

Sunday 16th October 2022
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Ephesians 2:8-10
Theme: “How can I be put right with God?”
“Meet Jesus, and have your whole life changed”
*** The Big Questions of life” (2)**

Introduction:

We are continuing a series on “The Big Questions of life”. Last week, we began the series by looking at the basic question about God, namely “How can you believe in God?”

This week’s question flows on from last week’s question.... So if God exists, *and the evidence points overwhelmingly to that and confirms that*, then “How can I be “ok” with God?” “How can I get on the right side of God?” Or as I’ve put it, “How can I be right with God?”

Part 1: “Not by works” (v. 9)

Well, “not by works”, as Paul puts it in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus. Listen to what he writes:

8-9 For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it (Eph. 2:8-9 TEV)

*Or more literally, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and **this is not from yourselves**, it is the gift of God— ⁹ **not by works**, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-10 NIV).*

Yet, this is not what most people in the world believe! Instead they believe that we are put right with God *by our good works, by what we do!*

Take the average “Aussie”, for example, *one of the 60% or so who say that believe in God (see Census, 2021)*. How does the average “Aussie” think that he is going to make it to “heaven”? Through doing good works, *things that please God!*

Now, this is an understandable point of view....

After that's the way it works at school, at work, in families, and in relationships in general. We are taught to "do things" in order to please people. So, for example, at school you are highly regarded if you do well in your exams and your assignments.... At work, you get "brownie points" and promotions if you do well at your tasks.... And in families and relationships in general, we learn that if we do "good", we will get praise.

So the average "Aussie" thinks that he or she can please God, *and make it with God*, by doing "good works".

As I've said on other occasions, this is the biggest problem that I have at funerals: communicating the fact that only forgiven people go to "heaven", *when many, even most, of the people at a particular funeral believe that "good" people go to "heaven"*. But more of this a bit later... (*Plus see Being the Bad Guys on the beliefs of the 40% odd people who say that they don't believe in God*).

And the average "Aussie" is not unique in this point of view. Take the average Muslim, and there are a huge number of Muslims in this world, *and an increasing number of active Muslims in Australia (3.2% of the population)*. Most of us know a neighbour or a person who is a Muslim, *and we have some coming to our mid-week ministries*.

What does the average Muslim believe?

That we are on the right side of Allah, if we do what He wants us to do. There are five pillars to Islam, *five things that Allah wants us to do*, namely:

- * **The Creed:** "**There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet**". It is mandatory for a Muslim to say this creed at least once correctly and with heartfelt conviction. In practice, however, the devout Muslim speaks this many times a day.
- * **The Ritual Prayer:** Prayers are required to be said five times a day, upon rising, at noon, mid-afternoon, after sunset, and before retiring. The prayers consist of set formulas with prescribed bowings and prostrations.
- * **Almsgiving:** Muslims are required to give 1/40th of all that they possess to the poor and those in need.

- * **Fasting:** Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink and sexual intercourse from sunrise to sunset during the month of *Ramadan*.
- * **The Pilgrimage to Mecca:** every Muslim is expected to go to Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in his life, if he can possibly do so.

The average Muslim believes that if you do these things, then maybe, *just maybe*, you'll make it to "heaven", *if God chooses to be gracious to you*. Of course, there is one way to make sure that you make it to heaven: and that is by being involved in Jihad *against non-believers* (see *Defying Jihad*, by Esther Ahmad; cf. *Understanding the Koran*, p. 143f, and my sermon on John 4:4-30 entitled "Jesus and the Muslim woman").

Now I'm mentioning all this to make it clear that most people in our world believe that you can 'make it' with God by doing good things.

It is certainly also what the average Hindu believes (2.7% in Australia, 2021 Census). It has been great getting to know a number of Hindu women and children through our mid-week ministries.... But they too focus in their religion on "doing things" to appease the gods, and be reincarnated in a higher form or caste of being, and ultimately to be released from this cycle of death and rebirth, and become one with the god-ness of the universe (see *Internet articles*, including the article by the North American Mission Board, plus my experiences of Hindus in Bali and at the Gaza oval).

So it is probably fair to say that most of our friends and neighbours believe deep down that if they do "good things", they will make it with God, *or hopefully make it with God....*

Part 2: "By grace...through faith" (v. 8)

So how can we be right with God, if it is not through the "good things" that we do!!?

Well, listen again to what Paul writes in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus

⁸⁻⁹ For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it (Eph. 2:8-9).

What's Paul saying here? He is saying that we are "saved", that is "put right with God" as a free gift from God. That's what the word "grace" means: God's undeserved goodness to us.

Let me tell you a story that Tony Campolo tells and which I think helps us understand what "grace" is:

The director of a very prominent inner-city ministry was driving one of his young workers to a meeting when the young man suddenly shouted, "Stop!". When the car stopped, the young man jumped out and ran back to where a derelict-looking man had up a sign that said, "I need money for food". The young Christian worker gave the beggar a five-dollar bill, which was all the money he was carrying.

