

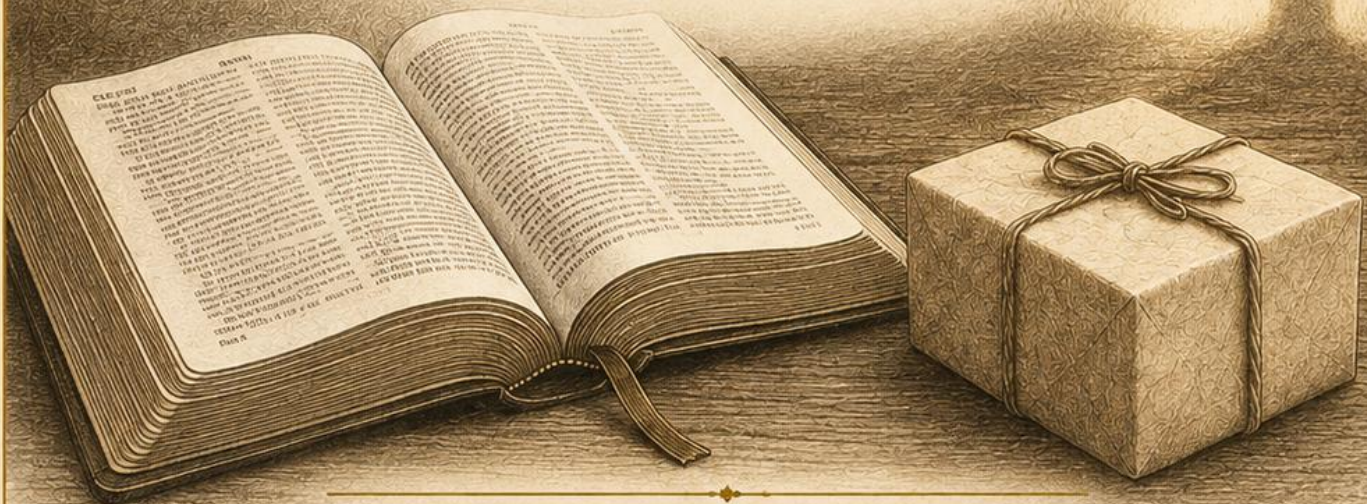


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE GIFT YOU NEVER OPENED

Ephesians 2:1–10 KJV

If salvation is God's free gift,
how do we receive it?



Sermon & Pastor's Commentary
Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley
Pastor & Teacher

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Ephesians 2:1–10 KJV

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley | Reason Together Church

Aloha, and welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you have worshiped with us many times or this is your first time here, we are grateful that God has brought us together.

At Reason Together Church, we believe that honest questions do not frighten God.

They can lead us deeper into His Word.

So bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

And let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Our gracious Heavenly Father,

Thank You for allowing us to gather in Your house today.

Thank You for giving us Your Word so that we do not have to guess about the most important questions of life and eternity.

As we open the Bible, help us lay aside our assumptions, our traditions and anything we may have misunderstood.

Show us clearly what it means to be saved by grace through faith.

Speak especially to anyone who has known about Jesus for many years but has never personally placed his or her faith in Him.

Give us ears to hear, hearts willing to respond and the humility to let Your Word correct us.

We ask all of this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Our primary Scripture today is Ephesians chapter 2, beginning with verse 1.

I am going to read through verse 10 from the King James Version.

As we read, listen for four things.

Listen for what we were.

Listen for what God did.

Listen for how salvation is received.

And listen for what salvation produces.

Ephesians 2:1 begins:

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by grace ye are saved;

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

May God bless the reading and understanding of His Word.

Before we continue, let me briefly explain how giving works at Reason Together Church.

We do not pass an offering plate.

If you are visiting with us, we are not asking you to give.

We encourage you to support your home church.

For members who wish to give, the giving box is available and our approved online giving option may also be used.

Our desire is that giving always be an act of worship, never the result of embarrassment or pressure.

If this is your first visit, you will also find a simple guest card.

We ask only for your first name and email address.

We will not single you out, place you on an endless mailing list or show up at your door uninvited.

We simply want to thank you for being with us and make it possible for you to ask a question if you choose.

Several years ago, I was getting ready for a last-minute trip.

I was moving quickly, trying to remember everything that needed to go with me.

I reached for an old travel bag that I had used for years.

At one time, that bag carried my computer.

It carried my camera.

It carried my video recorder.

It carried cords, batteries and enough electronic equipment to make airport security wonder what I was doing.

Most of those devices had eventually been replaced by one iPhone.

The old travel bag had been set aside.

But on this particular day, I needed it again.

I opened the bag and found something inside that I had completely forgotten.

It was a gift.

Someone had given it to me nearly three years earlier.

The gift had been sitting there all that time.

It was only inches away whenever I passed that bag.

Someone had already selected it.

Someone had already paid for it.

Someone had intended for me to enjoy it.

I did not have to work for it.

