

Saved By Grace. Now What?

SCOTT HOEZEE

When teaching seminary students how to preach, one thing teachers of preaching often stress is to be careful to avoid writing sermons that make it sound like getting saved is somehow all up to us based on how we behave. But of course, the problem is that neither can sermons avoid talking about what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus; and therefore, what we need to do as a result of being saved. We are not saved on account of what we do, but neither can we be saved without acting differently as a result. Well, as we conclude a Groundwork series on some of the early Church's faithful sayings, we look at a line from the end of Paul's letter to Titus; a faithful saying that will help us ponder these matters. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and indeed, Dave, we are at the end of a five-part series in which we have highlighted common catch phrases from the First Century Church. These are easy to memorize sayings that we think circulated among the believers at a time when they did not have any written material; so they memorized some very short, pithy sayings that kind of encapsulated the Gospel so that they could rehearse that in their minds, share it with their neighbors, and so forth. And one of the things we have said about these faithful sayings, or trustworthy sayings, as they come up five times in the two letters to Timothy and the one letter to Titus is that they also kind of give us a window on history. What did the earliest brothers and sisters in Jesus think was the most important?

DAVE BAST

Right. We have kind of run the gamut from very practical things like leadership in the Church – remembering that and honoring that – to the purpose of Christ's whole coming, which was to save, to our need to endure, and a few other things in between...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Train ourselves in godliness.

DAVE BAST

Right. Now today we come to the last of them, and it is from the letter to Titus. Titus was a pastor, another of Paul's companions like Timothy; a younger man, probably, than Paul. At the time of Paul's writing, which is very near the end of his life – the Pastorals, we think, are the last things that came from his pen – Titus happens to be living and working on the island of Crete, and we do not really know anything else about the church there, except Paul addresses Titus there – Crete, one of the Greek islands. I have never been there myself. I do not have anything against the people of Crete of modern day, but Paul kind of slams them a little bit. It was a tough place to work, where Titus found himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Apparently the people of Crete had a reputation, and Paul even directly refers to it, I think, in the first chapter of Titus, that they had a reputation for being kind of gluttonous, kind of lazy, and Paul said: Yes, that is right; that is your flock, Titus. Good luck.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But not good luck, but be faithful to God; and so, here from the end of the letter, let's listen to these words, and eventually, at the very end of this we get to the faithful saying that is the subject of this program. So, Paul writes to Pastor Titus:

^{3:1}Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good; ²to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone. ³At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of fashions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another; ⁴but, when the kindness and love of God our savior appeared, He saved us; ⁵not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our savior; ⁷so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.

DAVE BAST

⁸This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. And of course, that is the passage. The first question is: What is the trustworthy saying? Because of all of the five, this is the hardest to sort of pin down. Is it when the kindness and love of God our savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy? Well, that is a trustworthy saying – that could be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Could be.

DAVE BAST

Or is it: He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our savior so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs of having the hope of eternal life. That could be it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; or it could be both. Probably...

DAVE BAST

What comes after? I mean, stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is hard to tell. Most scholars though... I mean, again, there are no quote marks in Greek, right? So unfortunately, you cannot see where Paul put quote marks around the trustworthy saying. Most scholars think it probably is this, the one option that you mentioned, Dave: He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our savior. So that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs of having the hope of eternal life.

DAVE BAST

And even that is a mouthful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a mouthful; that is not a real short one; but it certainly gets at core things. So, this is a passage of being saved by grace alone – justification – which we are going to talk at length about in just a little while on this program; but Paul nestles it in the context of reminding people also to do good; and so, you have that thing that has been held in creative tension all through Church history. We saw it on a recent Groundwork series on the epistle of James, where it is deeds versus faith and faith versus works; and the creative tension is exactly what we said at the top of the program: Before you are saved, nothing you do could get you saved; but once you are saved, there is a lot you are supposed to do in gratitude to God. So, it is that tension between needing to talk about Christian living and never wanting to confuse that with how you became a Christian in the first place.

