

## Salvation by Grace Matt Bassford

Theme: GRACE – FAITH – LIFE (the pursuit of Holiness) – Sequence matters.

Everything begins with Grace. Everything possible is sourced in and empowered by God's grace. This grace was given before you were born, before you obeyed, and will make life possible afterward. There is no point where anything about what you can do or who you are is divorced from God's grace. We struggle with this. GRACE, FAITH, WORKS. Maybe there is some scarring from abuses by others. But we make a HUGE mistake if we equate GRACE and WORKS – as if they are equals in power or glory. Ex) like seeing the **Sun** and **Moon** as the same size and equating them. But one feeds the light of the other. We will dig into this in detail in the worship hour, but first I want to draw your attention to an article. Matt Bassford is dying of ALS. It has brought him great clarity with reference to Grace that we all need.

Recently, I have become an even louder proponent of grace, indeed of the naked necessity of grace, than I ever was before. I can tell from the comments I've been getting on social media that this has made some good brethren nervous. They reply with variations of, "Yes, but you have to do something." In light of this, I thought it would be useful to explain my thoughts more fully.

Every day, I am confronted with the reality that in the next couple of years, I will die. The Bible tells me that I should be confident in the face of death, that I should contemplate the end of my life with hope rather than fear or despair.

If so, that hope can have only one basis, and I am not it. I know myself too well. I believe that I am a better man than I have ever been before, but I also see more clearly the immense gap between my righteousness and the righteousness of Christ. If I have to be good enough, I assuredly have not been.

I have not been diligent enough. I have not been wise enough. I have not been holy enough. I have not been loving enough. In these and so many other areas, I see no cause for confidence in my own merit, yet I am to be confident.

Such confidence can only come from putting my trust in the grace of the Lord. It is so great that I no longer need to fret over to the sufficiency of my own goodness. Whether that goodness be little or much, His grace is sufficient.

So far, I know that I have said little to settle the nerves of my concerned readers! If indeed we rely on the grace of Christ because we can make no meaningful contribution to our own salvation, doesn't that lead to an apathetic, do-nothing faith that is unconcerned with sin because God is just going to slosh a bucket of grace all over it?

In the first place, I acknowledge that this is not merely a hypothetical. There are millions, both in the Lord's church and outside of it, who treat the grace that they imagine they have received as a license to be worldly. Second, though, the question was answered 2000 years ago in Romans 6.

Too often, we go to Romans 6 to find support for our beliefs about baptism but fail to reckon with the argument that the chapter makes. According to Paul, grace does not release us from the need to do anything. Instead, it puts us under obligation. We are freed from sin, but we become slaves of righteousness.

If we truly understand ourselves in this way, the notion of being do-nothing Christians is laughable. Admittedly, earthly slaves are not known for diligence, but even they will work hard when under the eyes of their masters. We can never escape the supervision of our Master.

We must consider ourselves as having no self-will left in the things of the spirit because we have wholly given over that will to Jesus. We don't even have standing to ask how much or how little we should give and whether it will be good enough. We already have signed over everything.

This dovetails with James's discussion of justification by works in James 2. Biblical scholars have pitted Paul and James against each other for hundreds of years. However, they should have noted that James didn't merely cite Abraham, one of the most illustrious figures of the Old Testament, as an example of justification by works. He also chose Rahab.

I've watched Bible classes struggle with Rahab for years. How could God exalt a prostitute who helped the Israelites by lying??? However, that's not a difficulty with the text. It's the point. We only become confused when we refuse to class ourselves with Rahab.

Rahab did not justify herself by being good enough. She justified herself through the action that is inseparable from genuine faith. Instead of continuing on to destruction with the people of Jericho, she cast her lot with God's people.

It is the same with us. If her service was tainted by lying, how much more is our service tainted by envy, pride, carelessness, indifference, and lack of love! All of us are in the business of offering blemished sacrifices. Nonetheless, like Rahab, we serve anyway. We too have cast our lot with the people of God and are justified in His sight.

The grace of the Bible is not a blank check that allows us to sin all the more. It is a demand that we put to death the old man of sin. None of us will ever succeed in so doing. None of us will ever come close.

However, our souls do not depend on our success or failure. The same grace that asks for everything offers everything too, so that we may rest our hope not on ourselves but on the salvation available only in Christ.

### **Romans 1-6 – God's Plan to Save us by Grace through Faith**

- Ch. 1 – There is inexcusable sin in the world around us. *(a non-Christ life world)* **(1:23-25)**
  - o We often site that the godless world is lost in sin.
- Ch. 2 – There is inexcusable sin in you and me at times also. **(2:1-2,17-22)**
  - o Religious people were often guilty of hypocrisy and sin.
- Ch. 3 – None are righteous. None worthy. All sin and dishonor God. **(3:9-12,21-25)**
  - o If you are saved it will be because you put your trust in Jesus.
- Ch. 4 – Men like Abraham were righteous based on Faith in God. **(4:3-5, 16-22)**
  - o This chapter focuses on Abraham's trust in God to lead him.
- Ch. 5 – Our salvation is based upon the Father, Son and Holy Spirit **(5:1-5,17-21)**
  - o Christ's life offers you grace and the gift of righteousness.
- Ch. 6 – Does this mean sin is okay? May it never be. How can that be? **(6:1-7, 16-23)**
  - o You have given your life to Him, willingly and fully enslaved to God.

Salvation is from God. It is a beautiful gift offered to you in Jesus Christ. You must believe in His power to save you. You must give your life over to Him, obedient in baptism and enslaved to His service. These are responses to grace. The result is freedom from the bondage and penalty of sin, and the freely given gift of eternal life in Jesus our Lord.

What if I sin? You will. You are no more righteous on your own merit than you were before. But now, by faith in Christ, you will not let sin reign in your body, because your body belongs to God – you are filled with gratitude. The good news is righteousness does not require perfection. The crucial news is that you fully surrender your life to God.

### **James 2 – Faith without works is dead. But Rahab lied and nobody is talking about it!**

This chapter is written to Christians. It may have application to the non-Christian but that is not the text.

- **2:8-10** – Warning: we can't ignore sin. We can't accept it. Our whole lives belong to God.
- **2:12-13** – Bonus note: hard heartedness is often the hidden problem. Don't overlook that.
- **2:14-17** – Works of love and mercy must define us. Faith will live in works of godliness.
- **2:18-20** – Works of obedience demonstrate faith, and the two cannot be separated.
- **2:25-26** – I get Abraham, but why would the Spirit reference Rahab?!
  - o She was a foreigner, a prostitute, and she LIED right in the middle of her story!
  - o **Joshua 2:1-5** – She lied about hiding the spies. **6:22-23** – She and her family are saved.
  - o **Hebrews 11:31** emphasizes her harlotry, omits the lie, and puts her in a great list!
  - o **Matt. 1:5** - She is brought into the lineage of David and Christ! Redeemed and Blessed.

So why is no one talking about her mistake? It's almost like her belief in God, determination to follow Him, and ultimate choice to abandon all to be with God's people, led God to overlook her sin, committed in a time of fear, and to openly welcome her as His own instantly and completely.

I am Rahab. I left sinful living behind and a life without God. Even while I'm trying to do right, dumb decisions, sin, sneaks in (usually on the inside). Does God emphasize the mistake or treasure the life of faith? No lying isn't okay. No sin is. But God's grace is greater. God's grace will lead me to holiness. So I repent and grow because of His goodness.