When he got back in the car, the director of the ministry reprimanded him, "Why did you do that? That guy is probably going to spend the money on drugs or booze. You know that as well as I do".

"You're probably right", the young man answered, "but I gave him the money just in case" (*"Spontaneous Grace", on p. 41 of Stories that Feed your Soul*).

That's what "grace" is: freely giving of yourself to those who really don't deserve it". Now, that's what God's done for us!!

God gave His only Son for us, *part of His very Being*, gave him up to be born as a tiny baby for us, gave him up to live among us and tell us and to show us how much God loves us, and gave him up to suffer and to die for us on a cross, so that we might be "forgiven", *so that we might be put right with Him* (*John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 3:21-28*).

On the cross, Jesus took upon himself the judgement, the punishment that we deserve from God for our "sins", and made it possible for us to be "put right with Him", *as we receive personally what God did for everyone on the cross* (*Mark 10: 45; Isaiah 53:4-6, 10*).

And how do we receive for ourselves of what God did for everyone through Jesus on the cross?

Well, what does Paul say in our Bible reading:

⁸⁻⁹ For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith (*Eph. 2:8*).

“Through faith” is shorthand for saying: “Through faith *in Jesus as your Saviour*”.

We have to receive for ourselves what Jesus did on the cross for everyone.... And we do this by holding out our hands to God, and saying in effect:

“Let what Jesus did for everyone be for me” (*cf. Luke 18:13*).

Let’s think back to the story that Tony Campolo told about that young Christian worker’s act of “grace” for that derelict-looking man on the side of the road. In theory, that man could have said to the young Christian worker:

“I don’t want your five dollars. Go away!”

But of course, he didn’t! “Faith” is holding out your hands to God, and saying, “Please give me what you are offering me!”.

Exhortation:

But how are the many, many people around us to find this out!!? As I said, most people in our society, *if they believe in God*, think that they will make it with God if they do “good things”. How can family members and friends and neighbours around know that this isn’t the case....

Well, by allowing them to meet Jesus *through you!* By allowing them to hear what Jesus says about how to have a relationship with God *through you!* How do we do this? Let me suggest three ways:

*** By living your life as a follower of Jesus**

Remember what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁴“You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven (*Matt. 5:14-16*).

It’s by “the good things” that we do, *our acts of love, compassion, and generosity*, as we follow Jesus that point people to God, and the way He has changed our life (*See Addendum re “for good works” in Eph. 2:8-10*).

And unless they can see that our life is different in the way that we love others and freely forgive them, and that unless they can see that we have things that they'd love to have, *like peace and joy and a certain hope for the future*, they won't be interested at all, as to *why* our life is different.

- * **By you telling others that it is “Jesus” who has changed your life**
I don't think that we should be reluctant to mention “Jesus” to family and friends and others.... In fact, he and his name should be part and parcel of what we say to them. Our speech should be punctuated by references to Jesus, and the way that he has changed your life, and can change the life of others.

For example, we can say things like:

- **“That reminds me of something that Jesus said.
He told a story about a young lad who left home, and wanted to have nothing to do with his father...”
Or He told a story about a rich man who piled up as much money as he could for himself...”**
- **“You know, I have peace of mind, *most of the time*, because I know that Jesus died on the cross for me”**
- **“You might have noticed that I smile a lot. That's because I know through Jesus that I'm loved and forgiven by God”**
- **“Actually, I'm not afraid of dying and meeting up with God. I know that I'm God's forgiven child as I trust in Jesus as my Saviour, and that one day when Jesus comes again, he'll awaken me from my sleep of death, and take me home to be with God”**
- **By enabling them to meet Jesus personally, *for themselves***
How do we do this? I think that we need to have Gospel resources on hand that we can give to others, like:
 - **The Gospel of Luke**
 - **The Good News New Testament**
 - **The Beginner's Bible** (*for families with young children*)

Conclusion:

So this week, we've been looking at the second of our series on "The Big Questions".

Today's question has been: "How can I be put right with God?". Our focus has been on the fact that we are put right with God "not by *our* good works", but "by grace", *God's undeserved goodness to us*, "through faith" *in Jesus as our Saviour*.

For the others to know his, *and especially the people who are close to us and who we love*, we need to allow them to meet Jesus *through us*.

May God bless us as we seek to do this, *even if our efforts at times are rather feeble*. The wonderful fact is that God will bless our efforts, and lead others to know him through Jesus (*cf. "There is no Plan B, only Plan A which involves you sharing the Good News"*).

Addenda

1) It is interesting that Paul says in our Bible reading that we are "saved", put right with God, not by our works, but "for good works":

⁸⁻⁹For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it. ¹⁰God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do