

Galatians 1:11-24

“Amazing Grace Revealed”

June 5, 2016



-when you stop and think about it,
Saul was a terrorist

-like those in the Middle East

today, his self-proclaimed mission in life was to persecute
and kill in the name of religion

-he was a blasphemer, a murderer and an enemy of Christians

-and yet... God called Saul unto himself

-"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

-the light of Christ shining around him and in him revealed his
sin

-it also revealed God's grace

-Saul had beheld the glory of God and wasn't dead!

-Jesus wasn't there to kill him, but to forgive him and to call
him as an apostle to the Gentiles

-when you look at Scripture, you start to see a pattern

-Saul was not alone in the list of unlikely candidates to receive
God's amazing grace and his call to serve

-in fact, Jesus' disciples and apostles form an elite group whom
we could call the original Dirty Dozen

-time and again the pattern was the same ... the light of God reveals
sin ... the grace of God in Christ forgives sin ... the Spirit of God
calls into service

- the epistle readings for June lessons form a continual account from Paul's letter to the Galatians
 - it gives us an opportunity to do a multi-week read and study of this important letter that is all about God's Amazing Grace
 - our goal is to examine this thing called grace
- the grace of God in Christ stands alone as the means of our salvation
 - if you try to mix salvation and the law, you have an unholy mixture
 - you end up with a poison that will lead to death
 - that is why Paul was so on fire last week ... if anyone tells you a different Gospel, don't listen!
 - we are saved by grace, through faith in Christ, apart from the works of the law
 - “if salvation could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing”
 - if there were something you could do to save yourself, then God is a fool ... if you could get yourself to heaven, Jesus wouldn't have had to suffer and die on the cross
- so ... our goal today is to try and see just how amazing God's grace is
- Paul tells us that his call was from his mother's womb, it happened before he was born
 - he was set apart for it from the beginning
 - and he was not alone
- it happened to Jeremiah who was only a child when he was called
- it happened to Isaiah who was a self-confessed man of unclean lips
- remember how we said that the “Paul Pattern” had happened before?
 - the light of God reveals sin ... the grace of God in Christ forgives sin ... the Spirit of God calls into service
 - that's what happened to Isaiah in Isaiah 6

- it happened to Gideon who was the weakest man in the weakest clan in all of Manasseh
- it happened to Moses who was prone to stutter and prone to pride
- it happened to Jonah who was not very good at following orders, but was very good at looking out for number one

- when you come to the New Testament, why would Jesus recruit red-neck fishermen to be his disciples?
 - why would he call tax collectors and doubters
 - why would he want zealots who were planning revolution?
 - and why, oh, why would God pick a terrorist like Saul?
 - what's he got ... what makes him worthy?

- the answer is nothing absolutely nothing
 - God calls him by his grace so that he might preach ... grace
 - you need someone called by grace to preach grace
 - his ever-obedient angels have never experienced that kind of grace
 - how could they preach and plead and encourage

- today we want to go a little deeper in our understanding of the amazingness of grace

- did you know that Paul has his own apocalypse?
 - when the word apocalypse is mentioned, we usually think of John and the last book of the Bible with all its plagues and wars and bloodshed
 - or we think of global nuclear war
- we think of exploding suns or huge meteors crashing into the earth

- at its very heart, an apocalypse is “a revelation of hidden, heavenly secrets about God’s plan for human beings”
- and while an apocalypse is usually bad news, the revealing of hidden heavenly secrets about God’s plan for human beings could be a good thing

- Paul has a revelation to bring
 - it is a marvelous, never before seen, colossal, stupendous revelation
 - it is not the revelation of destruction, it is the revelation of God’s amazing grace
 - at the beginning of his ministry Jesus read this from Isaiah: “*The LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor*”

- what is it that makes God’s grace so utterly amazing?
- we know ... salvation is by grace alone through faith alone without the works of the law
 - we know that if salvation could be gained through the law, then Christ died for nothing
 - we know that there is nothing in us that makes us worthy of salvation ... we are sinners, blind, deaf, dead, enemies of God
 - there is nothing in us that makes us worthy of God ever choosing us
- do you know what that means?
 - it makes God’s eternal election divinely necessary ... you were chosen by God before you were born

- otherwise, your salvation would have had something to do with you
 - it would somehow depend on what you did
 - or what you didn't do
 - or what you're going to do tomorrow

- did God come down and look around and think, "who would do a good job for me?"
 - who has earned a promotion?
 - who has the inner drive and will get the job done?

- if you're God and you've come down to this sorry world looking to hire some help, what do you have to pick from?
 - you're looking at even more than the Dirty Dozen here
 - in fact, everyone is a reject
 - everyone is lost and condemned
 - everyone has the making of a terrorist

- Jesus says to his original Dirty Dozen in John 15:16, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide*"

- Paul writes in Ephesians 1:4-5, "*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*"

- did you catch the amazingness of God's grace ... God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world

- God decided way, way back, even before you were born, that you would spend eternity with him
- it wasn't based on how good a person you were, or would become
 - it wasn't based on you becoming a good person
 - it wasn't based on a decision you might make
- you have been saved by grace ... grace alone ... God did it all
 - you have redemption through his blood
 - you have the forgiveness of sins
 - you have a guaranteed inheritance
 - you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit

- many people have problems with this and find it hard to understand
 - and you need to know that there are parts of it that you won't understand

- you can say what Scripture says, but if you try to say more, if you try and follow logic and reason, you will go off the rails

- what do we know for sure?
 - God has revealed that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
 - God has revealed that faith is not the cause of grace, nor does faith trigger the results of grace
 - if it did, then grace would no longer be grace and heaven would not be a gift of God, but something you earned

