

What Mamaw would want you to know

Rev. John Belden

When I visit people to explain the gospel, they sometimes tell me, "I wish you could meet my Mamaw. Now, she's a real good Christian woman. I've never heard her cuss, and she loves everybody. If anyone will get to heaven, she will."

It's that last phrase that always bothers me. It implies that Mamaw's good life will earn her a place in heaven. But if Mamaw really is a Christian, here are some things I think she would want you to know.

She would want you to know that her goodness is not the reason God is letting her into heaven. It's a by-product of grace. Grace is unearned favor. Grace is receiving free salvation from God when you don't deserve it. It's what Paul had in mind when he said we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23), and "it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

She would want you to know that she was once "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). And it's because of God "who is rich in mercy" that she's no longer in that condition (v. 4). He made her "alive together with Christ" (v. 5). She has no reason to boast. God saved her so that "He might show the exceeding riches of His grace" (v.7).

She would want you to know that her holy life is the fruit of this free gift. Just like apples don't make a tree into an apple tree but merely prove that it is, her good works don't make her saved. They merely prove that she is. She's not working to earn salvation from God. She does good works because she already has salvation.

Rather than working for God, she is "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10). God is working on her. Even the good works that she does are works that "God prepared beforehand that [she] should walk in them" (v.10). As David said, "My goodness is nothing apart from You" (Psalm 16:2). To say that God owes her heaven because of works would be like saying God owes her for something He has produced in her.

She's like the saints of old who knew their own righteousness was not sufficient to save them. Like righteous Job, Mamaw can say, "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and You cover my iniquity" (Job 14:17). She would not want to stand before a holy God in her own goodness. As David said, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3).

She would want you to know that she's going to heaven because of her faith in the goodness of the One who died for her. He is the One who bore her sins "in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). He suffered once for her, "the just for the unjust," that He might bring her to God (3:18).

She would want you to know this because she cares about you. She wouldn't want you to think you could earn heaven by being good. She would want you to know that "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20). And if you're trying to earn heaven by your righteousness, you're "ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish [your] own righteousness." In doing so, you have not "submitted to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3).

She would want you to know that you also can be accepted by God. Not by trying to follow her example and be a good person. But by admitting you are a helpless sinner and casting yourself on the mercy of a gracious Savior, just like she did.

She would want you to know these things because her time is short. Soon she will pass from this life to the next. And if she is ever going to see you again, you must know what she knows.

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