

faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

God’s grace described in Ephesians 2 looks and sounds and feels a lot like God’s grace in 2Chronicles 36. It is because of God’s love for us, and his mercy toward us, that we have been made alive with Christ, not by an effort or goodness of our own. We were dead and dead people can’t do anything. God didn’t send Cyrus to overthrow Babylon because his people deserved it, but because of his love for them and his faithfulness to his own promises. Rather than leaving us dead in our transgressions, God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms with him, not because we deserved it, but because by doing so, all creation might behold the incomparable riches of God’s grace. In other words, if you want a demonstration of just how loving and gracious and kind God is, look no further than the mirror when you wake up because we are the evidence.

We are a trophy of God’s grace. The point of a trophy isn’t the trophy, but the accomplishment of the person whose it is. Does that make sense? The trophy might be amazing and tall and golden, but we don’t admire the trophy as though the trophy has done something great; we think, “wow, whoever received this trophy must have done something truly amazing.” It is by God’s grace alone that we have been saved. It is a gift to be received pure and simple. If someone gives you an extraordinary gift and you receive it from them, you don’t go around saying, “I received this gift. I could have rejected it, but I didn’t. That means this gift isn’t really a gift because I had to receive it.” We’re not saved by what we do, which is why we can’t boast. And on a side note, here’s why you don’t want to take any credit for your salvation, because if you earned it, then you have to keep earning it, and if your salvation is up to you, then you’ll lose it for sure.

The final point Paul makes preempts those who would take God’s grace and exploit it by living the way they lived before they were forgiven. Paul says that while our salvation is a pure gift from God, the result of our salvation is that we do the good works God prepared in advance for us to do. To go back to Matt’s sermon a couple of weeks ago, the good works are the following through to the righteousness we’ve been given. To go back to Pastor Brianna’s communion one week ago, the blood of Jesus is the source of our salvation and good works are the result of it. But to be clear, we cannot possibly receive God’s grace, be born again, adopted into God’s family, filled with his Spirit, and not have God produce fruit through our lives. It’s impossible. Just like it’s impossible for a healthy apple tree to do anything other than produce apples. So what do we take away from these passages of Scripture. [John 6:1-15 feeding of 5000...]

Conclusions

God’s judgment against his people for their sins prefigures his judgment against Jesus for our sins. God judged the sins of his people by driving them from the land he gave to them and destroying the temple and Jerusalem. Many of them were killed. Others were taken captive and served a foreign king in a foreign land. They were humiliated and their land left desolate. And yet, God sovereignly and graciously restored them. Because of his great love for us, God poured out the wrath for our sins on Jesus, who himself was beaten, humiliated, and crucified. Part of the way we prepare our hearts to remember and celebrate Easter is to remember God’s kindness and faithfulness to his people, the culmination of which is in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

While God has poured out his wrath on Jesus for our sins, if we are unfaithful and adopt the practices of the world around us, we will experience God’s discipline. When Jesus prays for his disciples, Jesus says that they, “are not of the world just as I am not of the world (John 17:16).” In Romans 12:1-2, Paul warns the church not to

“conform to the pattern of the world.” James warns the church that “friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4).” The Apostle John warns his congregation, “Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Part of the way we prepare our hearts to remember and celebrate Easter is to ask the Holy Spirit to show us if we have adopted the thoughts, attitudes, habits, speech patterns, or actions of the world around us that are an offense to God. It’s worth remembering that God’s love is both expressed in sending Jesus to pay the price for our sin, and in disciplining his children (Hebrews 12:7-11).

The gift of our salvation leads to good works prepared in advance for us to do through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The question of the relationship between salvation and good works is ancient. James, in fact, speaks a pretty definitive word when he says, “But someone will say, “*You have faith; I have deeds.*” *Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do... Faith without works is dead* (James 2:18, 26).” Again, the source of our salvation is the death of Jesus alone. Nothing else. However, it is equally true that the result of our salvation is good works. Part of the way we prepare our hearts to remember and celebrate Easter is to ask the Holy Spirit to show us whether or not we are producing the kind of fruit he wants us to produce, and if we’re not, ask him to produce that fruit in and through us.



