

December 13, 2015

## ***Salvation Comes From the Lord***

Grace is a most difficult concept for us to comprehend. It is nearly impossible for us to fully understand that the Father, through the death of his only Son on the cross, made it possible for each of us to be made righteous. We do not deserve God's mercy and we cannot merit his grace. In fact, the Apostle Paul would say the Father did everything to make grace happen while we were powerless to do anything about our sin, while we were his enemies and even while we were completely estranged and separated from him. (Romans 5)

Grace came into the world without our help and cannot be earned or merited by what we do, but grace is available to us through our faith. ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."*** The Apostle writes to the Ephesian believers (2:8-10). We are saved by God's grace poured out for us in Jesus Christ on the cross through our faith.

But what does it mean that grace comes through our faith? The two stories we shared last week, Israel crossing the Jordan River and Naaman being healed of leprosy, demonstrate. I think, what ***"through faith"*** means.

In nearly every letter that Paul writes he needs to address this idea of salvation by grace through faith and not through the keeping of a set of rules. The point he is making in the letter to the Ephesians and in so many of his letters is that we cannot earn grace by what we do. Grace is here and available to us. While we cannot earn grace neither can we receive grace without action. Just as the Israelite Priests had to step into the flooding Jordan, and just as Naaman had to dip himself in the muddy water all seven times, we need to respond to God's offer of grace if we expect to receive it.

We cannot earn grace, but we must respond to grace. So, what is the only reasonable response we can make to the greatest of all gifts? Paul would say this, ***"What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!"*** If the Apostle were writing today he might have said, "Are you nuts?" If our sin made it necessary for our God and Father to sacrifice his one and only Son on our behalf how can we possibly continue to live in sin? It would be, in fact, insane to do so.

So what should we do instead? Paul would continue, ***"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer."*** When, might we ask, did we die to sin? The Apostle says, ***"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves***



*to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* (Romans 6:1-8)

Remember where we started with this series? We began by talking about what it means to follow Jesus; to be a disciple. In Matthew 16:24-25 Jesus said, ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."***

My only reasonable response to the greatest of all gifts, the grace of God, is to give up my self-serving drive to survive, to put that old selfishness to death, to let it be buried with Christ and then to let him raise me to new life. Nothing less would make any sense. He died to give me life and I must die to find that life.