

9. Salvation by God's grace

5/5/2019

A farmer was preparing to sell his litter of puppies. While he was putting up a sale sign on his farm gate post, a little boy came to him and asked the farmer, "How much is a puppy?" with squinting eyes because of the bright spring sunlight.

"Well, son, these puppies are pure breed and they are expensive." The boy fished out a handful of coins from his coverall pocket. "I have 39 cents. Will this do?" The farmer couldn't help himself but smiling at the boy and said, "Oh, I reckon so. That will do just fine." Then he turned around and whistled toward his barn.

There were four of the cutest puppies you have ever seen running and stumbling toward the farmer. As they arrived to the fence, they stuck their noses out to the little boy and started to lick and jumping at him. From the corner of his eye, the boy noticed the fifth puppy was coming toward him rather slowly and limping. The boy looked up from his squatted position and said, "I will take that one," as he pointed to the fifth puppy.

"Son, you don't want that one. He cannot run with you and play with you well. He is a runt and crippled." The boy started to pull up his pant legs and showed his leg braces and specially made shoes to the farmer. And he said, "I don't run well either. I can understand him. I will be his friend."

You see, spiritually, we are crippled because of our wicked and sinful nature that we all are born with. Jesus came to us and became our friend and identified with us by taking our sins upon Himself. That is the Grace of God.

A. TO THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE

When the question was posed to the great Christian apologist and author C.S. Lewis when he walked into a room one day where a group of men were debating what makes Christianity unique among all the world's religions, Lewis answered right away. "That's easy. It's grace." Then he went on to explain that no other religion teaches the concept of a God who takes the initiative to respond with undeserved favor to sinners.

The Good News of Christianity is what God has done to bridge the gap of sin and make it possible for sinful human beings to have forgiveness and fellowship with Him.

Theologians have developed a classic definition of grace as God's unmerited, or undeserved favor toward sinners. I define grace as the inexhaustible supply of God's goodness by which He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. It is His gift to us.

Since all of God's dealings with us are anchored in His grace, to miss grace is to miss God's work in history. We are saved by grace, and the only way we grow as Christians is by grace.

Any serious study of grace will soon take us to Paul's great letter to the Ephesians where he used the word "grace" 12 times throughout this letter, beginning with his trademark salutation, "Grace to you" in v2.

Ephesians 1:5-6 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.
The only motivation for this outpouring of grace is God's kindness, which is why we will be praising God throughout eternity.

B. SETTING GRACE AGAINST OUR PREVIOUS DARK BACKGROUND

Sometimes we need to look back and remember where we once were before we can appreciate where we are today. One of the great problems in our culture is that folks who have "arrived" forget where they started. When this happens people begin thinking that they deserve all the stuff they have, and they stop thanking and start demanding.

Maybe we should have a "Remembrance Day" every so often in church, during which we think back to where we were before Christ and remember how desperate and hopeless it was without Him, so we can learn to value God's grace more. Our appreciation of grace will soar, and our spiritual growth will be helped, when we look back the place where God brought us from.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Verses 1-3 of Ephesians 2 are the dark background against which Paul wants to show us the grace of God. And the background is very dark, because in our natural, unredeemed state, we were totally unacceptable to a holy God.

The words "trespasses and sins" give two different nuances to our sinful state. To trespass means to depart from the right way, and to sin means "to miss the mark, as an archer misses the mark when he misses the bull's eye. By nature we lived in an environment of sin and breathed the air of rebellion against God.

C. THE HEAVENLY CORONER'S REPORT

If we really want to see where we were without Christ, we should visit the county morgue. You see, what we have in Ephesians 2:1-3 is fundamentally a coroner's report. Among dead people there are different levels of decomposition. A person who has been dead a long time won't be looking so great, while someone else who has just died may still be looking pretty good on the autopsy table. But both people are equally dead.

A lot of spiritually dead people don't feel dead. And as far as they and the people around them are concerned, they don't look dead. But those who are still in their sins are dead, according to God's Word.

We go to a lot of trouble to dress up death and take the edge off. But don't miss the point. We were dead in our sins, and Ephesians 2:2-3 says there were three nails in our coffin: *the world, the "prince of the power of the air," or the devil, and our own sinful flesh.* The bottom line is that we were cut off from the eternal life that Christ gives. And without Christ's sacrifice the only possibility is eternal death or separation from God in hell.

