

# From Major Mess to Masterpiece

Ephesians 2:8-10

Listen to this news story dated January 30, 2006:

A visitor to a British museum destroyed a set of priceless 300-year-old Chinese vases after tripping up on his shoelace, the Daily Telegraph reports. The three Qing vases, dating from the late 17th or early 18th century, had stood on a windowsill at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge for at least 40 years. Their prominent position made them among its best-known artifacts, the paper said. The report was accompanied by a photo, taken by another visitor, of the culprit, an unnamed man in his 40s, attempting to pick himself up among the porcelain debris after last week's accident. Steve Baxter, another visitor who saw the accident, was quoted as saying: "We watched the man fall as if in slow motion. He landed in the middle of the vases and they splintered into a million pieces." "He was still sitting there stunned when museum staff appeared. Everyone stood around in silence, as if in shock. Then the man started talking. He kept pointing to his shoelace and saying, 'There it is; that's the culprit!' (taken from ABC News Online, January 30, 2006).

I could not imagine the complete embarrassment and horror of breaking something priceless like this. It was a masterpiece that turned into a major mess. From masterpiece to major mess – created to be a thing of beauty, preserved over the centuries – in one careless move it went from timeless treasure into tiny pieces of trash.

I don't know if you realize this, but the Bible talks about God Himself being an artist, taking ordinary materials and making them into magnificent displays of His greatness and glory. Psalm 19:1 says, "**The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.**" Handiwork, that word means something made, workmanship, craftsmanship. God is Himself a Craftsman, the Master Artist.

From the beginning of creation, God shows Himself to be an Artist. The first phrase in the Bible, Genesis 1:1 says "**In the beginning, God created...**" There is nothing in this world that exists that God did not create, because part of God's nature is to create and make beautiful things. Genesis chapters 1 & 2 record the creation of the world, and notice in Genesis 2:7, "**And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.**" God acts just like an Artist or Craftsman by taking "**the dust of the ground**" and making it into a man. Mankind is part of God's glorious artwork. David in Psalm 8:5 even says we are the crown of His creation, "**For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor.**"

So mankind, as the crowning point of God's creation, made in His own image, the masterpiece, is placed on the earth that God created, and is given some instructions, one of which is recorded in Genesis 2:15-17, "**Then the LORD God**

took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die." The permission to "have anything you want" is followed by a simple warning – "if you disobey Me in this one area, you will die." God's masterpiece would become a major mess.

We know the rest of the story from Genesis 3 that the man and woman sinned by disobeying God. And we have seen in Ephesians 2 the lasting effects of that sin. We saw that just as God said, sin with its enslavement to the world, the flesh, and the devil, brought the consequence of death and the judgment of God. We turned God's masterpiece into a major mess.

But as we have seen from verses 4-8, God did not leave us in our mess, dead in our sins. He made us alive together with Christ, raise us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ to be eternal displays of His grace and kindness.

Last week we looked at verses 8-9 and saw How God Saved Us.

## I. How God Saved Us(vv.8-9).

A. What it Means to be Saved.

B. We are *not* Saved by our Works.

C. We are Saved by Grace.

D. We are Saved by the Gift of God.

We saw that God saved us by grace, through faith, not of works, but that our whole salvation was the gift of God. A gift, of course, is a free and unconditional present. That is the only basis on which God offers salvation. The gift of God is salvation by grace and through faith. It is offered to all people everywhere. We receive the gift by faith.

E. We are Saved through Faith.

1. *Faith is not just knowing something.* I believe that there was a historical person named Abraham Lincoln who was President of the United States during the Civil War. But believing in Christ the way you believe in Abe Lincoln is not saving faith. James 2:19 tells us, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!"(James 2:19 NKJV). You know that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was raised from the dead and still be unsaved.

2. *Faith is not just feeling something.* Many people equate faith with feelings. Jesus warns us about a mere emotional response in His parable of the sower, "**But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles,**" (Mat 13:20-21 NKJV) Faith is much more than a good feeling, nostalgic memories or a mystical experience.

3. *Faith is not religious rituals.* Some think that because they have been baptized, taken communion, gone through catechism or some other ritual that they have faith. Those are "works," not faith. And Paul is very clear in verse 9 that salvation is not of works.

4. *Faith is not sincerity.* There are many sincere people in false religions. You can be sincerely wrong. Salvation is not just based on faith but faith in the right thing! Paul says in Romans 10:17, "**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**" Faith is based on hearing the truth of the word of God.

5. *Faith is genuine trust.* It begins with proper knowledge, it involves the emotions, but it comes back to the heart. Do you really, personally believe that Jesus died for your sins and accept that payment on your behalf?

Jean Francois Gravalet was the world-famous acrobat known as the Great Blondin. He was born in France in 1824. He became famous throughout Europe and America. He became famous for crossing Niagara Falls on a tightrope 1,100 feet long and 160 feet above the water. Once he pushed a wheelbarrow across while blindfolded. Another time, he stood on his head on the wire.