I did not have to earn it.

I did not have to reimburse the giver.

But for nearly three years, it did me no good because I had forgotten it was there.

That discovery caused me to think about a much greater gift.

It made me think about the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

And it raised the question we are reasoning through today:

If salvation is God's free gift, how do we receive it?

Perhaps you have heard someone say, “Salvation is free.”

That is true.

Perhaps you have heard that eternal life is the gift of God.

That is also true.

But what does that mean?

Does free mean that everyone automatically possesses it?

Does believing mean agreeing that Jesus existed?

Does receiving salvation require a particular prayer?

What about repentance?

What about baptism?

What about church membership and good works?

If we must respond in some way, have we earned part of the gift?

These are not small questions.

They concern where we will spend eternity.

So let us begin with the meaning of a gift.

When something is truly a gift, the giver provides it.

The giver bears its cost.

The recipient does not receive it because wages are owed.

If I must perform enough labor to deserve what you give me, it is not really a gift.

It is payment.

Romans 6:23 places those two ideas beside one another.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Notice the contrast.

Wages on one side.

A gift on the other.

Wages are earned.

A gift is given.

The wages of sin is death.

That is what our sin has earned.

But eternal life is not described as better wages for better people.

It is described as the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin pays wages.

God gives a gift.

Before we can appreciate that gift, we have to understand why we need it.

Ephesians 2:1 does not describe humanity as slightly confused.

It does not say that we are spiritually tired and need a good night's rest.

It does not say that we are basically good people who need a little encouragement.

It says that we were "dead in trespasses and sins."

That is a serious diagnosis.

A person who is physically sick may cooperate with a physician.

A person who is weak may exercise and become stronger.

But a dead person cannot produce life within himself.

Spiritually, we do not need a minor adjustment.

We need life.

Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

All have sinned.

That includes the person with a terrible public past.

It includes the person with a respectable private reputation.

It includes the person who has never entered a church.

It includes the person who has occupied the same church pew for fifty years.

Our sins may not be identical.

Their earthly consequences may not be equal.

But every one of us has fallen short of the glory of God.

Sometimes people respond by comparing themselves with someone else.

"I know I am not perfect, Pastor, but I am better than that person."

That may or may not be true.

But that person is not the standard.

The glory and holiness of God are the standard.

Imagine standing in a courtroom after the evidence has proven that you broke the law.

You say to the judge, "Yes, I committed that crime, but let me tell you about all the laws I did not break."

"I stopped at a red light last Tuesday."

“I paid for my groceries.”

“I returned something I borrowed.”

Those may be good things.

But obeying one law does not erase the guilt of breaking another.

Good deeds do not travel backward through time and make our sins disappear.

Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.”

The verse does not say that kindness is evil or that obedience is worthless.

It teaches that our righteousness cannot cleanse us from sin or place God in our debt.

We cannot build a ladder of good works tall enough to reach a holy God.

We cannot donate enough money.

We cannot attend enough services.

We cannot perform enough acts of kindness.

We cannot erase our guilt by promising that from now on we will do better.

If salvation depended upon us becoming good enough, salvation would be impossible.

But then we reach two of the most beautiful words in Ephesians chapter 2.

“But God.”

We were dead in sins.

But God.

We were unable to save ourselves.

But God.

We were guilty and deserving of judgment.

But God.

Ephesians 2:4 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.”

Salvation did not begin when we finally became lovable.

Salvation began in the heart of a God who loved us while we were still sinners.

Romans 5:8 says, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

He did not wait for us to make ourselves clean.

He did not wait for us to repair all the damage.

He did not wait until we deserved His attention.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

God loved.

Therefore God gave.

The greatest gift came from the greatest Giver and was motivated by the greatest love.

Now we need to make an important distinction.

Salvation is free to us.

But salvation was not inexpensive.

Sometimes we use the word free to describe something that had little value.

Someone is giving away samples because the samples cost almost nothing.

Someone leaves an unwanted chair beside the road with a sign that says "FREE."

That is not the meaning of grace.

The gift of salvation is free because the price has already been paid by someone else.

First Corinthians 15 says that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

First Peter 2:24 says that Jesus "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Jesus lived the sinless life we could not live.

He willingly took our sins upon Himself.

He died the death our sins deserved.

He was buried.

And on the third day, He rose bodily and victoriously from the grave.

On the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished."

He did not say, "I have completed most of it. Now you must finish the rest."

He did not say, "I have paid the first installment. Your good works will cover the remaining balance."

He said, "It is finished."

The debt was paid.

The sacrifice was complete.

The work required for our redemption had been accomplished.

Grace does not mean nobody paid.

Grace means Jesus paid what we could never pay.

So we have established why salvation must be a gift.

We have established who purchased the gift.

Now we arrive at the heart of our question.

How is that gift received?

John 1:11 says that Jesus “came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Then verse 12 says, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

Notice how the verse brings receiving and believing together.

“As many as received him.”

