



AN OLD TESTAMENT PICTURE OF SALVATION

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Greetings and welcome. It's good to be with you today. Our scripture reading is one that is well loved and oft quoted – and rightfully so. In Ephesians 2:8-10, the apostle Paul writes: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Paul succinctly states God's great scheme of redemption in this wonderful passage. We are saved because of God's grace by placing our faith in Jesus Christ so that we might give our lives in service to Him. But what does that look like? HOW does grace save, through faith, and what does it result in? Often, the best way to understand a profound truth is to see it demonstrated. There is a story in the Old Testament that powerfully illustrates salvation by grace, through faith, unto good works. We want to look at that account today, and perhaps it will answer some questions and dispel some modern myths we hear about salvation.

In Ephesians 2:8-10, the apostle Paul summarizes three major aspects of salvation. He shows us the cause, the means, and the purpose of salvation. He clearly states that we are saved because of God's unmerited favor shown to us. “For by grace you have been saved...”, he says in verse 8. We did not and cannot earn salvation. Rather, God in loving kindness, generously made salvation possible by offering His own Son as an atonement and propitiation for our sins. We did nothing to deserve this – quite the contrary. We deserve God's judgment and wrath because of our sins. So, salvation is offered to every sinner based on God's grace and favor. But if this were all that was involved, then everybody would be saved, and we know that's not the case. So, you see, this grace is not received unconditionally. God offers salvation because of grace, and it is possible only because of grace. But Paul says that salvation which comes by grace is obtained through faith. We lay hold on God's generous and undeserved offer to save by trusting in Christ, His Son. Paul states it this way in Romans 5:1-2, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have

access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Grace is the divine cause and faith is the appropriating force that brings salvation. And then Paul says in Ephesians 2:10 that having been saved by grace through faith, “we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.” That is, we have been saved and set apart to belong to Him and to therefore glorify and serve Him according to His will. That’s God’s scheme of human redemption in a nutshell.

Now, that scheme was revealed in Christ and made known to the world through the work of His inspired apostles in the New Testament scriptures. Though this plan was completed and unveiled in the coming and work of Christ, this basis of God’s dealing with man goes back to the beginning of time, man just didn’t know and understand it. In other words, God’s forgiveness and spiritual blessings upon mankind have always been because of grace, because since the time of Adam, all people have sinned and are therefore under God’s judgment. So, anything sinners have received short of God’s judgment is on the basis of God’s unmerited favor or grace. When God has offered such blessings, they had to be received through faith, and God used those who He thus blessed for His glory and His purposes. We see this, for example in Noah. Noah was an upright man in comparison to the world around him, but Noah was still a sinner for ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The bible says, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord...” (Genesis 6:8). But God had something for Noah to do. The Hebrew writer tells us in Hebrews 11:7 “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” So, God showed grace to Noah in saving him out of a wicked world and from the flood, Noah received that salvation by believing and acting by that faith upon what God said, and he built the ark in order that he and his family could be saved. Now, did Noah earn his salvation by building the ark? Of course not! Was a sin forgiven for each nail he drove? Of course not! But would Noah have been saved if he had refused to do what God said and not built the ark (and according to the plan God gave him)? I think we’re all honest enough to know the answer to that question. And then, why did God save Noah and his household? Because God would use Noah and his family to repopulate the earth and continue His purposes for the human family. So, Noah, you see, was saved by grace, through faith, unto good works.

We can say the same of Abraham. Abraham was great man who stood out from among others, but he was still a sinful man. Nonetheless, God chose to bless him. Abraham received God’s blessings through faith or believing God which was manifested in the fact that he DID those things God told him to do. He left Ur. He journeyed to the yet unseen promised land. He offered his son Isaac, and so forth. All of those were his faith in action. Why did God do this? Because Abraham was to serve God and be the father of a great nation God would use to bring Christ into the world to save you and me. So again, we have God’s spiritual blessings offered by grace, received by an active and obedient faith, for the purpose of setting that person or those people apart to serve Him. Paul tells us in our text that this is what occurs in our salvation from sin.