One day he carried a man across Niagara Falls on his back. When he had put the rider down, he looked into the crowd and asked a man standing near, "Do you believe I could do that with you?" "Of course I've just seen you do it." Then Blondin said, "Hop on, I'll carry you across." The man called back, "Not on your life!"

He didn't really believe did he? He said he believed, but he was not willing to bet his life on it. True faith in Jesus means that we stake our lives on Him. We commit ourselves to Him as our only hope for salvation. We give ourselves totally to Him, and burn our bridges behind us.

And in salvation God takes us from a major mess to be His masterpiece. Which brings us to verse 10.

## II. Why God Saved Us (v.10).

### A. We are Saved to be God's Masterpieces.

V.10 says we, those of us who have been saved are "**His workmanship created in Christ Jesus.**"

"**Workmanship**" comes from *poiema*, a Greek word from which we get our English word "poem." It means "that which is made." The ancient Scots understood this word. Their word for "poet" is maker. The idea behind the word is not so much poetry, but anything that is wonderfully made, be it a poem, a novel, a painting or a sculpture—a masterwork.

Bible scholar F.F. Bruce translates this peculiar word as "masterpiece." Every believer is like God's great work of art.

I started this message by pointing out that God is an artist. All creation is the His handiwork. But although there are many majestic things that God has made, they are not God's masterwork.

A powerful sermon was preached by E.V. Hill called, "The Greatest Thing God Ever Did." He starts by asking the question, "When was God at His best?" Was it when He created the world out of nothing? As E.V. Hill develops this in great detail, you're led to believe that this was when God was at His best. But then he says, "No, that wasn't the greatest thing God ever did." Then he preaches through the Passover, explains the Exodus and then ends up in Bethlehem, asking this question, "Was God at His best when He sent His Son to be born?" In his inimitable style, He develops this in great detail, indicating that the Incarnation was a great event, but it wasn't the greatest thing God has ever done. As I listened to the sermon I was beginning to wonder if the Incarnation wasn't God's best day, then when was God at His best?

E.V. Hill then reflects on the resurrection. Surely, this was God at His best! When he finishes retelling the resurrection story, pointing out that God has destroyed death, defeated the devil and made our salvation secure; it's obvious that this has to be the greatest thing God ever did. But then He says, "No, that wasn't God at His best." I started to scratch my head at this point, and became a bit uncomfortable because I couldn't think of anything greater than the Resurrection. And then, at the very end of the message he says, "The greatest thing God ever did was to save a seven-year-old black boy on a dirt road in Alabama...and that boy was me!"

The ultimate creation of God is when a person is "**created in Christ Jesus.**" We are born "**dead in trespasses and sins.**" For us to be "**made alive**" in Christ is God's greatest stroke of genius (**2 Cor.5:17**).

God made everything we see in this universe in just 6 days by just saying the word and speaking it into existence. However, to make a sinner a saint it cost God the life of the "**only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.**"

Believers, we are God's masterpieces. We should live like it.

## B. We are Saved to Perform Good Works.

We were not only saved to be God's "**workmanship**" we were saved too "**for good works,**" that is to do "**good works.**"

We are not saved *by* "**good works**" but we are saved *for* "**good works.**" "**Good works**" cannot produce salvation, but salvation can produce "**good works.**" John Calvin said, "**It is faith alone that justifies but faith that justifies can never be alone**" (cf. **James 2:17-18**).

Saving faith always produces a changed life. A saved person will produce "**good works.**" In Mt.5:16 Jesus says, "**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**" 2 Cor.9:8 says, "**God is able to make all grace abound toward**

**you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."** Col.1:10 says we are to be **"fruitful in every good work."** 2 Tim.3:17 says we are to study scriptures that we may be **"thoroughly equipped for every good work."** Titus 2:14 says that Jesus saved us in order to **"purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."**

Only after we have been saved can there be good works in our lives (cf. v.2). Because Christ lives within us we are now capable of **"good works."**

### C. We are Saved to do God's Will.

Note that **"God prepared beforehand"** our good works **"that we should walk in them."** In other words, we have an eternal job description. We are literally to walk, or to live in these good works, not merely "do" them. I think that's an important distinction, because to walk or live in good works indicates that it is to be a lifestyle, not just a "to do" list that we check off each day and then figure we're done for the day.

God has a wonderful, fulfilling and rewarding plan for our lives. He loved us, chose us and prepared us for His good works **"beforehand."** How thrilling to be the objects of such divine interest and devotion.

We don't have to search vainly for God's will. We must simply go about doing the **"good works"** as we are taught in Scripture and as the Holy Spirit leads us. If we do so, we will be doing God's will.

There are good works that God has prepared for you to do that will rise out of necessity. Someone will need you to encourage them, to help them, or to serve them, and God will put you in the right place at the right time to do it. When you act, the church acts because you are part of the greater picture.

There are also good works that God has prepared for you to do that will arise out of adversity. Someone will mistreat you or talk about you or respond to you in a wrong way, and God puts you in that place at that time so that you can do the right thing. God wants to use that adversity in our lives to mold us more and more into His masterpiece.

What about you? Are you still in a major mess or are you God's masterpiece?