just want to see you and know what is going on in your life. Its been days since they've seen you for more than a passing moment. Mom made a nice meal for you and as much as you don't like talking to your parents about what is going on your life, you know you need to. And in love for your parents, you walk right into the good work God has prepared.

As a parent, you are God's creation. You see your child has messed up again and it is up to you to respond. And even though you don't always know what to say, or the right way to say it, you know you need to say something. And in words of correction and forgiveness, you walk right into the good work God has prepared.

As husband and wife, you are God's creation. You are worn thin after a tough week at work, long hours, and heavy traffic on your way home. You just want to eat dinner, watch some TV, and then go to bed. But she has been alone at home all week and needs to talk. And as much as there are tough things you need to talk about, you know she needs you to talk and she knows you need her to make dinner; and you both discover a good work that you are walking in together and its called marriage.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

These works are not about you; they about Christ and the neighbor who needs you. These works are not about what you must do; they are for you to do.

Without even knowing, we walked right into it. A gift of God. A planned salvation and God's creation of something new; you've walked right into it; into Christ. This gift is not about you at all; "And that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God." This is not about you; it is for you. It is not about you it is about Christ, in whom we are raised up a new creation. It is not about you, it is for you:

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,
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Amen.