DAVE BAST

Right; yes, absolutely. You referred to the first chapter of Titus, where Paul kind of takes a knock or two at the Cretans and their rather low way of life; but here in Chapter 2 he says: But we are the same. We are no different. One of the things that authentic Christianity has always stressed is we are not any better than anyone else. We do not have any right to look down our nose at anybody. So, Paul kind of goes on and says: Hey, look, at one time we too were foolish and disobedient and deceived and enslaved. We lived in malice and envy. We hated each other and were hated by... So, yes, okay...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Kind of a dim picture.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is who we are; and then this wonderful introduction of the idea of grace, and just listen to the words that Paul uses – the vocabulary of salvation. He talks about the love of God, for starters; and then saved us because of His mercy; rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit kind of symbolized in baptism...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The kindness, the kindness of God. It is like Ephesians 2...

DAVE BAST

Generous, generosity. Jesus Christ our savior – justified by His grace – those key words; and then, hope – the hope of eternal life. So, it is all that grace stuff.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and all that grace stuff that leads, then, to a renewed life and of doing good works. What is interesting – and here is what we are going to want to talk about coming up in just a moment – both how we get saved and the fact that that then leads us to do good works – both in this passage are rooted in a doctrine that we call the doctrine of *justification*; and in just a moment we will want to think about what is justification? It is the core of this faithful saying, and of everything in this passage. So, we will think about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we just noted, Dave, that in this passage from Titus 2 that we are looking at, Paul roots everything – how we get saved and the reason we live differently as a result of being saved – it is all rooted in our having been justified by the kindness and love and mercy and grace of God. The great

Reformed theologian, John Calvin, once said that justification is the hinge of the Reformation; so Calvin said, back in the 16th century, that the whole reformation of the Church that Martin Luther started – the hinge of the whole Reformation – everything swings on, and everything depends on this idea of justification; and so obviously it is a pretty big deal theologically.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; I mean, you quoted Calvin; Luther famously called it the article of the standing or falling of a church. A church will either live or die by what it teaches with respect to justification. Now, interestingly, normally we have learned to talk about justification by faith, and that is certainly true, and stressed elsewhere, but here in this passage Paul talks about justification by grace – slightly different, although he mentions faith without using the word when he goes on to say so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; and we are going to sort of explore that tension between faith and works.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, in the tradition of the Church, we do believe we are saved by grace and justified by grace; but the very first thing that happens to you when you get grace is you get faith; and so, it is almost as though saying justified by faith is the same thing as saying justified by grace because to Paul's mind, they were simultaneous anyway. Grace comes, boom, faith comes. It is the first gift of grace.

DAVE BAST

We have a famous document, Scott and I both, in our traditions, our churches, called the Heidelberg Catechism, and it asks very pointedly: How are you right with God, in a famous question, and it says: Only through true faith in Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But that is not of yourself, that is not a work.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a gift; and that is exactly right. How am I made right with God?

DAVE BAST

That is the justification.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it is the answer to the question, in kind of popular parlance: How do I go to heaven? How do I know... Or the rich young ruler: What must I do to be saved? Well, the answer is you cannot do anything. You cannot work your own way to heaven, you can only be brought there as a gift of grace; but that is where justification comes in; and back in the Reformation day, one of the things that set Luther off was the fact that the Church had begun implicitly, if not actively, teaching: Well, how do you go to heaven? You give enough money to the Church. You contribute to building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. You behave. You straighten up and fly right morally, and then God will reward you – if you are good enough, God will reward you; and that, of course, leads to great anxiety. Martin Luther was such an honest guy that he knew that at any given moment he was not doing it right. He was terribly guilty all the time. He would no sooner confess his sins, he would get up off his knees and commit another sin on his way up; and so, he said: Boy, if this is up to me, I am in trouble. So, when he read Romans for himself and saw Paul's words, you know, that we are justified by faith – it is a gift of God – what a revolution that led to in Church history and in the history of the world, really.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you know I think the problem today is quite different because I think that most people in our culture never dream that there might be something wrong between them and God. You know, how are you right with God is just not a question that occurs to them. They do not think in those terms anymore. Maybe it is a measure of how far we have sort of departed from scripture – from the Bible – that there is no knowledge or sense that something is wrong. I mean, you cannot read ten pages in the Bible without coming up against the idea that something is wrong. So, in a sense, it gets back to this idea of justified by grace. I mean, even before grace creates faith in us, it maybe will create an awareness of our need that something is wrong...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure, absolutely.