March 14, 2021

Pastor Jared Stoner



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Easter 2021 #2

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This morning, we're going to continue our series of messages leading up to Easter. During these Lenten messages, we are, along with the church all over the world, preparing our hearts to remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus. So much of that preparation is simply remembering and reflecting on why Jesus came in the first place. In order to help us in that process, we're looking at the story of Scripture, which not only recounts our need of a savior in frequent detail, but paints numerous pictures of what our savior would look like. We'll begin this morning by reading 2Chronicles 36:14-23.

Persistent Compromise

(2Chronicles 36:14-23)

2Chronicles 36:14-23 *“¹⁴Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. ¹⁵The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. ¹⁷He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁸He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD'S temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. ¹⁹They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. ²⁰He carried into exile to Babylon*

the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. ²¹The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah. ²²In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: ²³This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.””

In verse 14, the chronicler summarizes what led God to remove his people from their promised land and send them into exile. Not only had the kings been unfaithful to the Lord, but the nation as a whole, from it's priests to its people—young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural. Those sins build and build until they form a tidal wave of judgment that would roar through the land, destroying its most sacred treasures and displacing its people.

We learn that God's people grew in their unfaithfulness, that is, they did what the nations around them were doing rather than what God commanded them to do, even to the point that they worshiped other gods in the temple. The prophets provide numerous examples of these types of sins and of the gods the Israelites followed instead of Yahweh, gods like Molech, to whom they burned children alive as sacrifices (Jeremiah 32:35).

Lest we think that God sat idly by while his children went haywire, verse 15 reminds us that God repeatedly sent warnings to his people through the prophets. The prophets decried the sins of God's people and exhorted them in nearly every way possible to turn back to the Lord so that they

might receive his blessing and escape his judgment. That is, God called for his people to repent so that, when they turned to him, they would receive his blessing, which he longed to pour out on them. God, it says, had pity on his people and on the temple he had enabled them to build. God did not want to judge his people. He did not want to send them into exile. He did not want to see the temple plundered, but his people would not listen.

In fact, verse 16 says that not only did the people not listen, but they mocked the prophets and despised his word until God's wrath was aroused and there was nothing left to be done. That's why Isaiah warns the people, *“⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon (Isaiah 55:6-7).”* But the people did not turn to the Lord.

Verses 17-21 summarize God's judgment against his people. God brought the Babylonian war machine into tiny Israel. After nearly a two-year siege of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar did as he was wont to do: he killed young and old alike, men and women, and he killed them where he found them, including in the temple. He plundered the temple, then burned it, and tore down the wall around Jerusalem after removing everything of value there. Finally, he removed the remnant of those who survived the killing and they went to serve him in a foreign land. As such, the land was able to rest as God commanded that it should, until the 70 years of their exile were up.

None of these things are particular surprising. God had told his people over and over again that if they would obey him, they would receive his blessing, but if they rebelled against him, he would punish them and remove them from the land. What's surprising, however—even shocking—is how 2Chronicles ends. In verses 22-23, we come to find out that God's judgment was not

terminal. It wasn't the end, but one step in the process of redemption, that in the midst of loss and suffering, God had a plan to restore his people. He hadn't given up on them. He hadn't turned his back on them. He hadn't forsaken them even though they showed again and again and again that they deserved precisely that.

Just as God had used Nebuchadnezzar to remove his people from their land, destroy the temple, and sack the city of Jerusalem, so God would use another ruler to return his people back to their land, rebuild the temple, and restore the city of David, Jerusalem. So, in 539bc, the Persian King Cyrus the Great invaded Babylon, overpowered it, and appointed governors over it. God then spoke to Cyrus, who wrote these words: *“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple [house] for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.”* The decree of Cyrus echoes David's words to his son, Solomon in 1Chronicles 22:6: *“Then David called for Solomon his son and charged him to build temple [a house] for the Lord, the God of Israel.”* As such, Cyrus is sometimes called the Gentile Messiah. He sent the Israelites back to Israel and paid for the construction of the temple. God's gracious generosity toward his people in the midst of their sin and its devastating effects wasn't an end in itself, but points to God's ultimate act of gracious generosity toward sinful human beings, and we read about that in Ephesians 2:4-10.

Saved By Grace (Ephesians 2:4-10)

Ephesians 2:4–10 says, *“⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through*