My Heavenly Home – Reached by Grace Through Faith
November 2, 2025

Today we continue our sermon series on "My Heavenly Home." This morning as we celebrate the Reformation we will focus on how we get to that wonderful place. And people get there in a very different way than most people think. That's very sad because it means that many people's expectations and hopes are wrongly based. Which also means that many are in for a shocking disappointment one day when they die. So it is crucial that you and I understand what the Lord teaches us about the path to heaven. That path to heaven is clear and simple yet incredibly difficult for many to grasp. The Apostle Paul outlines that simple path in the words of Ephesians 2:1-10. We'll read those words during the course of our sermon this morning. (Revelation 5:12) "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Did you know that technically there are two ways to be saved and get to heaven one day? (It's nice to have options, isn't it?) The first way is simple, but not simple at all. The first way to heaven is to live a perfect life. That's it! Live a perfect life and you're in! As long as you never do anything wrong or say anything wrong or think anything wrong, you've got it made! God will welcome you into heaven one day. How are you feeling about your chances with that approach? I mean, how hard can it be to be perfect in every way and never, ever sin in any way? Well, the Lord tells us this in his Word: (Romans 3:22-23) There is no difference between [any person], for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. God states the simple fact: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Which means that option 1, never, ever sinning in any way isn't really an option. As I said, it's a simple way to heaven, that isn't simple at all. In fact, it's impossible.

So what is the other option? The Holy Spirit shows us in the words before and after what we just read in Romans 3. (Romans 3:22, 24) This righteousness (perfection in God's eyes) is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. … All are justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. In other words, option 2 to heaven is that God shows us grace and gives us faith in Jesus our Savior. In other words, God does all the work! This is a much better option. And actually, this is the ONLY option since we can't be sinless. Being saved by God's grace is also very simple and also very difficult. Grace is simple in that the Bible shows us that God in love did all that needs to be done for our salvation. God the Father gave us his Son to be our Savior. God the Son, as Savior, died for all of our sins. God the Holy Spirit gave us the faith that these things are true. Grace is simple in that the Triune God did all that needs to be done for our salvation. Grace is complex in that it is very difficult for humans to grasp the truth that God could be that good and merciful and that salvation could be so easy. People have great difficulty accepting the fact that God has already done everything needed for our salvation and that there is nothing left for us to do. Salvation by grace alone seems too simple and too wonderful to be true so they make the concept of grace difficult.

Consequently, because it seems too easy, too good to be true, people manufacture means to earn grace. The logical conclusion seems to be that if someone wants something as wonderful as heaven, well, they have to earn it. Consequently, they come up with their own ideas, wrong ideas, on how we acquire salvation. But no human being can ever be good

enough to get to heaven by what they themselves do. The only way anyone gets to heaven is because of what Jesus has done for us. Either a person holds to a do religion, where the emphasis is on self and what they do. Or a person holds to a done religion, where the emphasis is on what Jesus, God himself, has accomplished for us. The interesting (and tragic!) thing is that the vast majority of the world believes in and tries to follow option 1, a DO religion. That is, being good enough to make it to heaven on their own. And this is literally and spiritually a dead end. Brothers and sisters, we have a done religion. Our confidence is in Jesus, God's Son, who did everything that needed to be done to bring us home to heaven. And recognizing this fact, that Jesus is our hope and not ourselves, is the source of incredible certainty, and hope, and joy, and peace, and security. Because we are relying upon a certain thing, Jesus our Savior, for our salvation.

This was ultimately what brought about the Reformation. Martin Luther read God's Word and saw that it contained a different message than what was being taught in the Catholic Church, the predominant church at the time. Luther recognized that the Bible clearly taught that people were saved through faith and not by works and his goal was to make sure that people understood this. In the process, five doctrinal statements came out of the Reformation. Each of these statements is comprised of only two Latin words and one of the two words in each statement is "sola" which means "alone." We'll focus on two of those five "sola"s in our sermon focus verses for today. These "sola"s were important in Luther's day and they are still incredibly important yet today. Our focus verses for this morning are the first 10 verses of Ephesians 2. And here's the first point those verses bring out. We were dead in our sins. The verses that make this clear are (Ephesians 2:1-3) 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. (that's a very descriptive way of referring to the devil). 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. These words from the Holy Spirit don't paint a pretty picture of our previous spiritual situation.