DAVE BAST

And that, too, comes from grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, that is interesting because, as you just pointed out, Dave, not only is the concept of justification or the need for it not much in vogue these days, the truth behind it is also not known. In fact, about the only place you are going to hear the word justification today is when you are using Microsoft Word or some word processing program and you can justify your document. You can right justify, left justify, or do full justification. Well, what does that mean? Well, when you justify, it means that all the words on either the right or the left or both will line up in a straight line, lining up with the edge of the page, so everything is going to be straight; and that is actually what justification does. It makes us line up right with God, but you need that because you are not lined up – you are misaligned – where God is the straight edge you are jagged and crooked and fractured and broken; and what Jesus does by grace is He smoothes that all out so that... Some people remember justification – justified – by saying it is just as if I'd never sinned because now I line up with God; and the Gospel says that is what we need because without that grace, we do not line up at all. We are crooked and jagged.

DAVE BAST

And what grace means as well is that this is one hundred percent God's doing. Another popular fallacy, I guess... maybe I am going off too much on popular culture now, but I think we have serious problems in our society of not understanding the scripture, and one of the most popular ideas is: Well, okay, if you are going to come back to God, you take the first step, and then God will come and meet you, you know; or God helps those who help themselves – the most famous verse that is not in the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; or I actually saw a tee shirt recently from some Christian novelty company – I think I may have mentioned it before on Groundwork – but it was a picture of Jesus on the cross, and this was really the slogan: Jesus did His best, you do the rest.

DAVE BAST

You do the rest.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is heresy!

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is not even that He did 99.9% and we do 0.1%; grace means one hundred percent God or nothing.

DAVE BAST

Right. All we do is accept this. We open our hands and say, “Thank you,” and that is really what the response of faith is. It is responding by trust in what God has done, and He had to do a lot. I mean, grace also implies all of these other things – some of the words we mentioned: His mercy; Jesus Christ the savior, Paul mentions here; Jesus had to do something for justification to happen; God could not simply tap His magic wand and wave pixie dust on the world and say: Hey, it is all okay, you know, I have dealt with... No, the cross is at the heart of this, and our faith is put in what Jesus has done for us in dying for us and paying our price.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, human beings as Paul describes it in this passage in Titus, without God and without grace, we are an absolute mess, but when grace comes it changes everything; but anything that powerful, to clean us up that much, is going to have, needless to say, huge ripple effects; and that is what we are going to want to think about next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where today we are talking about the faithful saying – the last of them from Titus – that God saved us by His mercy and He has justified us by His grace so that we may have the hope of eternal life, and so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. So, now we come to the other side of things, and the difficulty of balancing this, of stressing grace – it is all God’s doing – but grace also transforms us so that we get doing as well, and what we get to do is good works.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here is a point where you can have a lot of interesting discussions with a lot of good, faithful, Christian people who have different perspectives on this. Here is something, too, that sometimes can lead to guilt and anxiety, and the big question is: Okay, I know we are called to do good works, but how do I know when I have done enough? How much is good enough? Can I still, even after getting grace, mess up enough or not do enough that I will still end up on the outside? I mean, what about that? And so, you know, that is a tough question: How much is enough? What is the measure here? But it is also a question... You know, there are at least three ways I can think of that are kind of bad ways to answer the question of how much good work is enough good work. On the one hand, somebody could say: Well, I don’t know if I do enough for God, but I do a lot more than George and Helen, who go to my church; so I have to be ahead of them in God’s eyes. Well, I don’t think that is how...

DAVE BAST

Comparison shopping.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or maybe we say: God knows how busy I am, and if He did not want me this busy, He would not have called me to the job I do; so, He knows I don’t have any time left over for the Church. I cannot do anything that way. That is not a very good way to think about it. Or – and here is something I think we all encounter sometimes – maybe somebody says: I am a deacon, I volunteer at the food pantry, I coordinate our church’s homeless program, I work two days a week with the afterschool tutoring program, I attend every service church holds, I teach Sunday school and a weeknight bible study, and I still feel guilty that I am not doing enough, even though I am exhausted all the time. That is another thing I do not think that you want to do with this call to good works.

