

The Gables – Good Works

Introduction (Rick):

A man lay dying and he began to yell out, "I need a priest, I need a priest!" Another man came along and asked what was wrong. The dying man said, "I need a priest to give me last rites, I'm dying," the man said.

"There are no priests around here, but maybe I can help." I'm not a religious person myself, but I have lived next to the Catholic Church my whole life and I hear their ritual all the time. I think that I can say it for you."

The dying man said, "Thank You."

So the helpful man leaned close to the dying man and in a soft voice repeated the ritual as he has heard it so many times:

"B-6, N-33, G-52, I-24, ... Bingo."

<http://www.my-pastor.com/church-jokes.html>

Dialog:

Rick: Did you have Bingo games at your church when you were growing up?

Donna: We didn't have Bingo at the church, but St. Mary's did sponsor a fair every year to raise money for the church and for the Simsbury community. I think they had Bingo at the fair.

Rick: I remember playing Bingo at the annual Fireman's Fair behind St. Patrick's Church in Farmington. It was lots of fun, especially when I won. I can still hear the announcer saying, "Oh-a sixty-four; Oh-a sixty-four."

Donna: Yes, those events were fun... and they did a lot of good for the community.

Rick: I was raised in the Congregational church right here in Farmington. As a boy, I remember the minister, Harland Lewis, giving a sermon on "Grace."

Donna: How old were you?

Rick: I don't know; maybe fifteen.

Donna: Wow! It's amazing that you still remember that. What is "Grace?"

Rick: Grace is unmerited favor. It means receiving something you don't deserve. It's what God gives us so we can be in heaven with Him some day.

Donna: I was always taught that we get to heaven by believing in God *and* by being a good person. Doing things like obeying the Ten Commandments, giving to the church, and by helping others who are in need is how we get into heaven.

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Rick: Those are all good things, and a very important part of the Christian life, but are not what get you into heaven. **Galatians 3:23-25** says, “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

Donna: What does that mean?

Rick: That means we are no longer obligated to obey all the rules and regulations of the Old Testament. However, the moral teachings contained in it still apply.

Donna: What do you mean by “moral teachings?”

Rick: We no longer have to offer the sacrifices and perform the ceremonies that the ancient Jews did. We need to follow the *Spirit of the Law*, rather than just the *Letter of the Law*. For example: One of the Ten Commandments is to not commit adultery. But Jesus taught in the *Sermon on the Mount* that even looking at a woman lustfully was committing adultery. So, not committing the physical act of adultery represents the *Letter of the Law*, but Jesus has a higher standard. He wants us to obey the *Spirit of the Law* too.

Donna: The *Spirit of the Law* sounds even harder to keep than the *Letter of the Law*.

Rick: That’s very true. No one can truly keep the letter and the spirit law, so we need God’s grace to save us.

Donna: I don’t get it.

Rick: Nothing we ever do, from a works perspective, will be good enough to get us into heaven. **Ephesians 2:8-10** says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Donna: How can we be saved only by faith? That sounds too simple. There must be something I have to do to earn it.

Rick: If God judged us by our works, we would all go to hell. Instead, because he is a gracious God, he judges us not by works we have done, but by the work Jesus did for on the cross. By believing that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross, we are set free.

Donna: Where do “works” come in then? What are “good works,” anyway?

Rick: Good works are good things you – helping others, donating time/money, working at a charity – things that you deserve credit for or compensation for. Since we are saved by God’s

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grace, and not by our own works, we don't deserve any credit for getting into heaven. All the credit goes to God.

Donna: But I work hard making meals for our family and making meals for people in the church who are needy. I serve as a deacon in our church, which is a lot of work – emailing people, calling people, attending meetings, conducting interviews, and serving communion. That's a lot of work. Doesn't it count for something? Won't I get credit for it?

Rick: Did you notice what the last part of the verse in Ephesians said? God prepared good works in advance for you to do. That's why the Bible says that God has a wonderful plan for our lives. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “**For I know the plans I have for you,**” declares the LORD, “**plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.**” Our job is to follow his plan for us, even here at The Gables. So once again, since God planned these good works in advance for us, he deserves the credit.

Donna: Don't I deserve any credit?

Rick: Yes, you do. You will be rewarded for following His plans when you get to heaven at the Bema Judgment for all believers. Don't get too confident in your “good works.” The Apostle Paul did a lot more “good works” than you or I have done.

In **Philippians 3:4-9** he writes, “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.**”

Donna: Does that mean we can just kick back and wait until it's our turn to go to heaven, whether we do any “good works” or not?

Rick: **James 2:14-17** says, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

So, faith is not just an intellectual assent that Jesus died on the cross for us. It is a heart-felt belief that changes our lives so that we want to serve God and others. So remember, our righteousness comes through faith in God, not by our own works.