

Bail Out Package

Ephesians 2:1-10

3-14-21 Pastor Bill Mosley

Gordon MacDonald tells this story. I wish I knew the names; I know it's a true story. There was an English pub and outside there was a raging storm, and the worse the storm got the more people came in for shelter and, of course, they got to drinking and eating. It was pretty wild that night. In the midst of all the melee of people moving around and laughing and gesturing, there was a waitress who came along with a tray, holding it high with mugs of ale and cups of coffee and tea. Someone in the crowd didn't see her coming and jostled her rather dramatically and the tea and the coffee and the ale went flying.

It splashed all over a newly painted wall. In a nanosecond the wall was splotted with all of this liquid running down.

The tavern keeper was instantly angry. The crowd got quiet to see how he would react. The humiliated waitress stood there wondering what would happen next. In that silence, oliver sudden from the corner of the tavern, a man spoke out. He said, "If you will permit me, perhaps I can do something about that." And he stepped forward and he opened a little case. People saw that in the case were a lot of artist's brushes and paints. The man went to work on this wetly stained wall. He sketched with charcoal. He painted in a background. He used small brushes on details.

As the moments went by the crowd grew stiller & stiller, quieter & quieter, & forty-five minutes later, a wall of ugly mess, was a beautiful thing, absolutely magnificent.

The crowd gasped together in the beauty of what they were seeing. Then the artist took a piece of charcoal & signed his name in the lower left-hand corner. Quickly he wrapped up the tools of his artistry, & went out the door into the storm. When the people looked at the name, they realized they had been watching

one of England's greatest artists at work. They had seen beauty come from something ugly & wasted.

St. Paul would have loved that story because that was exactly what he was trying to say to the Ephesians. people looking across the years of their lives saying, "It started out beautiful but it became ugly. I've made a mess; I've dropped the ball a thousand times; I've hurt people; I've succumbed to temptations in life and, yeah, there have been the good moments but all these bad moments, can God ever look at me and say, 'I am proud of this creation?'"

Yes, because Jesus Christ did what that artist did. He took something which others thought to be ugly and He turned it into something beautiful. For all of those who follow Him, this can be our experience. We are His creation, created in Christ.

There is no such thing as a perfect person. We were created to be perfect, but humanity has corporately & consistently made a decision to reject God's laws to one extent or another, & the Bible starts with the bad news, we are all sinners, so that when we come to faith in Christ,

God reverses that. St. Paul said "If any person be in Christ, he is a new creation." Paul was speaking on two levels. He was saying, "In God's eyes you are a perfect work of art already." But in the real time situation, we are a mess on the wall. Some day Jesus is going to come again and when He does, when we see Him face to face, the perfecting job will be complete and we will be award-winning works of art in heaven's eyes. — Gordon MacDonald

The Scriptures today talk about "raising up": a serpent, a cross, a believer. Human beings love darkness rather than the light; they rebel against God who loves, heals, forgives.

The act by which God establishes his sovereignty over Israel is the Exodus, the

release of the enslaved nation from Egypt. The path to the promised land led to Edom, a nation of the descendants of Esau, enemies of Israel, who refused passage across their land.

So Israel had to backtrack into the desert. The people grumble and complain. God sends food, but they complain still. There were snakes. And salvation from the snakes.

Freedom is never easy or cheap, & the Israelites grumble over its cost in the very act of being freed. God sends judgment, but also grace to them that repent.

A Pharisee named Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night, presumably to avoid his skeptical friends, or symbolically to show that he was in darkness, but was coming to the light. He asked, "What does it mean to be born of the Spirit, to be born anew?" Today's gospel is part of the discussion that followed, plus John's preaching on the coming of the Son of God.

God was NOT condemning the world, NOT sending judgment, but salvation.

You probably know one of the verses there. John 3:16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him might not perish, but have eternal life.

Some of you may even know a verse from Ephesians. Ephesians 2:8. If you were in my confirmation class, it was the first thing you had to know, and we went over it in nearly every class. Say it with me: *For by grace you have been saved, and this is not your own doing, it is a gift from God.*

Some scholars say that Ephesians was not written by Paul — the vocabulary uses about 100 words that Paul does not use in any other letter; he does not write in this letter in the same intimate manner as he usually does to old friends, and this is strange since he spent three years in Ephesus and started the church there. Paul's writings were collected at Ephesus, and it seems likely that this letter could have been intended as a preface to the collection, perhaps written by Onesimus, bishop of Ephesus.

The writer emphasizes unity in Christ, because we all belong to God's family by his grace. For by grace you have been saved, and this is not your own doing, it is a gift from God.

The federal government thinks the world is in a big mess today. Congress and the President are trying to bail out the economy, but they're just making a bigger mess with the bonus brouhaha. Some things you just leave alone. Isn't that what capitalism is about, the free market system? Let it alone and it sorts itself out. The same with the environment and climate change. The world adapts.

Leave it to God. People make a mess. That's what Genesis 3 says. That's what sin is all about.

God has set forth a bail-out package of huge proportions! The amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is gathering up our sins, our failures, our pains, our brokenness, our pasts, our presents, & our great illusions of the future, into the reality of Christ's death & resurrection.

This is huge--so huge that most cannot fathom its size & scope. Instead they shrink it & trim it, preaching & proclaiming that God isn't gathering up "all things," just "some" things. You know, the more righteous of this world! The more pure of this world! The things that look right & behave correctly & have some redeeming qualities about them. —Dr. Donovan Drake

God is giving. To the world.

I wonder if the waitress ever thanked the famous artist. Did she keep her job? She certainly couldn't pay for her salvation.

She did get a free lesson in grace.

And so do we. Every day.

Lord, we thank you for the grace you give us by saying no to whatever makes it more difficult to say yes to you. 1330 words