

Ephesians 2:4-10 We live by God's grace! Sunday Lent 4 March 11, 2018

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God's grace and peace are yours through your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's lesson of grace is from Ephesians 2:4-10

These are Your Words, heavenly Father. By them, remind us of Your grace in Christ. Your Word is truth.

Dear Friends, living by God's grace in Christ,

Jesus once said, *"What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36-37) That reminds me of a story. There was a rich man who loved cars. He spent every free hour talking of them or riding in them. When he became ill and realized he was soon to die, he made one request: that he be buried inside his BMW. So, at his death there was a large funeral and an even larger hole dug in the cemetery, big enough for him and his car! As a crane lowered the vehicle into the ground, a homeless man watching said, "Man, that's really living!"

Of course, he wasn't living at all. The man was dead and a good car was being wasted! If only the man had spent more time in life, really living! He could have had life in Christ, which would have continued in heaven, where his expensive car wouldn't qualify as a piece of junk! So, we must keep our priorities!

We live by God's grace!

First, we want no other life outside of Christ. It states in *Proverbs 14* *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but ... it leads to death."* (v12) Without Christ, we are spiritually dead. You've probably seen trees with a large red X on them. They are marked to be cut down. A disease or ash borer has killed them. Sin has done the same to us. It has invaded our lives and it has marked us for death. Paul wrote the Ephesians, *"You were dead in your transgressions and sins."* (Ephesians 2:1) There is nothing that we can do on our own to stop it. Without Christ, we would remain dead in our sins and suffer eternal death forever.

Paul in Ephesians described this absence of spiritual life as under ... *"the spirit (devil) who is now at work in those who are disobedient."* (v.2) Without Christ in a person's life, the devil is in control. Martin Luther in The Bondage of the Will described people as if they were horses. Either the rider is Jesus, who guides people to heaven; or the rider is the devil who furiously beats them, driving them to eternal punishment. His goal is to keep as many people as possible under his rule until they collapse under the weight of their sins and die to suffer forever. Which rider controls us?

Paul continued describing life without Christ. He wrote, *"All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."* (v.3) Imagine that you are a death row inmate who has committed so many violent crimes that there is no hope of pardon. The day arrives for your execution and you cannot stop it. Spiritually, all people are on God's death row. It's only a matter of time before the awful end. One commentator wrote, "Whether they are open or secret sinful actions and thoughts infect every man, woman, and child." The outcome is serious. The consequences of being spiritually dead, disobedient, and influenced by the devil can only lead to one thing: God's judgment of death and eternal death in hell.

Yet, our loving God does not want this to happen to us. He intervened to stop the death sentence from being carried out. Paul wrote, *"Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."* (v.4, 5) As sinners, God-haters, and spiritual corpses, nothing in us drew God to us. Love for us resided only in His heart. It is unconditional. God's love moved Him to send His innocent son to a Roman death row for execution. On the cross Jesus took all the anger of God for all sin, the punishment we deserved, the suffering and eternal separation that awaits us sinners, and Jesus died to take it all away.

God not only loves us, He shows mercy. He saw the sorry spiritual condition that we are in: lost in spiritual darkness with no escape. His heart went out to us. Even though He is a just God and rightly demands punishment for sin, God is rich in mercy. He never runs out of pity or kindness. There is always more for us through Jesus. In Jesus' death, God offers life instead of death!

Second, what does it mean to be alive in Christ? It means to be changed from unbelief to faith and from spiritual death to life. How can we be certain of this change? Jesus promised, *"Whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life...; He has crossed over from death to life."* (John 5:24) Faith connects us to Jesus! Everything good that He accomplished became ours and all our evil became His. So in Christ, instead of seeing our offenses, God sees us as sinless. Instead of seeing our evil nature, God sees a perfect nature. Instead being objects of His anger, we are the objects of His love.

And, there's more according to Paul: *"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of His grace...."* (v.6-7) Right now, do we feel like we are seated with Christ in heaven? No! But God sees us there in Christ! God sees our entire life connected to Jesus. As Christ lived perfectly on earth, so we have lived through Him. The payment Christ made for sin, we have made through Him. Jesus has conquered death and so have we! He ascended into heaven with authority and God sees us seated with Him! How can we be sure? It is God's gracious promise! John wrote, *"He who has the Son has life."* (1 John 5:12)

To make certain that we understand that we are not saved by our own works, Paul wrote, *"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."* (v. 8-9) The idea of grace runs completely counter to our sinful nature. It says, we'll get to heaven because of the good we've done or the evil that we've avoided. But, in the Bible, the word "grace" means the undeserved love of God that moved Him to offer us the gift of eternal life in Jesus. It was completely won by Christ. And it is completely received by us through faith which is worked by God. This is what it means to live by God's grace!

Yet, Paul doesn't stop there. He continues, *"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works..."* (v.10) Since we have the gift of faith that connects us to the love, kindness, and mercy of God in Christ, we cannot help but live in ways that reflect God's love. We can't be perfect on earth, but we are made new. I have known people with heart transplants. Before surgery, they were weak and tired. After the operation, they lived renewed lives. Through faith, God has given us a heart. Jesus promised, *"I am the vine and you are the branches, if a man remain in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit...."* (John 15:5) Jesus will affect our prayers, our patience, and our readiness to follow God's will even if it be a "cross."

On the day of your funeral, what will your friends and family say about you? Will it be about the kind of car you drove or the fortune made? Or will they praise God for His grace in calling you to faith in Christ as Your Savior. Will they praise God for the gift of eternal life that you didn't deserve? More importantly, what will God say about you? He will say: *"My Son died for you! He cleansed you by His blood. You are mine for eternity because My Son saved you!"* Thankfully, we won't need to be buried in a car to get to heaven. All we need is to trust in Jesus whom God gave to save us by His grace. Amen.