“Even to them that believe on his name.”

The Bible uses several words when extending the invitation of salvation.

Believe.

Receive.

Come.

Call.

Trust.

John 3:16 says that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

When the Philippian jailer asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answered,

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

Romans 10:13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Revelation 22:17 says, “And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

The invitation is clear.

But we must understand what the Bible means by believing.

In ordinary conversation, we use the word believe in several different ways.

I may say, “I believe it will rain.”

That means I think rain is likely.

I may say, “I believe what that person told me.”

That means I accept the statement as truthful.

I may also say, “I believe in that person.”

That can mean I have placed my confidence in him.

Saving faith is more than agreeing that certain facts are true.

It is personally relying upon Jesus Christ and His finished work as our only hope of forgiveness and eternal life.

We are not merely receiving information about Jesus.

We are receiving Christ.

We are not trusting a religious system.

We are trusting a Person.

We are not trusting our ability to hold on tightly enough.

We are trusting the Savior who is able to save.

James 2:19 gives us a necessary warning.

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”

The devils know that God exists.

They know who Jesus is.

During His earthly ministry, demons sometimes identified Jesus more quickly than the people standing nearby.

They possessed accurate information.

But they did not love Him, trust Him or willingly submit to Him.

A person can know facts about Jesus without knowing Jesus as Savior.

You can know that He was born in Bethlehem.

You can know that He taught in Galilee.

You can know that He died on a cross outside Jerusalem.

You can know that Christians proclaim His resurrection.

You can pass a Bible examination and still never place your faith in Christ.

Imagine studying an airplane.

You know who manufactured it.

You know how powerful its engines are.

You have read its safety record.

You have watched it take off and land many times.

You may honestly believe that the airplane can fly.

But there is a difference between believing that the airplane can carry someone and entrusting yourself to it by boarding.

Or imagine that you are seriously ill.

You research a physician.

You read every diploma on the office wall.

You believe the physician is highly qualified.

But knowing the physician's qualifications is not the same as entrusting yourself to the physician's care.

Saving faith is not merely believing that Jesus can save people.

It is trusting Jesus to save me.

That requires me to recognize something about myself.

I am a sinner.

I cannot save myself.

My religious activities cannot save me.

My good intentions cannot save me.

My family history cannot save me.

Jesus Christ is my only hope.

That brings us to repentance.

We recently reasoned together through the question, "What is Biblical repentance?"

Repentance is sometimes misunderstood as punishing ourselves until God decides we have suffered enough.

It is sometimes presented as cleaning up our lives before we are allowed to come to Christ.

But if we could cleanse ourselves before coming to Jesus, we would not need a Savior.

Acts 20:21 brings repentance and faith together.

Paul described his message as "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Repentance and faith are not two competing methods of salvation.

They describe the sincere turning of the heart.

Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of direction.

I stop defending my sin.

I stop insisting that I have no need of a Savior.

I stop trusting my own righteousness.

I agree with God about my sin and turn toward Him.

Faith places my trust in Jesus Christ.

Think of a person walking away from God.

He cannot turn toward Christ while continuing to insist that the opposite direction is right.

The change of direction is repentance.

The One toward whom he turns is Jesus Christ.

We do not clean ourselves up and then come to Jesus.

We come to Jesus because we cannot clean ourselves up.

This raises another question.

If a person must believe, receive or call upon the Lord, does that response become a work?

If I must receive the gift, have I earned some part of it?

Romans 4:4 says, “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.”

If you work for an agreed wage, your employer owes you that wage.

When payday arrives, you do not send a thank-you card for the generous gift.

You earned it.

It is a debt that must be paid.

But Romans 4:5 continues, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

Faith is not a payment offered to God.

Faith does not add value to the blood of Christ.

Faith does not complete an unfinished cross.

Faith rests upon what Jesus has already completed.

Imagine someone drowning in the ocean.

A rescuer reaches him and pulls him to safety.

Would the rescued person boast, “I saved myself because I did not push the rescuer away”?

Would he claim equal credit because he allowed himself to be rescued?

Of course not.

His testimony would be, “I could not save myself. Someone came for me and brought me safely to shore.”

Receiving a gift does not turn the recipient into its purchaser.

The hand receiving the gift cannot boast that it purchased the gift.

That is why Ephesians 2:8–9 is so precise.

“For by grace are ye saved.”

Grace is the source.

“Through faith.”

Faith is the means by which we receive what grace provides.

“And that not of yourselves.”

Salvation does not originate in us.

“It is the gift of God.”

God is the Giver.

“Not of works.”

We cannot earn it.

“Lest any man should boast.”

No redeemed person will stand in Heaven and say, “Jesus did most of it, but let me tell you about the part I contributed.”

Every saved person will give glory to Jesus Christ.

This truth requires us to consider several things people may mistakenly trust.

Church attendance cannot save us.

Gathering with believers is important.

Hebrews tells us not to forsake assembling together.

