

EPHESIANS

Part 3: “For By Grace You Have Been Saved”

Ephesians 2:1-10

Sunday, August 26, 2018

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Scripture

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ¹

This is God’s Word. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, we worship you and thank you this day for your amazing grace. It was when we were still sinners that you sent Christ Jesus your Son to die for us and, by his blood, reconcile us to yourself. May your Holy Spirit illuminate our hearts to rightly marvel at this truth. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus our Savior. AMEN.

Introduction

In the year 1815, after escaping from exile and rising to power for the second time, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte of France (**Show Picture 1: Napoleon**) raised an army with the intent of conquering the world.

Already Europe was exhausted. For the last decade, they had given everything they had to defeat Napoleon and his insatiable hunger for power and domination. Once already they thought they had stopped him. But it seemed like no matter what they did; he wouldn’t go away. Some people began to think that eventual defeat was inevitable.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Eph 2:1–10.

But a final international coalition of soldiers united together under the command of Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington ([Show Picture 2: Wellington](#)). Together they marched to meet Napoleon's forces just outside of a little village in Belgium named Waterloo. There they would make their final stand, and fight one of the most critical battles in history – the Battle of Waterloo ([Show Picture 3: Battle of Waterloo](#)).

As the two forces met one another, all of Great Britain – Wellington's homeland – held its breath. This would be the decisive final moment of the Napoleonic Wars. If Wellington won, it would likely be the end of Napoleon's reign. If he lost, all of Europe lost with him.

It is of this environment of anxious anticipation that an interesting legend has been passed down over the years. As the story goes, Wellington had dispatched a ship to bring back news of the battle to London. When the ship found its way toward the Thames River and outskirts of London, the messengers began to wave flags in a code to relay their news. The watchmen at the Tower of London, were just able to make out the words "Wellington" and "Defeated" before the famous London fog obscured the ship from view.

Everyone's hearts sank. The enemy had won. The war was lost. Soon they would be invaded, their way of life would be lost, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. The bad news began to spread, and a cloud of mourning and sorrow enveloped the city.

But just then the sun broke through, the fog lifted, and the watchers were able to see they had missed part of the message. The message wasn't "Wellington defeated" – it was "Wellington defeated the enemy!"

And suddenly, London's sighs of despair were transformed to shouts of joy and jubilation.

Now to tell you the truth, no one knows if that last part is genuine or if it is one of those contrived fables passed down through the years. But this much is certain: the victory was won at the Battle of Waterloo. Days later Napoleon abdicated his throne in Paris, never to rise to power again.

And the reason I tell you this story is that sometimes *it is only when we feel the weight of bad news first, then and only then can we know the joy of good news.*

In today's passage, we encounter the idea of grace. It is perhaps Christianity's greatest and most important ideas. Grace is God's unmerited favor and love. But it is more than that.

Grace is a complex, two-fold idea. For grace to exist and matter, it means that something has gone terribly wrong. A moral debt has been accrued and demands payment. A precondition of need and obligation exists, and a response is required. But likewise, grace means that God has righted what is wrong, he has paid the debt, and he has responded to our need. Grace means bad news first, but then good news that is even

better.

This truth of grace is not just part of Christianity; it is central to Christianity. The gospel itself is described in the New Testament as *“the gospel of the grace of God”* (Acts 20:24, ESV).

Now, grace initially sounds like a good idea. But everything in us tends to go against it. We are gravitationally pulled toward a spirituality wherein we believe we can perform for God and earn his love through our own white-knuckled efforts. This mindset may sound noble and virtuous, but such a spirituality will crush you.

Last week, I had the pleasure of talking to a woman who has attended here for a while now. She grew up in a church where she felt constantly judged and condemned and weighed down. Salvation was about what we did to earn God’s love, and it was never enough. As a result, she grew bitter toward God and other Christians and walked away from church. But someone invited her here, and she told me she heard and experienced something a Redeemer that she had never experienced – *grace*.

As a church that is radically Christ-centered, one of my prayers for Redeemer Christian Church is that we would be a church that knows and loves and exudes the gospel of the grace of God.