There is much controversy however in what is included in these three things Paul mentions: grace, faith, and good works. Are we saved by grace alone? Is the faith Paul talks about just a mental agreement or assent to some facts or is there more meaning to placing one’s faith in Christ? Are repentance and baptism part of that faith or are they good works that come after? Those are all points of great disagreement in the religious world today. I want to approach those questions by looking at an event that occurred several hundred years before Paul wrote those words that provide a powerful illustration of the concept He sets forth. After all, Paul said “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (Romans

15:4) And this story has much to teach us about what it means to depend upon God and trust another for salvation. I hope you consider it carefully in view of the questions we cited a moment ago.

The story is recorded in the book of 2 Kings, chapter 5, and involves a notable man of that day named Naaman. He was from Syria and was a powerful military captain for that country. He had wealth, power, rank, and position but the bible tells us in 2 Kings 5:1 that “he was a leper.” Leprosy is a terrible disease but especially so in bible times when there was no cure and no treatment. The leper was condemned to a humiliating, painful, and disgusting death as it spread and ravaged the body. It was highly contagious and dreaded affliction, and it did not discriminate based on age, sex, ethnicity, or social standing. And leprosy is a powerful picture in the bible of sin and the true condition of every sinner. Naaman, regardless of his wealth and power, was condemned to die unless God intervened. That’s the condition of every sinner today. Science can’t treat your sin. A doctor can’t treat it. A psychiatrist can’t treat it. A priest can’t treat it. YOU can’t treat it. Only God has the power to forgive and remove sin.

The story goes on to tell us that Naaman had a servant who was from Israel and had been brought back from war to serve Naaman’s wife. She was godly girl who believed in God and believed the prophets of God. She knew of the great prophet Elisha and that God had given him the power to heal. So, she got word to Naaman that if he would just get to the land of Israel and find Elisha that Elisha could heal him of his leprosy. Naaman may not have been disposed to go seeking a Jewish prophet’s advice and help but he was desperate. He understood his condition and that he had no hope otherwise. I wish more sinners would understand their condition today. I wish more sinners understood what it means to be lost and how awful an eternity in hell is going to be without God.

So, the record tells us Naaman got his entourage and his things together and he hastens over to Israel to locate this prophet, Elisha. He finally finds him and comes to Elisha’s house hoping for great things but he’s immediately disappointed. He’s disappointed because it didn’t go according to the way he had first imagined. Naaman thought he could come with great gifts, Elisha would come out to receive his gifts and perform a grand and exciting ceremony and in great pomp and circumstance, heal his leprosy. But that’s not what happened. Instead, Elisha doesn’t even come out to see him. He sends a messenger out to Naaman who simply tells him that if he wants to be healed, he needs to go down to the Jordan River, wade out into the water, and dip or immerse himself seven times, and he will be clean. Well, that was not only laughable to Naaman, but it was also infuriating. Naaman got angry (just like some sinners get angry when God doesn’t let them do things their way and, on their terms, but rather requires something of them).

Look beginning in verse 9: “Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.'" Do you notice what Naaman thought? By the way, phrases like “but I thought” or “I said to myself...” will get us in trouble with God every time. That’s one of our greatest problems. Instead of just listening and believing and obeying God, we come to God with our own expectations and then get upset if God doesn’t see or do it our way. But what did Naaman think? “HE will surely come out to ME and stand and call on the name of the Lord HIS God, and wave HIS hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.” You see, he expected Elisha to do it all. He expected a sensational event where God just does it all and that’s that. But no! There was something for Naaman to do.