But sitting in a church does not make someone a Christian any more than sitting in an airport makes someone an airplane.

Church membership cannot save us.

Membership provides accountability, fellowship and a place to serve.

But no church can place a name on a membership roll in Heaven.

Giving money cannot save us.

Generosity is an act of worship and love.

But God does not sell forgiveness.

Serving the poor cannot save us.

We should feed the hungry, care for the suffering and love our neighbors.

But charity cannot replace the cross.

Being raised in a Christian family cannot save us.

Godly parents are a tremendous blessing.

But God has no grandchildren.

Each person must personally respond to Jesus Christ.

Knowing the Bible cannot save us.

Scripture makes us wise unto salvation by pointing us to Christ.

But information without faith remains information.

Baptism cannot purchase salvation.

Baptism is commanded by Jesus.

It is the believer's public testimony of identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection.

It is important obedience.

But water cannot wash sin from the soul.

The thief who trusted Christ on the cross had no opportunity to be baptized, yet Jesus told him that he would be with Him in paradise.

Even repeating a prayer cannot save us.

There are no magic religious words that force God to grant eternal life.

A prayer can express genuine repentance and faith.

But a person can repeat every word while his heart remains far from God.

Jesus saves.

Not the aisle.

Not the raised hand.

Not the baptismal water.

Not the membership card.

Not the wording of a prayer.

Jesus saves.

At this point, someone may ask, "Pastor, are you saying that good works do not matter?"

No.

The order matters.

Ephesians 2 does not end at verse 9.

Verse 10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

Verses 8 and 9 tell us that we are not saved by good works.

Verse 10 tells us that we are saved unto good works.

Good works are not the root of salvation.

They are the fruit of salvation.

An apple tree does not become an apple tree because someone ties apples to its branches.

It produces apples because of the life within it.

In the same way, we do not become spiritually alive by attaching religious behavior to an unchanged heart.

God gives us new life in Christ.

That new life begins producing change.

Sometimes the change is dramatic and immediately visible.

Sometimes God transforms a person gradually, one area at a time.

No genuine believer becomes perfect the moment he is saved.

We continue to grow.

We continue to struggle.

We continue to confess sin.

We continue to learn obedience.

But salvation establishes a new relationship and a new direction.

The works do not cause the life.

The life produces the works.

So far, we have seen that salvation is a gift.

We have seen that Jesus paid its entire price.

We have seen that it is received through repentance and faith.

Now we must confront a difficult truth.

A gift may be offered and still be refused.

John 1 says that Jesus came unto His own and His own received Him not.

The problem was not that Christ was unwilling to receive them.

They were unwilling to receive Him.

In John 5:40, Jesus said, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

He did not say, "I was unwilling to give you life."

He said, "Ye will not come to me."

John 3:18 says, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already."

Salvation is freely offered, but that does not mean everyone automatically possesses it.

Hearing about Jesus is not the same as receiving Jesus.

Living near a church is not receiving Jesus.

Attending Christmas and Easter services is not receiving Jesus.

Growing up around Christian language is not receiving Jesus.

Admiring Jesus as a teacher is not receiving Jesus.

Knowing that someone else trusts Him is not receiving Jesus.

The response must become personal.

There is a danger in being close to the Gospel for so long that we assume proximity is possession.

A person may hear hundreds of sermons.

He may know when to stand and when to sit.

He may know the words to every hymn.

He may know how Christians speak.

Yet he may never have reached the place where he admitted, "I am a sinner. I cannot save myself. Jesus Christ is my only hope, and I am trusting Him."

The forgotten gift in my travel bag was nearby for nearly three years.

Its price had been paid.

The giver intended me to receive it.

But its nearness did not cause me to use or enjoy it.

Of course, every illustration has limits.

Salvation is not something we already possess before faith and simply forget to unwrap.

God offers eternal life through His Son.

We receive that gift when we place our faith in Jesus Christ.

But the forgotten gift illustrates the tragedy of something valuable remaining within reach while bringing no benefit to the person who does not receive it.

How many people are only inches away from a Bible?

How many are only a few minutes away from a church?

How many have Christian family members praying for them?

How many can quote John 3:16?

How many have heard the Gospel repeatedly but continue saying, "Maybe later"?

Nearness is not faith.

Familiarity is not faith.

Good intentions are not faith.

Today, we must make the question personal.

What are you trusting to make you right with God?

Are you trusting what Jesus did or what you have done?

Do you merely believe facts about Jesus or have you believed on Him?

Have you confused baptism, church attendance or morality with salvation?

Are you waiting to make yourself worthy before coming to Christ?

Are you postponing your response because you assume there will always be another opportunity?

If you died today, what are you depending upon as the reason God should receive you?

Please do not answer with the name of your church.

Do not answer with the good things you have done.

Do not answer with the faith of your parents or grandparents.

Do not answer by comparing yourself with someone whose sins appear worse than yours.

The only sufficient answer is Jesus Christ.

