

SERIES: This We Believe
SERMON: **I Believe in Salvation**
SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:1-10
SPEAKER: Josh Black
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Introduction: If I were to cite one example to prove the fact that we live in a world that is in desperate need of salvation I think I would mention Adolf Hitler. I was reminded of this on Monday while watching the movie *Expelled*. There was a portion of the movie where Ben Stein was interviewing people to try to find answers that could explain Hitler's motivation for mass genocide. They explained that it was Hitler's belief in Darwin's theory of evolution that led him to kill off all of the marginals in society. He was trying speed up the process of evolution by killing the physically defective as well as his enemies. He believed this would be a first step towards creating a "new society" inhabited by a "new" and perfected humanity. Ironically he thought he was blessing his country and the world by destroying that which he believed was bad in society.

The movie caused me to reflect on many things. One thought that I had was that the church also claims to be a new society. But the church is a society that is supposed to *embrace* those who are imperfect. And the true church desires to see our imperfect world transformed by becoming a society that loves its enemies. However, the church does not try to create this new society by changing the external environment. The Christian Church is a society that has been transformed internally; it is a society of new men and women who have been changed on the inside by God and who in turn will live changed lives in the world, for God. Christians admit that the world we live in is imperfect, but they trust that God's plan for saving and redeeming this world will ultimately prevail.

The Proposed Revision of our Statement of Faith, Article 7 reads, "*We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone.*"

My sermon this morning is not on the church – it is on salvation, but the proposed revision of our Statement of Faith essentially says that the true church is comprised of those who have truly received salvation. Therefore it is necessary that we look closely at what God's plan for salvation.

The book of Ephesians goes much deeper than this Statement and gives us a full picture of God's glorious purpose and plan for salvation. Paul shows us that the *true* church will prevail because God has begun the process of transformation and God will therefore be faithful to complete the transformation in each of us who have received his gift of salvation, for the sake of his glory.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians as we explore God's purpose and plan for his glory through his plan of salvation. We will read verses 3-14 in chapter 1 and verses 1-10 in chapter 2.
Ephesians 1:3-14:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before

the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 2:1-10:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 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. 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. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

I’m going to do my best to explain salvation in a logical order starting with the Father’s purpose and plan from the beginning, moving on to Jesus’ work in salvation and finishing with God’s completion and perfection of salvation through the Holy Spirit. As a result of following a logical order instead of going verse by verse, we will be jumping around in these two chapters quite a bit this morning. Please keep your Bibles open and follow along. Let’s get started.

So, what is God’s purpose and plan for salvation?

God’s purpose and plan for salvation was established in the beginning – by the Father.

Verse 3 says, “*He blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ*”; the blessing spoken of here is salvation, through Jesus. Verse 6 reminds us that this blessing is free; it is undeserved grace. So if we didn’t deserve to be blessed in Christ why did God bless us so richly?

We're going to find that there are a lot of answers to this question this morning, but God's primary purpose in offering us salvation is to bring glory to himself.

God's primary purpose for salvation is *His glory*. (1:3-4, 6)

He blesses us, so that we can bless him. He desires for us to respond to his grace in the same way Paul did when he began this letter: "*Praise be to God.*" God blesses us so that we might bless him with all that we are. His purpose from the beginning, as verse 4 reminds us, was for us to be holy and blameless in his sight, to the praise of his glorious grace. This first point summarizes my whole sermon. Everything else will explain and support this point. And everything in me wants to challenge each of you to be so overwhelmed with the riches of God's glorious grace that you will be a fountain, that is a constant source of glory to God with everything that you do and everything that you are. It is my prayer that you would not be overwhelmed with the troubles the world throws at you, but that you would be overwhelmed with God's glory and plan for your life. I pray that you would be able "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep" the love of God is and that you would be convinced that His purposes and plans will ultimately prevail!

So how does God bless us so that we might bless him? He begins to bless us by choosing us.