Exposition

So it is with that in mind that I would like us to explore the idea of grace together as it is revealed in the passage before us. We will look at three ideas: **1.) *The Necessity of Grace*, 2.) *The Cause of Grace*, and 3.) *The Effect of Grace*.**

1.) *The Necessity of Grace*.

Many modern people would say that human nature is fundamentally good. But the Bible would say that human nature outside of Christ is fundamentally *dead*: ***“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”*** (Ephesians 2:1–3, ESV).

“You were dead”; yes, this means you. This is the true spiritual condition of all humankind. And we must understand the reality of our spiritual condition outside of Christ before we can understand the reality of grace.

The theological term for this spiritual condition of death is *“total depravity.”* Total depravity doesn’t mean we are all as bad as we can possibly be. What it does mean is that we are spiritually dead and radically unable to be perfectly righteous. More than that, it means that we are often deceived about the true nature of our condition.

Now, this offends our inner West Texan. We don't like to think of ourselves as bad people. We are nice people. We are self-determined people. We are people who think that we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, sometimes even when it comes to our relationship with God.

But here, like smelling salts, the word of God wakes us up to the true reality of our need.

Back in 2003, a Harlem resident named Antoine Yates went to a local hospital bleeding from multiple bite marks and lacerations. When asked what happened, Antoine said his pet pit-bull dog had attacked him. The medical staff didn't buy his story, and a report was filed with the police.

When an officer came by Antoine's apartment later that day, he overheard a low, rumbling growl coming from behind a closed door. When he investigated the cause of this noise, he found that the source was none other a 400-pound Bengal tiger named Ming.

As it turns out, Antoine had been raising Ming for three years, ever since the tiger was a seven-week-old cub. Antoine thought that since he raised Ming from the time he was a cub that they had a special relationship, that he was in control of the situation, that no one needed to know, and that the tiger would never do anything to hurt him.

But here's the thing, tiger cubs turn into tigers, and tigers are apex predators. And if you invite them to live with you, they will try to kill you. Antoine's self-deception had led him to a place of mortal danger. And he was so far into his self-deception, he needed a wake-up call, and he needed someone else to get him out of the predicament he was in. After all, it is one thing to bring a seven-week-old tiger into your house. It is quite another thing to ask a 400-pound tiger to leave.

Outside of Christ, we are all Antoine. We are self-deceived and enslaved to sins that will grow into something that will kill us. Our hearts are tempted to nurse our little sins, all the while thinking: "This is okay. This sin is manageable. This sin will never hurt me. I like this. This isn't hurting anyone. I deserve this." But in so doing, we have made a deal with death, and we don't even know it.

The Bible says that we, outside of Christ, are already dead. We are locked into the violent and inescapable rip current of the course of this world. We are under the authority of the prince of the power of the air. We are enslaved to our own flesh. We are by nature children of wrath. We need to be awakened to the reality of our need. We need someone to save us from ourselves.

You may be thinking, "Well, that sounds pretty dark and discouraging." But there is a reason Paul wants us to know the uncomfortable truth about our condition outside of Christ.

The purpose of acknowledging this dire state is not to rub our noses in our failure. Paul is not trying to shame us. Rather Scripture calls us to understand the gravity of our need

so that we would be astonished by God's mercy. As one commentator says, "*The past is recalled not because the emphasis falls upon it, but in order to draw attention to God's mighty action in Christ.*"²

Paul wants us to know: *We are not bad people in need of resuscitation; outside of Christ, we are dead people in need of resurrection.* Only when we understand the reality of our spiritual condition can we then rightly marvel at the good news of grace.

2.) The Cause of Grace.

After the bad news of Ephesians 2:1-3, Ephesians 2:4 contains the best news in the world: "*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:4–7, ESV).