So let us answer today's question as plainly as possible.

If salvation is God's free gift, how do we receive it?

We receive God's gift of salvation by repenting and placing our personal faith in Jesus Christ.

We trust His death and resurrection rather than our works as our only hope of forgiveness and eternal life.

The source of salvation is God's grace.

The basis of salvation is Christ's finished work.

The means of receiving salvation is faith.

Repentance turns us toward God and away from the rebellion and self-righteousness that kept us from Him.

Good works follow as the fruit of the new life God gives.

And all the glory belongs to God.

Revelation 22:17 gives one of the Bible's final invitations.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Come.

The invitation is not to become good enough and then come.

Come.

The invitation is not to pay part of the price and then come.

Come.

The invitation is not to understand every theological question before you come.

Come to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps today you recognize that you have known about Jesus but have never personally trusted Him.

Perhaps you have been relying upon your baptism.

Perhaps you have been relying upon church membership.

Perhaps you have been relying upon the fact that you are not as bad as someone else.

Perhaps you repeated a prayer many years ago but now realize that you were trusting the words rather than trusting Christ.

You can come to Him today.

You do not need to purchase the gift.

You do not need to help Jesus finish paying for it.

You do not need to persuade God to love you.

He has already demonstrated His love at the cross.

You must repent and believe the Gospel.

In a moment, I am going to lead a simple prayer.

Walking down an aisle will not save you.

Raising your hand will not save you.

Repeating my words will not save you.

Jesus saves.

But if you understand that you are a sinner, believe that Jesus died and rose again and are ready to place your faith in Him, you may express that faith by calling upon Him now.

You may pray in your own words.

Or you may use these words as the sincere prayer of your heart.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner,

And I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that You died for my sins,

And that You rose again.

I repent and turn to You.

I place my faith in You alone,

As my Lord and Savior.

Please forgive me,

Save me,

And make me the person You want me to be.

Thank You for the gift of eternal life.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

If you sincerely repented and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, those particular words did not save you.

Jesus saved you.

The prayer was simply how you expressed your faith and called upon Him.

Please speak with me after the service.

I would be honored to open the Bible with you, answer your questions and help you begin growing in your new relationship with Christ.

If you are still uncertain, please speak with me.

There will be no pressure and no embarrassment.

Eternity is too important to leave the question unanswered.

For nearly three years, that gift remained in my old travel bag.

I did not have to purchase it.

I did not have to persuade the giver to offer it again.

I only needed to discover what had been placed within my reach and receive it.

But the gift of salvation is too important to leave unreceived.

It is too important to postpone until another trip, another season or another convenient day.

Second Corinthians 6:2 says, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

The greatest gift ever offered was purchased by Jesus Christ.

The question is no longer whether He paid for it.

The question is whether you have received Him.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for being rich in mercy.

Thank You for loving us while we were still sinners.

Thank You for sending Your only begotten Son to pay the price we could never pay.

Thank You that salvation is not a reward reserved for people who somehow make themselves worthy.

It is Your gift, received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

We pray for each person who called upon You today.

Give them assurance through the promises of Your Word.

Help them grow in faith, obedience and love.

For those who remain uncertain, give them the courage to ask their questions and seek the truth in Scripture.

For those of us who know Christ, never allow us to become casual about the gift we have received.

Give us courage and compassion to share the Gospel with others.

May our good works never become an attempt to boast before You.

May they instead become grateful fruit produced by the new life You have given us.

We thank You for Your grace.

We thank You for the cross.

We thank You for the empty tomb.

And we ask all of this in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Before you leave, please join us at the Reason Together Café.

The coffee is locally grown, the conversation is always welcome and there are free refills on conversations.

If you have a question about today's message or want to speak privately about your relationship with Christ, I will remain available.

May the Lord bless thee, and keep thee.

May the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee.

May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

To everyone, aloha.

And to those worshipping with us for the first time, Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

THE GIFT YOU NEVER OPENED

If salvation is God's free gift, how do we receive it?

Ephesians 2:1–10 KJV

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8–9

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION Salvation is God's gift, purchased entirely by Jesus Christ and received through repentance toward God and personal faith in Jesus Christ. Faith does not pay for salvation. It receives what God provides by grace through Christ's finished work.

The Bible does not describe salvation as a reward for religious achievement. Humanity is dead in trespasses and sins, unable to erase guilt or produce spiritual life. The decisive words in Ephesians 2 are "But God." God acts from mercy and love, makes sinners alive with Christ and saves by grace through faith.

Salvation is free to the sinner, but it was not inexpensive. Jesus Christ lived without sin, bore our sins, died in our place and rose again. Grace does not mean that nobody paid. Grace means that Jesus paid what we could never pay.

Receiving the gift does not make the recipient a co-purchaser. Biblical faith is not a meritorious payment, nor is it mere agreement that Jesus existed. Saving faith personally relies upon Jesus Christ and His completed work. Repentance turns the sinner from rebellion, self-rule and self-righteousness toward God. Faith rests in Christ.