- salvation by grace means that God loves you and decided to save you before you were born
 - he didn't choose you because you were somehow more worthy than the next person
 - he didn't choose you because he could look into the future and see what you would become

- when he chose you, He became the cause of every spiritual blessing in your life
 - you were brought to faith ... through him
 - you have been held in faith ... through him
 - you will be preserved in faith unto eternal life ...
 - how does it go ... he who began this good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ
 - he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength
 - nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord
- by grace you have been saved through faith ...
- the Bible says this ...
 - God wants everyone to be saved
 - those who are saved, are saved by grace
- the Bible also tells us that not everyone is saved
 - those who are not saved, are lost by their own fault, by their own persistent unbelief and rejection of God's grace and God's Holy Spirit
- when people have tried to solve the mystery they come up with one of two answers:
 - if God has predestined some for heaven, then they conclude that he must have also predestined others for hell
 - that makes perfect logical sense
 - but it is a theological error called "double predestination"
- how can you say that God decided in eternity only to save some people
 - to only have grace for some
 - to only forgive some ... that Jesus would only die for some

- and if you are not part of group A, you are bound for hell
 - and there's not a thing you can do about it
- this is where the logic of double predestination leads
 - problem is that our logic is flawed, corrupted, broken by sin
 - Scripture clearly says that God wants all to be saved
 - Jesus died for the sins of the world
 - salvation is by grace
- there is another error, and this one destroys grace, by making God's love something you work to earn
 - if God wants all saved and some are not saved, then some want to explain it this way ... your salvation and my salvation must be because you and I did something different from those poor souls who are not saved
 - I earned it
 - I was faithful
 - I held on through thick and thin
 - grace did some of it, maybe even most of it
 - but I did my part
 - I helped
 - I co-operated
 - I invited Jesus into my heart
 - I made a decision
- herein lies the other error
 - if you want the name for it, it's called "synergism"
 - it literally means that I must add my work to the work of Christ, and working together is what gets me home to heaven
- does that sound like grace to you?
 - it sounds like salvation by works to me

- so what can we say in response to this?
 - there is only one answer we can give ... it goes like this ...
 - this side of heaven our sin-sickened minds are unable to understand the mysteries of God
- we have to learn to do something else
 - you have to stop trying to understand it and explain it with your mind and let the truth of God's Word simply speak to you heart and your soul
- you see, what we have here is not so much a mystery for us to solve as it is a wonderful and awe-inspiring treasure for us to behold
 - that is what Paul seeks to show us
 - many times when you hear someone's personal testimony it's all about what a good job I've done turning my life around
 - the focus is on self ... nobody was as bad as I was
 - no one has done a more wonderful turn-around
 - where does this lead?
 - it leads to "I'm so proud of me"
- what we see here is just the opposite ... Paul has no pride, there is no hint of self-glorification
 - his personal testimony is not given to bring fame or honour or glory to himself
 - he only ever has one aim and goal, to bring glory to God
 - to hold up Jesus Christ crucified and risen
 - to point to God's grace
- the truth that God chose you before you were born, that he predestined you in love is necessary for grace to stand
 - it is a great and wonderful comfort for a sinner to know and believe that God will get you to heaven without your help

- it is a great and wonderful comfort for a sinner to know and believe that it's not our works that save us, but God's grace
- here's where the mystery sits ... if a person is saved, it is by grace and not his or her own doing
- it is because, in eternity, before the foundation of the world, God chose you for salvation, and in time, did everything that was necessary for your salvation ...
- if a person is not saved, it is not God's fault
 - it isn't because God didn't try or didn't love them enough
 - it isn't because God predestined them to condemnation
- God's Word through Paul in our text today was intended for hurting ears and sorrowful hearts
 - it was intended for Christians who were beset by trials and persecution, who were suffering for their faith
 - who weren't sure if they could hold out against the devil, the world and their own sinful flesh
 - who were deeply worried that their salvation depended not only on God's power but their own efforts
 - in the midst of those dark days, God's grace in Christ calls us to look outside of ourselves ... to look up to the cross
 - to Jesus crucified and risen for the sins of the world
 - how do I know I'm forgiven?
 - on Calvary God shows me the bill paid in full
- those who are hurting under the load of sin need to hear grace
 - the sharp knife of the law has already exposed their sin
 - they need to hear the sweet comfort of the Gospel
- what does Paul give them in our text today?
 - he gives them the sweet comfort of the Gospel

- they could rest secure in God's strength because long ago, before the creation of the world, God had his gracious eye on them
 - long ago, before the creation of the world, God put into place a plan to save them
 - that he who began this good work in them would bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ
- not much of it is about us
 - most of it is about God
 - what God has done for us
 - how God has chosen us
 - how he has forgiven us, redeemed us, adopted us, prepared a place of us in eternity
 - it's all from God, fueled by his love and his grace
- the blessed result is confidence and a certainty of salvation
 - that's what the good news of the gospel does ... it calms troubled hearts with pure grace
- that's what troubled hearts need
 - I know my sinfulness ... I confessed my sin today
 - I know there will be more tomorrow, and the day after ...
 - until the day I die, I can only echo Paul and say, "wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?"
 - you and I can only cling to grace
 - we can only trust God's doing and God's promise
 - and until the day we die, we will also say with Paul, "thanks be to God... through Jesus Christ my Lord"

-so, if you think that you are too dirty, too sinful or have done too much wrong for God to even look at you...think again!

-God wants that ALL would be saved

-he has shown that He has mercy for even those who would kill His followers

-God's mercy is great

-it is yours to have through the life lived and blood let by the Saviour of the Nations, the Lord Jesus Christ