

April 2, 2022
Ephesians 2:8-9

Funeral for Dave Espeland
Rev. Matthew C Rauh

Grace + Faith = Our Hope for Salvation

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Imagine this. Let’s say I had asked Dave if I could play organ. Being a nice guy, he would slide off the bench and let me play. There is a problem. I don’t know how to play organ. I never took piano lessons. I can’t even pluck out your basic chopsticks. Once I start playing organ, it will sound like a dog chasing a cat across the keys and pedals. For the sake of the congregation, for the sake of humanity, for the sake of music in general, Dave would instantly move me off the bench and tell me, “Pastor, you do the preaching. I will play the organ.” That would be wise. Dave knew how to play organ. He was good at it.

That is what Ephesians 2:8-9 is so important. In it God tells us to move off the bench, he will play. He tells us he is sitting in the driver’s seat so let him drive. In it he tells us to our great relief that he took over and made sure we are saved. At first that may hurt our pride. If I was in the driver’s seat and my wife opens the door and says she will drive, my pride might say, “Why can’t I drive?” But to hear the Lord say he is taking over is the greatest thing we can hear. Why?

Let’s go back to the beginning of this chapter. It said, **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ...”** According to this we never had a chance. We start off already dead, not physically. We breath, think, walk and talk and are productive. But spiritually it’s over. Just as a dead squirrel can’t finish crossing the street, we can’t do anything to get ourselves closer to God. Rather, we find ourselves trapped. As it said, **“... 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 flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”** So physically we are alive. We breath, walk, eat, talk and think, but it is for one purpose: to follow the ways of this world with the devil in command and to satisfy sinful lusts and desires. And what is the result? We are by nature objects of God’s wrath.

So we are totally incapable of saving ourselves. It’s over. But your Lord couldn’t stand there and do nothing. He jumped in and saves us, and he came up with the perfect formula. One part grace and one part faith equals salvation.

“For it is by grace you have been saved.” Grace. That is an attitude God has. It means to love the unlovable. Remember how it said we deserve his anger. Well, he gives us something we don’t deserve: his love.

Now love that doesn’t do anything is just noise. Love takes action. God’s love acted. He so loved the world that he gave up his only Son for us so that whoever believes will not perish, but have everlasting life. And it is free. He did it all. Technically nothing is free. Someone had to pay something for it. If I put a table in the narthex with free cookies, they are free to you. Grace means free to you, but someone paid a price. Jesus did. You know that price. Not with

gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. That is why the Bible uses the word, “redeem,” or “redemption.” It means to buy back. Jesus bought us by paying the price for sin, i.e. death. Don’t worry. He rose again on the third day, something we will celebrate two weeks from tomorrow.

The other half of the formula is faith. Now that may sound like something we to do. But that is wrong. I remember a grocery store that would sell cloth grocery bags. It was their way of cutting down on those plastic bags we use to carry groceries home. You bring that bag to the store, shop, and they put your groceries in that bag and you carry it home. The bag didn’t buy the groceries. That bag doesn’t carry the groceries. You still do. That bag simply holds the groceries. Faith is like that. It holds what God says and makes it our possession.

In fact, God helps us with that faith. Remember, we were dead in our transgressions and sins. But look at what it said in our reading earlier: **“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.”** God made us alive. That is why Paul spoke in the past tense earlier, “were dead in transgressions and sins.” Something changed. Our unbelief is in the past. We are no longer dead, we now walk and talk and think spiritually, we are alive. God helps by sparking that faith to take hold of God’s grace.

So take grace and faith, and what do you have? Salvation. And this is all a gift of God. After the service you are invited for a lunch downstairs. It is free. We don’t even put out a free will offering basket. But let’s say one of the ladies came to you with a bill that says you owe \$20 for the lunch. It is no longer free. God’s salvation by grace through faith is free, or as Paul says in our reading, **“... it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

That is the theology of these words, now what do they mean? I should not sit on the organ bench and play for church. It would be disastrous. We leave that up to folks who can play like Dave. God doesn’t throw us in the driver seat and say, “Ok, workyou’re your own salvation. Good luck.” He takes over and saves us. This is huge. We mourn like anyone else who mourns the death of a loved one. There is a gap now and we certainly feel it, from Marj to the kids to friends to a church, even for a community. But God adds joy to a sad moment like this. These words were Dave’s confirmation verse, but they were more than mere words that may have been written on his confirmation cake. He believed. He received God’s grace through faith. Even when it went from bad to worse, I was comforted by his child like faith. Though he endured treatments hoping God would give him some extra time, not for himself, but so he may still serve God by serving you, he did not stubbornly cling to this world. No, he stubbornly held onto his Savior with a certain hope of eternal life, not only for his soul, but also for his body in the resurrection. And how was he so certain? Because it wasn’t by works. It is by grace through faith. We are happy he is with the Lord. We are relieved he finished the race.

You heard Jesus offer you the invitation earlier. Go to him. You need to. You are burdened. And he will give you rest. He just gave you rest with Dave’s confirmation verse. May your souls find rest trusting that God took over and made our salvation certain. Amen.