Good works, baptism, church membership, generosity and Christian service matter, but they must remain in their Biblical order. They do not create salvation. God saves by grace and then creates the believer in Christ Jesus unto good works. The works are fruit of new life, not the price paid to receive it.

1. The Question Hidden Inside a Free Gift

Paid For Does Not Mean Automatically Possessed

A forgotten gift can be close at hand for years. Someone selected it, paid for it and intended it to be received. Yet it may remain unopened and bring no benefit to the intended recipient. That ordinary experience creates a useful spiritual question: Can God genuinely offer salvation as a gift while people remain unsaved because they have not received Christ?

Every illustration has limits. Salvation is not an object already owned before faith and merely waiting to be unwrapped. Scripture says that those who receive Christ and believe on His name are given the right to become the children of God. Eternal life is offered through the Son and received in relationship with Him.

CONTROLLING OBSERVATION The gift illustration explains availability and reception. It must never be used to imply that a person already possesses salvation before believing in Christ.

2. Why Salvation Must Be a Gift

Dead in Trespasses and Sins

Ephesians 2:1 describes people apart from Christ as "dead in trespasses and sins." Paul does not say that humanity is merely undereducated, discouraged or in need of minor improvement. Spiritual death requires spiritual life, and that life cannot be manufactured by the person who lacks it.

Romans 3:23 adds that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. People may differ greatly in reputation, conduct and earthly consequences, but no sinner reaches God's holiness through comparison with someone worse. The standard is not another person. The standard is the glory of God.

Good Deeds Cannot Travel Backward

Good behavior cannot erase guilt already incurred. A defendant does not answer a proven crime by listing all the laws he obeyed on other days. Obedience is good, but it does not transform guilt into innocence. If salvation depended upon balancing enough good deeds against sin, no person could know that the balance was sufficient.

GOSPEL NEED We do not need a small religious adjustment. We need forgiveness, reconciliation and new life that only God can give.

3. “But God”

Mercy Entered the Story

After describing humanity's sin and spiritual death, Ephesians 2:4 turns with two words: “But God.” Those words move the entire passage from human inability to divine action. God is rich in mercy. He acts because of His great love. Even when we were dead in sins, He made us alive together with Christ.

Romans 5:8 gives the same order: “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” God did not wait for sinners to repair themselves and become worthy of attention. The Gospel begins with God's love and initiative, not with humanity presenting an acceptable record.

GRACE PRINCIPLE Salvation begins with what God has done, not with what the sinner promises to accomplish.

4. Free to Us, Costly to Christ

The Price of the Gift

The word free can suggest that something had little value. That is not what Scripture means when it calls eternal life a gift. Salvation is free to the recipient because the price has already been borne by the Giver.

First Corinthians 15 summarizes the Gospel: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and rose again the third day. First Peter 2:24 says that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Second Corinthians 5:21 says that the sinless Christ was made sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

When Jesus declared, “It is finished,” He did not announce that He had completed the first installment of salvation. He accomplished the work required for redemption. Nothing we do can increase the value of His sacrifice or complete an unfinished cross.

GOSPEL TRUTH Grace does not mean nobody paid. Grace means Jesus paid what we could never pay.

5. Saved by Grace Through Faith

Grace Is the Source

Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Grace describes God's undeserved favor and generosity. Salvation does not arise from the sinner's worthiness.

Faith Is the Means

Faith receives what grace provides. It does not compete with grace because it does not function as payment. Romans 4 contrasts wages owed to a worker with God justifying the ungodly who believes. A wage creates debt. Faith abandons the claim that God owes us and relies upon His promise in Christ.

God Receives the Glory

Paul excludes boasting. No redeemed person will stand before God and say that Jesus performed most of salvation while the sinner contributed the decisive portion. Every part of salvation leaves the believer grateful and Christ exalted.

MINISTRY PRINCIPLE The hand receiving the gift cannot boast that it purchased the gift.

6. What Does It Mean to Believe?

Believing Facts About Jesus

A person may know accurate facts about Jesus. He may know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, taught in Galilee, died outside Jerusalem and was proclaimed risen by His disciples. Knowledge matters because saving faith is not faith in an unknown object. Yet accurate information alone is not the same as personal reliance upon Christ.

James 2:19 warns that the devils believe there is one God and tremble. Their knowledge is not saving trust. They recognize truth without loving God, receiving Christ or submitting to Him.

Believing On Jesus

John 1:12 connects receiving Christ with believing on His name. When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved, Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Biblical faith therefore has a personal object. The sinner depends upon Jesus Christ rather than merely agreeing that Christian claims exist.

SAVING-FAITH DISTINCTION Saving faith is not merely believing that Jesus can save. It is trusting Jesus to save me.

7. Repentance and Faith Belong Together

Repentance Toward God

Acts 20:21 summarizes Paul’s message as “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance and faith are not rival methods of salvation. They describe the sincere turning of a sinner toward God through Christ.

