

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED

Scripture: Titus 3:4-8

After that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

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.

When one man is engaged by another to work, and a wage is agreed upon, the hired worker earns his wage. The wage is his right. If the employer refuses to pay the wage, he can be sued in a court of law and forced to pay, because he is legally obligated to pay. One who has worked and earned may come boldly to his employer and claim his rightful due.

A gift differs from a wage. A gift is not earned. A gift is not given because of any legal obligation. To be a gift, a gift must be given freely, with no obligation, without any work on the part of the recipient to earn it, and perhaps without even any worthiness on the part of the recipient to have it.

Man's salvation is the gift of God; not the wages of good works. No man can earn salvation. There is no conceivable situation in which man can place himself so that God owes him, or is obligated to him. God owes nothing to man, but man owes everything to God. Even the saint, the righteous, the obedient, the perfect man -- all owe him a great debt. What do you have that you did not receive from God? He is the Creator of the world you live on, with all its resources and beauties, some of which you have adapted or appropriated to your own uses. He is the one who gives you life, health, strength, time, talent. He is the Sustainer, Ruler, Lawgiver whose continuing power and law make possible your continuing existence. What can you use to pay him? What can you rightfully or legally demand from him?

Man is always the creature, the thing made or created, and not the Creator. He is always the suppliant before God, the beggar depending on God for every breath of life and every morsel of food. He cannot perform works and then require God to give him credit on the heavenly books for services rendered. And even if he could, he would never be able to balance the books, because every man is under a debt of sin which God is under no obligation to cancel or forgive. Because we are all sons and daughters of Adam, we all partake of the consequences of Adam's sin and fall; we all share in his rebellious and fallen nature. That nature has caused us all to commit personal sin. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no not one."

No man is worthy therefore, to stand in God's presence. The closer we come to God, the more we realize our unworthiness. The true saint, the truly righteous man, never claims that he is righteous. The true saint confesses his utter unworthiness to be compared with or to approach to God's perfection. Like Isaiah, when he sees the Lord high and lifted up, he is constrained to exclaim, "Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips...." The true saint, as he strives to fulfill God's demands upon him, to draw nearer to God, and to fulfill his demands, grows increasingly aware of his own inadequacy and unworthiness before God. No man can earn acceptance with God by his own works. Forgiveness, redemption,

salvation, restoration to God's fellowship -- these are all un-earned gifts. They are not wages we have earned by our compliance with some code of conduct, nor are they a bonus added to such wages.

Man cannot save himself. He has no power over death. He cannot even exercise dominion over the good earth for very long before death intervenes. He cannot maintain dominion even over the small portion of earthly substance which comprises his physical body. No amount of obedience to law, or conformity to a moral code, or frantic good and pious works, can save man from death or restore him to the presence and fellowship of his Creator.

What we could never do for ourselves, God has done for us through the gift of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Salvation is a gift of grace. It is not a wage that man can earn or claim as his right. The prodigal son relinquished all rights to his place in the Father's house when he took his portion of the inheritance and left for a far country. He did not deserve to be restored to his father's house, or to his father's love, or to his father's presence. He had no claim on any of his father's remaining property. Nevertheless, the father's love, his mercy, his grace claimed the son in spite of the son's lack of merit. So we cannot claim or demand as our right a place in God's kingdom or household. Our justification before God -- his mercy -- his forgiveness -- our restoration to his presence -- are God's free gifts. They are given by reason of his free grace, and not because he owes them to us. "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."

Men who rely on their works to save them are prone to set up a code of conduct to which they more or less rigidly adhere, at the same time condemning all others who do not or cannot comply with that code. They judge their own righteousness by the imperfect code, and not by the absolute and eternal perfection of God. They conceive of God as extending a special and exclusive grace upon their race, their class, or even upon their religious denomination. They are willing to accept the grace of God for themselves because they think they keep a superior code of conduct; but they are somewhat

unwilling to have that grace extended to sinners who are less worthy, less moral than themselves. The grace of God is never exclusive; it is universal. Any man may claim it. There is no man so poor, so low, so sinful that he cannot claim and enjoy the grace of God. The only thing that can exclude him from that grace is his own rebellion and refusal to accept it. And even then it is always available if he will "come to himself" and return to his Father's house.

Men who rely on works are primarily concerned about the details of outward behavior. On the other hand when one begins to recognize and become aware of God's love and grace, as manifested through Jesus Christ his Son, and as he follows obediently where that grace leads him, he undergoes an inward change, a new birth, a new motivation for life. Once this has happened, he no longer needs a rigid code of conduct, or a set of rules to follow. His conduct flows naturally and inevitably from the kind of person he has become. His new nature, with its faith in a God of grace and love, cannot help expressing itself in a certain kind of conduct which is the result of that grace, and of the sense of forgiveness that grace has brought. One who unreservedly and humbly accepts the Father's gift of love, mercy, forgiveness, and restoration of fellowship will also accept willingly and gladly the obligations of his new status. He will want to act as a son of his Father should act, and by God's grace, he will.

Good works are not the means of salvation. They are the end product which God has in mind when he extends grace to men who were once intent on evil works. Good works are the fruits that indicate that grace has found at least a partial response, and that its results are good.

Works have their place in God's plan of salvation. We shall discuss that place in more detail in the next sermon of this series. Men's works done in the flesh will determine the degree of reward given to those who have received the salvation of grace; they will be judged "according to the works done in the flesh." But as we are careful to maintain good works, let us never lose sight of the fact that "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."