God initiates salvation before the foundation of the earth: *Predestination*. (1:4, 5)

The Bible is clear that God chooses us and that man's salvation was determined before the creation of the world. Here are a couple verses that show this:

Ephesians 1:4-5, "*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.*"

Ephesians 1:11, "*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.*"

Romans 8:28-30, "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*"

So God is the one who initiates the process of salvation.

God initiates salvation before the foundation of the earth: *Predestination*. (1:4, 5)

If most of us were honest we would admit that the idea of God picking people for salvation makes us a little uncomfortable. Others may flat out not believe that God predestines people for salvation. But like it or not the idea of predestination comes from the Bible. The reason I bring it up this morning is because it is right here in our text, but also to show you that God's plan of salvation was established for you before you were ever born. In fact God's plan of salvation was

established before the creation of the world. Salvation was God's idea in the beginning. It was never an afterthought or a knee jerk reaction to a plan that went south. God is in control. God has had a plan for salvation from the beginning, for the sake of his glory. We can praise God that we are the recipients of his grace and are included in his plan.

I'm not an expert on the doctrine of predestination and I don't believe anyone is. The doctrine is a mystery, but we can learn some things about predestination from our text.

First of all, verse 5 tells us that predestination is according to God's pleasure and will; God delights in predestination. Secondly, predestination is an act of unconditional love. Verse 4 says that we were predestined before the creation of the world. If God chose us before the creation of the world then he chose us before we did anything good or bad, therefore predestination is unconditional and not based on any good we possess. We also know that predestination is personal. Verse 4 tells us that "in love" he predestined us.

If God's primary purpose in salvation is His glory then God's primary motivation for salvation is His love.

God's primary motivation for salvation is His love. (1:4, 5)

We know this because the text tells us so but we also know this because verse 5 says that his plan for us "to be adopted as sons." The word adoption again implies that God is personal and relational and that while He always acts for the sake of his glory, he also always acts according to his love for us. The doctrine of predestination is often called impersonal and unloving. Scripture doesn't allow us to have that view of predestination.

I trust that many of you think you understand the love of God, but maybe you don't see how predestination and love can fit together. I think that as we do a brief recap on the nature of man, which Mike covered two weeks ago, we will see that maybe we don't fully understand the love of God. I think we will also see how predestination is necessary if we are to receive the love of God.

Some have sought to reconcile the predestination debate by likening the salvation process to a man who is drowning. Those who developed this illustration say that when God sees man drowning in his sin he throws him a lifeline; so God *does* initiate salvation – God chooses us. But man has the choice as to whether or not to grab the lifeline and accept the salvation that is being offered to him. I don't completely disagree with this illustration, but tend to think the opponents of this view have a better case, from Scripture. The opponents to this illustration look at **Ephesians 2:1-3** and say that the challenge lies in the fact that man is not drowning; man is dead.

Let's look at those verses again: *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world...All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

Man's problem from the beginning is that he is dead in his sin and separated from God's glory. (2:1-3)

The opponents to the lifeline illustration say that if you are dead in the water then you don't have the ability to choose the lifeline. If you are dead in your sin then you don't have the spiritual capacity to choose God or the desire to seek God. **Romans 3:10-12:** says, "*None [are] righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.*"

Man's problem from the beginning is that he is dead in his sin and separated from God's glory. (2:1-3)

I tend to believe that man's sin problem is so bad that he cannot choose God and he doesn't have a desire to choose God without God taking the initiative, but there have been godly men throughout the centuries who have disagreed with the view I hold. Both sides of this debate, however, are in agreement that before we receive salvation we are dead in sin. And this death presents a problem. God's plan is for humanity to live for the sake of his glory, but man on his own is not able to glorify God because he is dead in sin. All that man deserves as a result of his sin is the wrath of God, not the love and grace of God.