Repentance is not self-punishment or the successful repair of one’s life before coming to Jesus. If sinners could cleanse themselves first, they would not need a Savior. Repentance changes the mind and direction concerning God, sin and self. The sinner stops defending rebellion and abandons confidence in personal righteousness.

Faith Toward Jesus Christ

Faith turns toward Christ as the only Savior. The two responses belong together. A person cannot sincerely turn toward Christ while insisting that his former road away from God remains right. At the same time, repentance does not pay for forgiveness. It brings the sinner honestly to the One who paid.

PASTORAL CLARIFICATION We do not clean ourselves up and then come to Jesus. We come to Jesus because we cannot clean ourselves up.

8. Does Receiving the Gift Become a Work?

Some object that if a person must believe or receive Christ, then the sinner has performed a work and earned part of salvation. That conclusion confuses reception with purchase. Accepting rescue does not make the endangered person his own rescuer. Receiving a gift does not make the recipient responsible for its price.

Faith does not add value to the blood of Christ. It does not complete the resurrection. It does not place God in the sinner's debt. Faith rests upon the value of Christ and the truthfulness of God's promise.

CONTROLLING DISTINCTION A response may be necessary without becoming meritorious. Faith receives salvation but contributes nothing to its purchase price.

9. What Cannot Save Us?

Church Attendance and Membership

Gathering with believers and belonging to a local church are important parts of Christian life. Neither can substitute for personal faith in Christ. A church can place a name on its membership roll, but it cannot place that name in the Book of Life by administrative action.

Giving and Service

Generosity and service express love. They may relieve suffering, support ministry and honor God. They cannot erase sin or purchase eternal life. Christian service is a response to grace, not a payment offered in exchange for grace.

Family and Religious Knowledge

Godly parents and grandparents are a blessing, but faith is not inherited biologically. Knowing Scripture is also a blessing, but information must lead the hearer to Christ. No person is saved merely because others in the family believe or because Christian vocabulary is familiar.

PERSONAL QUESTION If every religious accomplishment were removed from my answer, would I still be resting entirely upon Jesus Christ?

10. Baptism, Obedience and Biblical Order

Baptism Matters

Jesus commands believers to be baptized. Baptism publicly identifies the believer with Christ's death, burial and resurrection and with the community of faith. It should never be treated casually or indefinitely avoided by someone who claims to follow Christ.

Baptism Does Not Purchase Salvation

The importance of baptism does not make water the price of forgiveness. The thief who trusted Christ on the cross had no opportunity to be baptized, yet Jesus promised that he would be with Him in paradise. The normal believer should obey through baptism, but salvation rests upon Christ rather than the availability of a ceremony.

BIBLICAL ORDER We are not baptized to make Christ's work sufficient. We are baptized because the sufficient Savior has commanded those who believe to follow Him publicly.

11. Good Works: Root or Fruit?

Ephesians Does Not End at Verse 9

Ephesians 2:8–9 excludes works as the basis of salvation. Verse 10 immediately says that believers are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Paul does not oppose grace to a changed life. He places them in the proper order.

An apple tree does not become alive because someone ties apples to dead branches. A living tree produces fruit because of the life within it. External religious activity cannot manufacture spiritual life. When God gives new life, that life begins producing obedience, love and growth.

Growth Is Real but Not Instant Perfection

A new believer does not understand everything or immediately conquer every struggle. Christians continue to confess sin, learn obedience and grow in grace. Nevertheless, salvation establishes a new relationship and direction. Grace forgives and transforms.

LIFE PRINCIPLE Good works are not the root of salvation. They are the fruit of salvation.

12. Can God's Gift Be Refused?

John 1 says that Jesus came unto His own and His own received Him not. John 5:40 records Jesus saying, "ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." These passages describe a genuine invitation and genuine refusal.

The freeness of salvation does not mean that every person automatically possesses eternal life. John 3 distinguishes the person who believes from the person who remains in unbelief. Revelation closes with a broad invitation: "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The water is free, but Scripture still calls the thirsty person to come.

Nearness Is Not Possession

A person may live near a church, own several Bibles, know Christian relatives and hear the Gospel repeatedly. None of those privileges is identical to receiving Christ. Familiarity can be spiritually dangerous when it persuades someone that being near faith is the same as personally believing.

PASTORAL WARNING Nearness is not faith. Familiarity is not faith. Good intentions are not faith.

13. The Sinner's Prayer and Assurance

Prayer Expresses Faith

Romans 10 connects belief in the heart, confession and calling upon the name of the Lord. A sinner may speak directly to God, confess sin and place personal faith in Jesus Christ. A pastor may help by offering clear words that express the Gospel response.

Prayer Does Not Replace Faith

The New Testament does not provide one mandatory arrangement of sentences that guarantees salvation when repeated. Words can be spoken without understanding or trust. The prayer is valuable only when it expresses the sincere response of the heart.