Those who were once dead are now made alive together with Christ. Those who were once bound by sin have now been raised up and seated in the heavenly places with Christ. Those who were once objects of wrath are now objects of God's kindness and love. Nothing could be greater than the contrast than what man is by nature, and what man can become by grace.³

What on earth could cause this change? Do the causes of grace lie within man or within God? The Bible's answer is clear. Nothing causes grace except for the sheer goodness of God's character: "the origins of God's saving initiative are to be found in his *mercy* (v.4), his *great love* (v.4), his *rich grace* (vv. 5, 7, and 8), and his *kindness* to us in Christ Jesus (v.7). The whole paragraph emphasizes that he acted on our behalf simply because of his own gracious and merciful character."⁴

As the ancient theologian, Augustine of Hippo once wrote, "*...the only thing of our very own which we contribute to our own salvation is the sin from which we need to be redeemed.*"⁵

This is one of the most humbling truths of the gospel. It wasn't in your best moment that God loved you. It wasn't in your best moment that Christ died for you – it was in your worst moment. God saved you when you were his enemy (cf. Rom. 5:8,10).

But this is also one of the most encouraging truths of the gospel. Our sin was so great

² Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 158.

³ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 69.

⁴ O'Brien, 164.

⁵ Augustine of Hippo paraphrased in Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life*. (New York: Oxford Press, 2009), 154.

that it merited the death of Jesus. But God's love was so great that he willingly paid that price for us. If you are far away from him today, if you have failed, if you have been brought low by your own sin, there is nowhere so far that his grace does not reach. Believe in him today!

3.) The Effect of Grace.

Grace originates from God and is accomplished by God through and through. We can take credit for none of it: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8–9, ESV).

So the Bible is clear. Good works won't save you. However, this does not suggest that good works don't matter. Quite the contrary. Grace is designed to transform us into a new way of life: *"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, ESV).

Another way of saying this is that we are not saved *by* good works, but we are saved *for* good works. See the difference? Our good works are not the cause of grace, but they are a necessary effect of grace. If we try to earn salvation by good works, we will always fail. But if we understand that Christ saved us when we could never save ourselves, good works become a way we worship God. As Klyne Snodgrass wrote on this passage: *"Surely proper application of this text starts with speechlessness, then moves to wonder and worship, and finally to obedience and service."*⁶

Amazing grace is meant to astonish us. When we understand the extravagance of God's love over against the filth of our sin, it should fill our hearts with a holy desire for God that overshadows our desire for sin. Augustine, who I mentioned earlier, famously taught that *sin was nothing more than disordered loves within our heart*. From disordered loves flow disordered lives.

But when God makes us alive again, he does not simply make us slightly better people. He makes us new people with new hearts that desire what is true and good and beautiful. God doesn't seek to destroy or deny our desires. He rightly orders the loves of our hearts so that our hearts desire him! And when our hearts desire God above all, it transforms the way we live.

I pray for us to be fascinated and changed by the truth of grace as a church. I want us to be so moved by this truth that we can't get over it. This is what it means to be a church that is truly Christ-centered. It doesn't mean we simply treat the Bible like a *Where's Waldo?* book trying to find Jesus on every page and in every sermon, but then walking away unmoved and unchanged. It means that as a church, we look to the word of God to be ever-moved by the reality of our need and how God has met that need through his life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It means that a fundamental part of the vision of

⁶ Klyne Snodgrass, [Ephesians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 115.

this church is that we seek to be different in the way we live and the way we love because we believe in the truth of grace.

So Redeemer Christian Church, may we never cease to be amazed by this grace. And may we be a people who display this amazing grace to the world. AMEN.

Questions for Community Group Discussion

- 1.) *Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and summarize what it is saying in your own words.*
- 2.) *Many modern people would say that human nature is basically good. The Bible, however, would suggest that, outside of Christ, human nature is dead in sin (Eph. 2:1). Why is it so important to understand the reality of our spiritual condition outside of Christ in order for us to understand the reality of grace?*
- 3.) *According to Ephesians 2:4-7, what motivates and causes salvation? Do the causes of salvation lie inside of God or inside of man?*
- 4.) *Ephesians 2:8-10 teaches that we are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works? What does that distinction mean and why is it so important?*

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