

## **Bold Prayers: Legalism** by Pastor Kurt Hoover

**Acts 15:1-11** But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup> And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. <sup>3</sup> So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup> But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

<sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup> And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, <sup>9</sup> and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

**Luke 19: 37-42** <sup>37</sup> As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" <sup>39</sup> And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." <sup>40</sup> He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." <sup>41</sup> And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

***But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” -Acts 15:1-11***

**This is huge! Thank you, God, for the boldness of Paul. Or perhaps better to say, thank you God for using Paul to be your light and presence in this religious debate so long ago.**

**This is the first time we hear Paul say these words in the Bible. But it will not be the last. Recorded in Acts, Paul talks about salvation through Grace alone in several of the churches he visited after this moment. The word Grace is found in every single letter from Paul to the early church. (Romans – Philemon)**

**And in Ephesians we find the chant that reformed the church 500 years ago. May these words reform the American church once again.**

***<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. -Ephesians 2:8-10***

**For by grace you have been saved through faith!**

**What makes you Christ's is Grace alone. Not your choice, but the choice of God to save a person in need. God's choice to do for you that which you cannot do for yourself. God's choice to save you from your angst. To**

**give you a hope, and a belief and a trust. Life to the fullest set free from the need to prove yourself to Him or others.**

**You have been saved by the Grace of Jesus – at great cost to Jesus.**

**You are not saved by Jesus... *and* your good works. You are not saved by Jesus *and* your surrender. You are not saved by Jesus *and* your political affiliation. You are not saved by Jesus *and* your personal piety. You are not saved by Jesus *and* some emotion, intellectual ascent or feeling. Adding something to the conditions of your salvation or God's presence is called Legalism. The same type of legalism that brings Paul to this powerful statement about Grace**

**You are saved by Grace alone, Faith alone, Christ alone and the delivery system for this saving Grace into your actual life – Scripture alone.**

**You are saved because Jesus said so. Because Jesus did so. Because even in your lowest moment, Jesus looked at you and said, 'Yes even for that I am willing to die.' Even that I will carry. I will become even that ... instead of you.'**

**But perhaps, your human nature, or your intellectual elitism, ... perhaps your feelings of fear or doubt say otherwise.**

**There is no end to the voices in your life who tell you can do this on your own. You don't need saving. Either the people you have hurt deserved it, or if you try hard enough you will find out how to live in this world without causing pain.**

**The biggest obstacle to salvation is not your mistakes but admitting that you need help. We would rather cover up the fact that we hit something with the family car, than run to Mom and Dad because they will know what to do next.**

**We would rather go around what the Bible calls 'sin.' Rather than run to our Father in Heaven because He is the only one who can do anything about it.**

**You do have sin. Yes, we all have deep angst. The foreboding knowledge that we are not enough. We have failed those we love most. We have not done our part to solve the problems of the world or our community.**

**This angst shows up in our regrets that weigh us down, shaking our confidence. This angst shows up in our doubts. We doubt our abilities, the intentions of others and even our hope for the future. Each of us has a broken relationship that we can point to ... you are not the only one. Yes, we do have a disposition that we need saving from, every day. What the Bible calls, 'sin.'**

**Yes, you do need saving. Yes, those closest to you do need saving. Yes, there are strangers in your life that God is going to use you to save!**

*<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10*

**You, not the person next to you, you need saving.**

**And for this reality I have really good news. You have a savior. And not just for your eternity... but one who has the words of eternal life for you today. The only thing that can take us out of the pit of our anxiety and angst is the hope that someone else can do for us what, we have come to realize, we cannot do. It is ok to fail to be limited ... because your salvation is not dependent on you.**

**You are saved by Grace through Faith. Both are a gift from God given through words of hope. God does not hold your failure and doubt against you. It was for this reason that He came into the world. God enters into your angst with Grace ... undeserved love and understanding. Grace ... actual forgiveness for your inabilities. Grace ... the power to be present in spite of your feelings and actions. Grace ... God, even now, is for you!**

**How can we know this, how can we trust this reality?  
At great cost to himself Jesus died to not only prove**

**God's Grace ... but to bridge the Gap between you and God forever.**

**He rode into Jerusalem to shout of 'Hosanna.' 'Blessed is the King delivered by God.' 'Finally we are going to have peace.' 'This guy gets all the Glory.' ... He left Jerusalem carrying, becoming the worst in all of us. Had we been there we too would have seen our sin in Him and joined the crowd in shouting. 'Crucify Him.'**

**Christ became our sin, our angst. And in His death our sin and our angst died. And that is good news for you and your daily struggle with the accusations of sin.**

**For by grace you have been saved through faith!**

**Not just in theory but in reality. An actual demonstration and completion of the Grace God has for your daily life. The only event that can actually bridge the gap between you and God. Jesus taking what we deserve in humiliation and death on a cross.**

**God has given you something to trust in... His faithful work and Presence. In history - on the cross. In your daily life, one step at a time. Christ meets you in your inadequacy.... your angst. You no longer are burdened with the task of proving yourself, earning God's presence or deserving his work in your life.**

**We love because he first loved us. We are adequate because Christ is present and at work in us. What you**

**can not provide for those you love Christ will provide through you in ways you can't even imagine.**

**Because of Jesus you are enough. You have all that you need. You are not missing anything.**

**You are truly saved by Grace. There is no longer failure there is no longer angst. There is only Christ, His finished work for your salvation and his presence. The light others see in you.**



\*James Tissot (1836–1902)