DAVE BAST

Well, and here is one more. Let's go to the opposite extreme; the person who says as some wag famously supposedly did say: I like to sin, God likes to forgive, and everything is admirably arranged. You know, sort of the...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Cavalier...

DAVE BAST

Hey, what the heck. I'll do whatever I feel like doing because I am saved by grace. Paul talks about people like that in his letter to the Romans when he says: Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid. By no means. Don't do it. It does not work that way. So, yes, where is the right balance between relying totally on Him, recognizing everything comes from Him, all I do is say yes and open my hands and say thank you; but it has to change me, and it ought to affect the way I live and the things that I do if my faith is real. I may have used this line before, but it is Spurgeon's great line, I think. He says faith that does not change your behavior will never change your destiny. So, it has to be life transforming; and there is James again, you know, faith that is real.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think that... I mean, are we supposed to keep track? Are we supposed to keep a tally book of our good deeds and put notches on our Bible every time we witness to somebody and they get saved? I do not think so. I think that a better way to think about this, if we have the hope of eternal life, as this faithful saying from Titus 2 says, if we have that, then I think it is supposed to just kind of flow into everything, even to the point where you are not wondering: When am I doing a specific Christian good work and when am I just doing something else? No, it is sort of like: Well, when I am a student in the classroom, I am a good student; I am a faithful student; I am an honest student because Jesus is flowing through me here; when I work as an auto mechanic in the shop and fix cars right and do not overcharge people and do my work faithfully; when I am a stay-at-home dad and taking care of the kids – all of it is some of the good work we do, not just specifically: Well, you know, most of my week is not spiritual, but I gave an hour at the food pantry Wednesday night, so I guess that is my good work for the week. I do not think you are supposed to look at it that way.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely not; although I think there is a good analogy with the classroom – you just mentioned students in the classroom. You know, you think about the kind of student – and we probably all knew them – who would come up right away first day of class and say to the teacher or the professor: What do I have to do to get an A? Tell me what I have to do to get an A. That in itself – that attitude – is a revelation that you do not have a true learner – a true student who is interested in the subject and who loves learning, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Is this going to be on the test?

DAVE BAST

So, it is not the right question to come to God and say: How much do I have to do to know I am doing enough, to do good works? It does not work that way. That is why Paul says... What he says specifically here to Titus is: I want you to stress these things. What things? All the stuff about grace. All the stuff about mercy. All the stuff about the work of the Spirit: The washing, the rebirth, the renewal. The grace itself that justifies. Stress those things so that, he writes, those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. It is almost like, if you revel in grace, if you just fill yourself with a sense of the goodness of God, well then, yes, you are going to go out and you are going to want to live gratefully; and the doing good will take care of itself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you will bear the fruit of the Spirit; you will discover what your particular gift is and you will use it. Maybe your gift is hospitality or teaching or who knows what, but you will do it. A leads to B, right? When you stress the grace and really help people see the beauty of the Gospel and that kindness of God... I love the fact that he uses that word kindness here and in Ephesians 2... Kindness sounds wimpy to us today; so the idea that our salvation came from God's kindness kind of elevates kindness to a new level. Once you see that, you are going to be kind, you are going to be gracious, you are going to be forgiving because what you have seen in God you want to do for others, and it should flow naturally. Do we all go in fits and starts? Yes. Do we fail? Yes. Do we need help and forgiveness? Yes. But, there is an inevitability here, and I think that neither pride: Look at how much I do; nor fear: Oh, I don't think I do enough – neither one should characterize it. It is too much like that kid, you know: What do I have to do to get an A? If you are that uptight and nervous, you don't get it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. Well, it is a trustworthy and faithful saying. Paul told Titus that God has given us hope of eternal life and he has given it by grace, and that is going to transform us and make us live differently. It most assuredly will. Thanks be to God.

And thanks to you for joining our Groundwork conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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