

“Saved By Grace”

Ephesians 2:8,9

INTRODUCTION: Let me tell you about Susan? Susan is a former Mormon. Twenty years ago the Holy Spirit brought to faith in Jesus. To this day, Susan can't forget the fear that characterized her early life as a Mormon. She says that guilt, like a tremendous weight, weighed constantly on her heart; that she never felt worthy enough for God's to love her; that she lived knowing she could never live up to the perfection that God required. Her sins tormented her, the future terrified her. That was then! Today, even after two decades, when Susan starts talking about the Gospel, she gets emotional. She says that when she realized that all of her sins were already forgiven by God because of Jesus saving work it was like a giant weight literally fell off of her heart. She still tears up when she talks about what it means to know that through Jesus she has been saved by grace.

That message, the message of salvation by grace through faith, is not new to us. It is the heart and core of our Christian faith. In fact, to hear that message of God's free and faithful grace, to be assured of it through word and sacrament, is the primary reason that we gather together on a weekly basis.

And we're never disappointed, are we? The message is always there! Every time you have come to this church, there has been one constant, one thing that came out loud and clear, it was the message – you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Never, not even once, did you hear someone say your sins will be forgiven “if”; or your sins will be forgiven “when”; or your sins will be forgiven “but”. Always, without fail, the message that came through was the truth that because of God's grace in Christ you are saved. Your sins, past, present, and future, are already forgiven and forgotten. As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, *“By grace you are saved, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

A MESSAGE TO SAVOR Do you know why that message is so prominent in our worship? It is because the message of God's free grace in Christ is the only answer to sin and there is nothing more destructive or deadly or dominant in our world than sin. Oh, I know, sin is rarely mentioned in today. We seldom hear the word; even less do people acknowledge it as the source of problems. But no matter how much people try to brush it aside or belittle it; no matter how much people attempt to disguise, defend or dismiss sin; the fact remains that sin is the most crushing disaster a person can have in his life. To call sin, any sin, nothing more than a mistake or an error in judgment as people do today, is like saying that a tornado is nothing more than a gentle summer breeze. Our world may not want to talk much about sin, but the Bible does. It mentions sin in at least 689 passages and hell in no fewer than 53.

When is the last time you seriously thought about the destructive power of sin? Sin harms the body, ask people whose livers have been eaten up by alcohol or whose bodies have been eroded by drugs or STD's if that isn't so. Sin impairs the mind. It destroys mental power, scars the memory, rivets a

person's thoughts on sensual subjects and reduces the capacity to love the good and the beautiful. Sin mars the soul. It separates the soul from God and condemns its unforgiven victims to a never-ending death. And sin is never alone, sin always involves others. It constantly seeks to entangle friends, family members, and often it drags its horrible consequences to future generations. Sin always leaves sufferers in its wake; it creates agony and hurls hordes of people into hell.

The truly scary thing is that I was born a sinner. Every day I sin. In fact, I can't help but sin. No matter how much I may not want to sin, no matter how much I may detest it and strive against it, the desire and the inclination to sin is so woven into the fiber of my being that I have to admit with the Apostle Paul, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*" Isn't that true of all of us? Are there any of us who don't have to admit with the Paul, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*"?

Where would we be if we didn't have this message? "*By grace you are saved, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.*" With those beautiful words Paul is reminding us that our salvation is a free gift, a gift undeserved and unearned. It is a gift God freely gives us because for some inexplicable reason, knowing our sins, in spite of our sins, he loves us. He loves us so much that he sends his son to do what we could never do, to live a perfect life in our place and then to suffer the punishment for our sins. And then in his grace he freely gives us the benefits of his son's work; he forgives of all our sins; he adopts into his family; he promises us answered prayers, protection, and providential care all through life. And when we die, he guarantees us an eternity in his presence. All of that is wrapped up on Paul's words, "*by grace you are saved.*"

Let me ask, have any of us started to take that message of God's grace for granted? Have any of us started to treat the Good News as if it were old news, to almost yawn when the pastor announces the message of God's forgiving grace? That can happen, and if it does we are in danger of drifting away from Jesus. Brothers and sisters, if the message of God's grace no longer excites us or warms our hearts then we need to pick up our Bible's and let God remind us of where we would be without it. Through this book God the Holy Spirit can awaken us again to the seriousness of sin in our lives and then open our eyes to see more clearly and appreciate more fully the beauty, the wonderful beauty, of our God's saving grace.