The Lord, through Paul, says: We were dead in [our] transgressions and sins. We used to be followers of the ways of this world. We used to be ruled by the devil himself. We used to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature. We used to follow our own selfish desires and thoughts. We were consumed with greed and lust and envy and hatred. We were liars and gossipers, cheaters and thieves. We were murderers and adulterers in one way or another. We were an absolute spiritual mess. We didn't know God, nor love God. In fact, we were God-haters. [We] were dead in [our] transgressions and sins. We had no spiritual life. We had no hope of spiritual life. We had no ability to attain spiritual life. Consequently, the Holy Spirit tells us in these verses, like the rest [of the human race], we were by nature objects of [God's] wrath. Properly understanding God's grace begins with the understanding of ourselves and our sin. In order to understand the magnitude of God's grace, we must first understand the magnitude of our sin. Our status before the holy God was that like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. We had disobeyed every single one of God's 10 Commandments, if not in action, then in thought. The Lord was furious at the magnitude and multitude of our wrongdoings. And because of our sinfulness, God could not allow us into his holy presence.

So what would we expect that the Lord would do with us? What is completely reasonable and justifiable? What is logical? What would we expect the pure and holy God to do with people as impure as us? That's right – punish us as severely as he can. This is hard to hear and is a sobering message for us all. But it's the simple truth. Yet God does not do to us what he rightfully could and should have done. Which brings us to this incredibly wonderful truth that we embrace – God loved us, so God saved us! (Ephesians 2:4-5) 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. That great love God has for us, moved him to show us astounding grace, and save us. In fact, we are saved by God's grace alone (Sola Gratia).

In our sermon focus verses, God shows us this truth, not only clearly, but also repeatedly. (Ephesians 2:5-8) 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. What were we? We were dead in our transgressions. Who made us spiritually alive? God, who is rich in mercy, did along with Christ. What is that? It is grace! It is by grace you have been saved. How were we saved? We are saved solely by God's grace. If our salvation were dependent upon us, we would have been lost, every one of us. We were hopelessly doomed. Trapped in an impenetrable prison. Banished from freedom. Separated from love. Condemned to an eternity of sweltering darkness and burning pain. We were the living dead.

But God in his grace intervened and rescued us. He sent us Jesus. Jesus came to our world. Jesus entered and endured our hell. Jesus suffered our horrors, and died our death on the cross in payment of our sins. And then he came back to life again. Jesus burst forth from the tomb alive and he gave us life, spiritual life, eternal life. He changed our spiritual corpse from death to life, from detestable to God to desirable. We did nothing! God did it all!

It is by God's grace you have been saved, and closely connected with "Grace Alone" is "Faith Alone." We Are Saved by Faith Alone (Sola Fide). (Ephesians 2:8-9) 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. The Catholic Church taught it in Luther's day and still teaches it yet today. And so do many other churches and every single cult teaches it too. They maintain that a person is saved, not by faith, but by actions. They teach that a person must live a good enough life to earn God's favor. A person must do enough good things, help enough people, give enough money to God and charities, pray enough and go to church enough to win salvation. And not only must they live a good enough life, but they must somehow make up for all the sins they have committed, in order for God to let them into heaven. That's the do religion we spoke about earlier. That's a very different message than God tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9. In fact, the idea that we are saved by what we do directly contradicts what Scripture says. And Martin Luther studied God's Word in depth. He saw what it said, and that it was a different message than what the church was teaching. He found passages like this one. (Romans 3:20) Therefore no one will be declared righteous in [God's] sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. In other words, not a single one of us can be good enough to win God's favor. The only way to make it good with God is to be perfect, and sinners simply can't do it. Perfection is impossible. It's unreachable. It's unattainable by sinful human

beings. That's why we needed, and need, Jesus! He was, and is, our Perfection! Jesus made the perfect sacrifice for our many sins by his innocent death on the cross.