But God is sovereign and his purpose and his will can not be overcome by anyone or anything. God's purpose and plan for salvation will be accomplished. But how can man, filled with sin and death ever glorify the holy God? **Ephesians 1:9** says that God makes known to us the mystery of his will. What is God's solution? Let's pick up our reading in verse 4 to see how God's plan is revealed. *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus*

God's purpose and plan for salvation is revealed – "in Christ." (2:4-7; 1:7-9)

So how is it possible for dead men and women glorify God?

God makes us alive with Christ by the Holy Spirit: *Regeneration.* (2:5)

By grace, God makes us alive with Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Dead men *can't* save themselves and dead men for sure *can't* praise God. But thank God that his plan of salvation involves his Holy Spirit making our spirits alive so that we can be in relationship with God, for the sake of his glory. This is called regeneration. When someone's soul has been made alive by God they are regenerated; or they are born again. And why does God make us alive?

Verse 4 tells us it is because of his great love for us.

God is rich in mercy: *Grace.* (2:4-5; Rom. 5:8)

Or as Paul says in chapter 1, verse 6, he acts in salvation "because of his glorious grace." And his grace is indeed glorious; it is amazing grace because "when we were dead in transgressions God

made us alive.” Or as **Romans 5:8** says, “*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”

Regeneration is one aspect of the riches of God’s mercy, but it is not all. Look with me at verses 7-9 as we continue “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep” is the love of God. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.*

In addition to regeneration God also redeems and forgives us in Christ.

God redeems and forgives us in Christ: *Justification.* (1:7)

We don’t have time to dive into the depth of meaning in Paul’s words used to describe Christ’s work, but I’d like to briefly define a couple of terms. The word “redeem” means to deliver from bondage or to buy back from slavery. We were slaves to sin and in bondage to transgressions, but Christ redeemed us from that bondage; he paid the price to set us free when he died for us on the cross.

Or in other words the debt for our sins was forgiven because of what Christ did for us. This is remarkable. The debt we have is a debt to God. The challenge is we don’t have what it takes to pay the debt and so God himself pays the debt on our behalf. If we have ever questioned whether or not God is the one who is responsible for our salvation, now would be the time to reconsider. We have been redeemed by God, in Christ. We have been forgiven by God, in Christ. And because our debt and sin is no longer an issue in Christ we are justified before God. “Justification” means that we have been declared right in the eyes of the perfect Judge. We were unrighteous; Christ was righteous and through his death made us righteous. We are now right in the eyes of God.

Christ declares us righteous so that we can be adopted as his sons and daughters.

God gives us a heavenly inheritance in Christ: *Adoption.* (1:5, 11, 14)

Ephesians 1:5 says, “*In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.*” The word “adoption” is very significant. Adoption in the ancient world happened when a rich father who didn’t have a descendant to inherit his estate would “adopt” a man of fine character and credentials to inherit his estate and carry on the family name. But as we have seen we are not of good character and we have no credentials; we are unrighteous and sinful. But isn’t this the gospel of God’s glorious grace? God adopts those of bad character. He does this in order to give us a heavenly inheritance and he does this because he wants to be in a relationship with us as our Heavenly Father. He’s able to do this because we have been justified by Christ and declared righteous through justification.

I hope that it is clearer to you now that God is the one who initiates salvation and the one who does all the work in salvation. We can take no credit for salvation and therefore only God is to be

praised and glorified. But even though we do no *work* in salvation we do have a role. I'd like to look now at how we can respond to God's work in salvation.

Man's response is to receive salvation by grace, through faith. (1:13a; 2:8-9)

Verse 13 says, "*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.*" Before you can receive the grace that is being offered to you by Jesus you have to hear it.

Man must first hear about God's grace: *Gospel Call.* (1:13a; Rom. 10:14)

Romans 10:14 says, "*But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*" Evangelism is not negated by the doctrine of predestination. Before someone can receive the grace offered in Jesus they have to first hear about it. And as a response to this reality it is our job as believers to preach the good news of the gospel if people are going to respond to the gospel.

And how do we respond to the gospel? Verse 13 says, "*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.*" So after hearing the gospel we have to believe.