A MESSAGE TO SHARE Why does God want us to savor that message of his grace? I'm sure there are a lot of answers to that question, I'm going to mention two.: First, God wants us to cling more closely to Jesus as our only hope. He wants us to remember that when we have Jesus we have everything. Even if we have nothing else, when we have Jesus, we have everything. Secondly, God wants us to savor that message of grace so that we are more eager to share it with others. Do you know how many people still need to hear the message of God's free and faithful grace? Right now there are nearly 8 billion people in our world. Of that number over 5 billion people are living and dying without the message of God's saving grace. They don't know the comfort, the peace, the hope, that you and I find in Jesus and his grace. Some of them you know. You can talk to them and pray for them by name

and share with them what we know of God's grace. And even the billions that we don't know, we can still pray for. We can ask the Lord to raise up Christians who will share the message of God's grace with them and we can ask the Lord will open their hearts to that message. And we can support our church body's efforts to send missionaries to them.

I'm here today to speak of the need to reach out to a specific group of people who don't know the message of God's saving grace. They are the over 16 million people who are members of the Mormon church. 16 million may not sound like a lot compared to the billions in the world, but keep in mind a couple of things. Mormons are one of the most neglected mission fields in the world because a lot of people think that they are Christian and they are not. Remember two that Mormons have a voracious appetite for converts and are extremely zealous in spreading their faith.

What is their faith? I will quote you only one passage from the book of Mormon that is representative of their faith. It says this: "For we know that it is by grace we are saved, **after all we can do.**" Did you catch it? (repeat) Can you understand now why Susan grew up tormented and afraid of God? Imagine living with the thought that your eternity with God in heaven depended not on his free gift, but upon you, upon you doing all you could do? What person, feeling the guilt of their sin or lying on their deathbed wouldn't wonder, have I done enough? Did I do it in the right way? Did I do what I did with the right motive? When can I be sure? How can I be sure?

Experience has taught us that a large percentage of Mormons live the stress points that characterized Susan's early life. They live with overwhelming guilt, depression, feelings of unworthiness, anxiety and despair. That is why we approach Mormons not as enemies but as victims. When we speak with them, instead of being confrontational and throwing up barriers, our method of witnessing is to try to build bridges by approaching them in love. Through social media, door to door conversations, in whatever way possible we try to lovingly sow the seeds of the Gospel in their hearts with the prayer that one day it will take root and bear the fruit of faith.

God is blessing our efforts. A ministry that started in Boise, Idaho has grown into an online global ministry. Traffic on our websites comes from over 170 different countries. An effort started last year to produced regular devotions for Mormons has nearly 5,000 people asking for them. On a monthly basis our on-line ministry leads to over 1,000 private conversations about God's amazing grace. A Bible information class, started with a goal of 300 has over 700 enrolled. In the last year alone nearly 5,000 people took our online witnessing course.

Thus far the Lord has permitted us to train over 23,000 witnesses in 33 different countries.

For all of these blessings we thank and praise the Lord. But there is so much more to do. That is why I am here. I'm asking for your help. Please pray for Truth in Love Ministry. Ask the Lord to continue to bless what we are doing and use our efforts to bring people out of the darkness of Mormonism to faith in Jesus. Please learn about our ministry. Go online to our websites and look at the wealth of material available. Please consider participating in our ministry. We have programs that enable people to

become directly involved in what we do. And yes, please consider supporting our ministry with your financial resources.

Brothers and sisters, there is so much to do, so many opportunities to seize, so many people to reach. Is it worth all the effort? You know the answer. Like me, you have stood at the foot of the cross and reveling in the grace of our God have echoed those words, “Love so amazing so divine, demands, my soul, my life, may all.” Amen.