What was special about the water in the Jordan River? Did it possess some healing property? Was it a magical stream that was known to cure leprosy? Of course not. So, why did he have to go and dip seven times in the Jordan River? Couldn't God have just healed him there on the spot? Yes, God could have but God didn't. What did God expect of Naaman? God expected Naaman to have faith. What kind of faith? The faith that would obey by doing even may have seemed strange – to go down and dip seven times in the muddy Jordan River. Did Naaman have that kind of faith? Not at the first. He instead got angry and was ready storm off back to Syria and die a leper. He said “why the Jordan River? Why can't I go somewhere else, to a nicer, cleaner place; ANOTHER river...?” You see, He thought like MANY people think today. “What difference does it make?” “God can save me some other way...” Thankfully, though, he had some wise servants who took him aside and reasoned with him and said “Naaman, think about it. If God had said what you wanted Him to say, you would have believed Him. So, why not just do what He says now. You either believe Him or you don't.” Naaman thought about it and finally conceded they were right. He now humbly follows the prophet's instructions, not because he understands why but because he's willing to take him at his word. Verse 14 says, “So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”

Now, friends this is a powerful picture and pattern of how God saved sinners. Naaman was healed by God's grace. Did he earn it? No! He did nothing to merit the prophet offering to him the opportunity to be cleansed. It was God's power and only God's power that healed Naaman. It was purely God's unmerited favor that extended that healing to this sinful and helpless man. But was God's willingness to cleanse and heal conditional? Absolutely! What if Naaman had turned around in his fit of rage and stomped back home to Syria? Or what if he had gone down to another river besides the Jordan and dipped seven times? Or what if he had reluctantly gone to the Jordan River, waded out and dipped once, twice, three, maybe even a fourth time and impatiently and disgustedly said “that prophet and his God don't know what they're talking about” and stormed out of the water, gotten in his chariot and gone home. What would he have been? A leper. A wet, upset, disappointed leper.

So, his cleansing was on the sole basis of God's grace but what was it conditioned upon? Naaman's faith. What kind of faith? Well, there's only one kind of saving faith, according to not only this story but much later according to James in James chapter 2 and the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 11: that is faith that acts. Faith that not only mentally believes but then moves in response to what God commands. It's that simple. Now, Jesus commanded sinners to be baptized to be saved. And like Naaman the religious world is FULL of people who disagree with that, argue against it, and deny it. They even get angry about it. But friend, listen to Jesus: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...” (Mark 16:16). “Unless one is born of WATER and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5) “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) Can a person say he believes Jesus Christ is he turns around and argues with that and denies and refuses to do it? Or if we try to be saved in some other way? The answer is no.

Naaman was cleansed BY GRACE (he didn't earn it), and THROUGH FAITH (he had to do what God's prophet told him to do). Was he cleansed before he did what God commanded? No. Was there something powerful and magical in the waters of Jordan that healed him? No. But God's power went to work and cleansed him on the basis of God's grace when Naaman believed and thus submitted himself to God's command. Now, look at what Paul said in Colossians 2:12, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the

dead." Isn't that simple? Isn't that beautiful. Baptism doesn't earn us salvation. But it's commanded if want to be saved. It is a condition of faith.

But finally, Paul said we have been saved by grace, through faith, according to Ephesians 2:10 "unto good works..." Well, we see this in the case of Naaman as well. Notice that he wasn't cleansed UNTIL he, in faith, obeyed God's command to dip seven times in Jordan. But that's not where Naaman's devotion ended. That was the point of cleansing but look what he did next. 2 Kings 5:15-17 "And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant." But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." (You see, it was all by grace even though he had to obey the prophet) "And he urged him to take it, but he refused. So Naaman said, "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD."

What is this about? He wanted to take part of that holy land back home with him where he would continue to worship and serve the God who had cleansed him. That's a wonderful picture of today. Naaman was cleansed by grace through faith unto a continued life of devotion, service, and good works. That's how it is with us. God in His grace is willing to save, we trust His Son by turning from our sins and being buried with Him in baptism having our sins washed away (Acts 22:16). God then sets us apart and sanctifies us for a life of obedience and service to His cause and for His purposes. Have you been cleansed? Have you OBEYED the gospel of Christ. I hope you will hasten to the water and do just that today.

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