Man must then believe in Jesus: *Faith and Repentance.* (1:13a; 2:8-9; Acts 3:19).

But what does it mean to believe? **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, "*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.*" Believing in the gospel means that we have to have faith that what Jesus did for us on the cross is sufficient to bring us into a saving relationship with God. Faith is by grace alone; it has nothing to do with what we have done. Otherwise it would not be grace. To believe is to put your trust in what Christ has done.

True belief will also include true repentance. Repentance is not explicitly expressed in this passage, but it is implied and is explicit in the whole context of the New Testament and in God's overall plan for salvation. Repentance is when we turn our back on our old way of life and sin and turn our eyes to Jesus by faith. **Acts 3:19** says, "*Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.*" This is not to say that we have to get our act together before we can turn to God. That would be a contradiction to faith and grace. But somewhere in the process of true faith in Jesus' work we turn our back on our old way of life and fix our eyes on Jesus.

As mentioned earlier, when we come into a saving relationship with God we are born again or regenerated. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.*" And if we are new creations we will no longer live as we did before we were new creations. That is not to say that we will not still struggle with sin, because we will, but if we have been truly saved then our lives will start to look different.

If we have faith in Christ's work on our behalf and repent then we are born again. And if it is God who has made us alive with Christ then we can have confidence that He who began a good work in us will be faithful to bring it to completion.

God's purpose and plan for salvation in the future is sealed – by the Holy Spirit. (1:10, 13b, 14; 2:6-7)

Again chapter 1, verse 13: *“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.”*

Did you hear that? If you believe, God has marked you and sealed you. You are His! Your salvation is guaranteed. That was a promise!

God's promised inheritance is guaranteed: *Security*. (1:13b, 14a)

Your inheritance, your adoption as a son or daughter into God's glorious family is a sure thing for those who have truly put their faith in Jesus Christ. If you believe you should live your life with confidence. What is it that is eating at you this morning? Is it bigger than God's sure plan for you? Is it bigger than your promised inheritance in His glorious kingdom? No matter what it is, it cannot be bigger than God's glorious grace and plan for your life! He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.

And not only will you live for eternity with your loving Father, but you will no longer live with the pain and toil that you wrestle with today. Let's look at chapter 2 verses 6-7 to see how God's work in salvation will be complete when we are raised with Christ.

God's work in salvation will be complete when we acquire our inheritance: *Glorification*. (14b; 2:6-7; Phil. 1:6)

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 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 purpose in fully redeeming us by his grace was so that we might glorify him. Jesus is the only man who ever lived that has ever perfectly glorified the Father. If God's purposes for his glory are to be accomplished in us then we too will have to be perfected in Christ-likeness. Christ was raised from the dead with a new and perfect resurrection body. He then ascended into heaven and was seated in the heavenly realms with the Father. God's salvation will be completed in us when we too are raised and we receive our perfect resurrection body. Those who have been saved will then also be raised with Christ to live in perfect relationship with God for the sake of his glory. This is called glorification. **1 Corinthians 15:42-49** says it this way:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body...Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

Only as we become just like Christ will we fully fulfill our purpose in glorifying God. Christ was raised physically, so we will be raised physically. The riches of God's grace will be shown in amazing splendor when God's work in redemption is complete. **Philippians 1:6** says, "*He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.*"

But we are not simply in a holding pattern between now and then. We will be perfect and Christ-like in heaven, but God's plan begins now; we are called to become Christ-like now.

Man's process of restoration begins now with a loving response to God's glorious grace. (2:9, 10)

If you take anything away from today's sermon take away this: God's purpose in saving us by grace was for us to glorify Him. He blesses us so that we might bless Him. His grace is a glorious grace.

Paul says in chapter 2, verses 8-10, "*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. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

The heart of the doctrine of grace and salvation is found in verse 9: Man is saved by Christ's work, not by our works.

Man is saved by Christ's work not our works: *Grace.* (2:9)

But verse 10 reminds us what we were saved for: God's glory.