This is the done religion we talked about earlier. And Jesus' perfection, and perfect sacrifice, becomes ours not by anything we do, but through something that God in his grace gives us. Jesus' perfection becomes ours through faith in Him. Which is why we want to always keep Jesus' cross in view. It's why we want to hear about Jesus' dying for us over and over again. It's why we rejoice in the Gospel message of the cross so much. That Gospel message is wonderful news to you and me and the Holy Spirit uses that message to build up our faith. And faith in Jesus is crucially important. For God shows us that we are saved by "faith alone" and not by works.

So to summarize, we are saved, by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Alone. But what about good works then? Where do good works fit into our salvation? God answers that question in our focus verses as well. He shows us that we do good works because we are saved and not to be saved. As God says through Paul. (Ephesians 2:10) For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. God wants us to do good works. God expects us to do good works. In fact, God tells us that we will do good works. But here's the key. We do good works not to be saved, but because we are saved by God's grace through faith. And what a difference that is! Good works are not the cause of our salvation. Rather, our salvation is the cause of our good works. For us, we do good things for God, not out of fear, but out of joy. As Christians, we do good works in thanksgiving for all that our God in his grace has done for us. We rejoice, and we thank God, and we praise God, and we sing because we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone brought by God through Scripture alone.

We've been talking a lot about theology so far in this sermon. And it's important theology to talk about and understand. But let me close this message with an illustration to try to help us grasp grace. Let me take you back almost exactly 15 years ago to October 12, 2010. Many of you will remember this. For 69 days, 2 and a 1/3 months, 33 miners were trapped in a Chilean mine. They were trapped ½ mile under rock in the blackest darkness, and in stifling heat and humidity. They were alive, but as good as dead. There was simply no possible way for them to rescue themselves. If they were to get out of that prison, monumental help must come from another source. If they were to be rescued, that rescue had to come from above, and it would take very drastic, previously unheard of actions to bring it about. I can't even imagine their thoughts as the hopelessness of the situation sank in. I can't even imagine the terror and despair they must have felt, as the magnitude of their situation sank into them. Yet 15 years ago this week the whole world watched as one by one they were pulled from the darkness into the light. It was some of the most compelling and emotional footage I have ever watched. One by one these men were rescued. One by one they were lifted out of their prison and into freedom by a specially fashioned rescue pod. They were whisked from isolation, to the loving arms of their loved ones. They were transferred from a living death, to a new life. And as I watched these men come to the surface, it occurred to me. This is a picture of grace. This is what God did for us. We were hopelessly doomed. Trapped in an impenetrable prison. Banished from freedom. Separated from love. Condemned to an eternity of sweltering darkness. We were the living dead. And then God rescued us. He sent us the rescue pod of Jesus. Jesus came to our world. Jesus entered and endured our hell. Jesus suffered our horrors and died our death in payment of

our sins. And then he came back to life again. Jesus bursts forth from the bowels of the impenetrable rock, and carries all to safety who cling to him in faith. And do you remember rejoicing every time another miner reached freedom? Do you remember the tears of joy, and the laughter, and the stunned amazement? Brothers and sisters, that's you and me! That's the exquisite joy and thankfulness you and I have. We were rescued from certain spiritual death, and only by the graceful intervention of God. And not only were we rescued here on earth in that we have come to know and believe in our Savior. But one day the graceful intervention of God will also rescue us from this dark earth, and lift us up to the light of heaven. That heavenly home is not reached by what we do. Rather, it's only reached by what God has done for you and me. It's reached solely by God's grace through the faith in Jesus that God has given us. It's a home that you and I are going to, by grace through faith. Thanks be to God!