Assurance Rests Upon Christ

Assurance should not depend upon remembering every word, producing a particular emotion or responding in the same physical manner as someone else. The believer looks to Christ's sufficiency and God's promises. The continuing fruit of new life supports assurance, but Christ remains its foundation.

PERMANENT INVITATION GUARDRAIL Those particular words did not save you. If you sincerely repented and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, Jesus saved you. The prayer was simply how you expressed that faith to Him.

14. The Source, Basis, Means and Result of Salvation

The Source Is Grace

God's grace is the source of salvation. He acts from mercy and love toward people who cannot make themselves worthy.

The Basis Is Christ's Finished Work

Jesus' sinless life, substitutionary death and bodily resurrection provide the objective foundation. Salvation is not based upon the strength of the sinner's feelings.

The Means Is Faith

Faith is the means by which the sinner receives Christ. Repentance and faith describe the honest Gospel response, not a payment that merits grace.

The Result Is New Life

God forgives, reconciles and makes alive. The believer becomes God's workmanship and begins a life of discipleship and good works prepared by God.

GOSPEL SUMMARY The source is grace. The basis is Christ. The means is faith. The response includes repentance. The result is new life. The glory belongs to God.

15. Conclusion: How Do We Receive the Gift?

The Bible's answer is neither complicated nor casual. We do not earn salvation through morality, ceremony or religious effort. We do not receive it by merely agreeing that Jesus existed. We repent toward God and place our personal faith in Jesus Christ, relying upon His death and resurrection as our only hope of forgiveness and eternal life.

Receiving salvation does not make us partners in purchasing it. Christ paid the price. Faith receives Him. Good works then follow as the fruit of new life. Baptism, fellowship, service and obedience take their rightful place after salvation as expressions of discipleship.

A free gift may be ignored, postponed or refused. Scripture therefore does not merely explain salvation. It invites a response. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

FINAL ANSWER We receive God's gift of salvation by repenting and placing our personal faith in Jesus Christ, trusting His finished work rather than our works as our only hope of forgiveness and eternal life.

Questions for Personal Reflection

What am I trusting to make me right with God?

Am I depending upon what Jesus did or what I have done?

Do I merely believe facts about Jesus, or have I personally trusted Him?

Have I confused baptism, church attendance, family history or morality with salvation?

Am I waiting to make myself worthy before coming to Christ?

Have I treated a prayer I once repeated as a substitute for present faith in Jesus?

Does my life show the growing fruit of the new life God gives?

Am I postponing my response because I assume there will always be another opportunity?

A Personal Invitation to Salvation

If you recognize that you are a sinner and cannot save yourself, you may come to Jesus Christ today. Believe that He died for your sins and rose again. Repent and place your faith in Him alone as Lord and Savior.

Walking forward, raising a hand or repeating a pastor's words cannot save you. Jesus saves. You may speak to Him in your own words, or you may use the following prayer to express sincere repentance and faith:

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I believe that You died for my sins and rose again. I repent and turn to You. I place my faith in You alone as my Lord and Savior. Please forgive me, save me and make me the person You want me to be. Thank You for the gift of eternal life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Those words are not a formula. If you sincerely turned to Jesus Christ and placed your faith in Him, Jesus saved you. Speak with a faithful pastor or mature Christian, begin reading the Bible and follow Christ through baptism, fellowship and discipleship.

A Closing Prayer

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for being rich in mercy and for loving us while we were still sinners. Thank You for sending Your only begotten Son to pay the price we could never pay.

Keep us from trusting our goodness, religion or accomplishments. Help us rest entirely upon Jesus Christ. Give assurance through Your promises to those who sincerely believe and produce in us the good works that flow from new life.

For those who remain uncertain, give them courage to ask their questions, open the Bible and seek the truth. May every reader understand the Gospel and respond to Your gracious invitation.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Selected Sources

Primary Scripture

Ephesians 2:1–10 KJV, with special emphasis upon verses 8–10.

Gospel Need and Christ's Work

Isaiah 64:6; John 3:16–18, 36; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:8; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.

Receiving Salvation

John 1:11–12; John 5:40; Acts 16:30–31; Acts 20:21; Romans 4:4–5; Romans 10:9–13; Titus 3:4–7; Revelation 22:17.

Faith, Works and Discipleship

Ephesians 2:8–10; James 2:14–26; Luke 23:39–43; 2 Corinthians 6:2.

Language and Interpretive References

Standard Greek lexicons and exegetical references were consulted for the terms grace, saved, faith, believe, gift, works, receive and repent, together with the grammatical relationship of Ephesians 2:8. These sources support the explanation but do not replace the controlling authority of Scripture.

Pastoral Note

This commentary accompanies the approved Reason Together Study. It does not replace the sermon transcript or internal Study Vault. Its purpose is to provide a readable public explanation of the principal Biblical reasoning, preserve pastoral cautions and help readers apply the study faithfully.

REASON TOGETHER *Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*