D. GOD'S GRACE MADE US ALIVE IN CHRIST

The "before" picture of our standing before God isn't pretty, but thanks to our gracious God, there is also an "after" picture. Ephesians 2:4 begins with two of the "most important, exciting, and life-changing words in the Bible. "But God" are words that will reverse any situation. "But God" will bring life where death existed, because of what God has done for us in grace.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

That last phrase is the key. If you know Christ as your Savior, you are saved, not because of your decision or anything else you did, but because God took the initiative to reach down and save you by grace.

If you took your children to a petting zoo and a little lamb came running toward you, you probably wouldn't be afraid at all. You might even reach out your hand for the lamb to lick. But suppose you are at the zoo when the alarm goes out that a lion has escaped from its cage. If that lion came running toward you, you would be terrified and start to run because you know what lions can do. Now suppose the runaway lion corners you and comes at you – but instead of attacking you, the lion simply licks your hand gently the way the lamb did.

If that happened, whose gentleness would you appreciate more, the lamb's or the lion's? I would appreciate the lion's gentleness more because I know that he could just as easily have destroyed me without violating his nature as a lion at all.

Grace is Holy and Righteous God's kindness and gentleness to us when He could have backed us into a corner as guilty sinners and destroyed us without violating His holy and righteous character. But God wanted to make us His children, so instead of expressing His wrath against us, He poured it out on His own sinless Son on the cross. Jesus took our punishment so God could embrace us.

E. GOD HAS ADOPTED US

Ephesians 1:5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will

There is a song that is so well-known to believers and unbelievers like. Though the vast majority of the world population really don't understand the depth of the meaning of the song lyrics, they acknowledge that it is a beautiful song and song lyrics.

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!" You know the song, but do you know the story of the man who wrote it? John Newton was only seven years old when his godly mother died. He was turned over to relatives and soon forgot the Scriptures she had taught him. By the time he became an apprentice seaman, he had acquired knowledge of a different kind – along with a reputation for being able to curse for two hours straight without repeating a single word!

Later, he joined the British Navy, but he couldn't tolerate the discipline required and soon deserted, fleeing to Africa so that, in his own words, "I might sin my fill." Eventually, however, he fell into the hands of a Portuguese slave trader. For months, the chief woman of the trader's harem treated him like an animal, beating and forcing him to dig through the garbage for his food.

Finally, in starvation and rage, Newton managed to escape and found his way to the shores of Africa, where he was picked up by a passing ship. Because he was a skilled navigator, he earned the position of first mate. But while the captain was ashore one day, Newton brought out the ship's rum and got the entire crew drunk. When the captain came back, he was so mad that he struck Newton, knocking him overboard.

Newton should have drowned if it were not for another drunken sailor. The seaman pulled him back on board by spearing Newton's thigh with a boat hook, leaving an enormous wound.

Some weeks later, when the ship neared the coast of Scotland, it sailed into a storm and almost sank. Newton stood manning the pumps – seasick, vomiting, and fearing for his life. In the midst of that terrible storm, Newton was desperate enough to cry out to God whom he learned from his mother when he was a little boy. And God miraculously spared his life and changed his heart that day.

John Newton emerged from that experience to become chaplain to England's Parliament. He even preached before the king! Despite his vile past, this man would later be called by many the second founder of the Church of England. And it was he who wrote these soul-stirring words:

"I once was lost, but now am found, blind, but now I see."

You see, salvation comes from faith in Christ Jesus, nothing else. We can only receive salvation by the principle of grace through faith. Grace cannot be obtained through works, whether they be past, present, or promised because by definition grace is given without regard to anything in the one who receives it.

God's grace has a wonderful, lifelong goal that reaches even beyond His initial gift of salvation. God determined that our destiny was to become His adopted children. For us as God's elect and His adopted children, this inheritance includes every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. As Christians, too many of us are still living in the spiritual ghetto even though our Daddy owns it all. Many of us have not spiritually grown up to discover all of our rights and privileges in Christ.

The grace of God calls for a response on our part – not to try to pay for what we have, but out of overflowing gratitude for what God has done for us.

Next Sunday we will learn about how we can grow in Christ, which the Bible calls the process of sanctification.

F. REMINDERS

- 1) In the realm of grace, the word "deserve" does not apply anywhere.**
- 2) God saved you for Himself; God saved you by Himself; God saved you from Himself.**
- 3) Until we have a heightened awareness of our own wretchedness, we will never understand how amazing Grace really is.**