Man is saved for God's glory, unto Christ-like works: *Sanctification.* (2:10)

We glorify God when we become more like Christ and "walk before him holy and blameless." This process of becoming more like Christ is called Sanctification. Sanctification literally means being set apart for God. It is living a life that no longer follows the ways of the world, but follows Jesus.

Verse 10 says that "*we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" Being God's workmanship is simply another way to say that we are born again. We have been re-created by God; we are regenerated by God. The purpose of this regeneration is for the glory of God. We glorify a holy God when we walk in holiness before him. We were re-created to do good works. The good works don't result in re-birth, the re-birth results in good works. But where there are no good works there looms the question of whether or not re-birth ever took place.

We were saved for the sake of glorifying God. God chose us before the foundations of the earth to be saved. He also purposed before the foundations of the earth that we should glorify him

through Christ-like living. If this is not happening then we are not in line with God's purposes in salvation.

If we are placing our confidence in a prayer we said a long time ago or an aisle we walked and are not participating in God's larger scope of restoration that results in Christ-likeness then maybe we don't grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of God is.

Is this all to say that salvation is by grace and sanctification by works? By no means! If God is faithful to complete the work that he began in us then it follows that he will enable us to do good works. However, just like we are responsible to respond to Christ work on our behalf, we are also responsible to respond to the work of the Holy Spirit who is moving us closer towards Christ-likeness.

If you have been saved by God's grace and for His glory you will live like it! If you are a new creation, live like one. The Church is the new society of new men and women. We can change all sorts of things in the church to be more relevant or more attractive, but the only real change that will happen in this world is when people, who have been changed by God, live changed lives in this world for the glory of God. Are we making a difference? When the world sees the people from First Free out in the world do they see the hope you have in Christ or is it hard for them to tell the difference between you and everyone else? When is the church going to quit acting just like the world and start living like they have been saved by grace?

Conclusion:

If God's plan of salvation has never gone from your head to your heart then it probably has never made it to your feet. I trust that most people in this church agree with God's plan of salvation in their head, but I pray that you would all receive the grace that God has offered you in your heart and that you would be born again and that you would live changed lives for God's glory. This is not simply an invitation to those of you who are sitting here that know you are not a Christian, it is an invitation to those of you who think you're a Christian, but your Christianity has never gone *beyond* your thinking. I suspect there are many of you here this morning that Satan has lulled off to sleep and who think they are right with God, but if your heart and your life have not been changed it doesn't matter how much knowledge about salvation you have or how often you attend church. God's plan of salvation never had anything to do with a church roster; it has everything to do with a heavenly roster. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3, "*You must be born again!*" Saying "the prayer" is no guarantee that you have been saved. Sanctification is the true test as to whether or not you have received salvation.

If you're working for God out of a sense of obligation to him, or to be a responsible parent, or for some other external motivation, and not out of response to the love that has been lavished on you then you may be putting your trust in works. Your works won't save you. The only work that will save you is the work of Christ on the cross. And the only works that are pleasing to God and for His glory are the works that flow out of a relationship with him; the kind of works that are returning blessing for blessing. If you haven't received the blessing and the free gift of grace that God has provided then you have nothing to give back to him.

But you can receive that blessing this morning. All you have to do is to receive the grace that has been offered to you through Jesus Christ. Believe in Jesus, turn away from the hopeless life you are living and turn towards a hope-filled life now and in eternity through Jesus. He will take you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way; God wants you to be just like Jesus for the sake of his glory!

Are you overwhelmed with the pressures of life? I pray that you become overwhelmed with the grace of God and his glorious and eternal plan of restoring you. Are you still living your life in bondage to sin? I pray that you would be overwhelmed with the grace of God and his glorious and eternal plan of redeeming you and freeing you from that bondage. Your challenges in life may be real, but they are small compared to God's solution in Jesus.

Let's pray! (Ephesians 3:14-21)