

Sermon Draft

Text: Ephesians 2:1–10

Sermon: "By Grace"

When we clearly see how desperate we are, we see and understand grace for what it is, God's undeserved love. The Israelites have murmured against God and now are dying of snake bites. Then all who look to the brass serpent live that is our Old Testament Reading. God so loved a helpless world that he lifted up his Son on the desolate wilderness of Calvary, Gospel. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but by grace we have been saved, our Epistle and text for our meditation this morning. By grace! Alone!

Paul takes us through a roller-coaster ride of sorts in our text (we go up and down and all around). In the first three verses, he drops us in a terrifying plunge, a hair-raising free fall speaking on the depths of the condition of all of humanity. We are enslaved by our own sinful desires, and the world and Satan try to control us.

Then, just when we think we are surely dead God pulls us out of it; verses 4-6, we see God's mercy and grace as he provides salvation for us in Christ. That is the big moment, the center of the ride! The moment when against all those g-forces we are pulled up from death to life.

As we first understand and recognize our problem (Law), we then are enabled truly to understand our redemption: because of what Christ has done for us (Gospel), we are made alive to him. And, finally, climbing out of that center of the ride, in verses 7–10 we thank and praise God for his astonishing grace and, through him and by his grace, live a life for others.

Paul actually achieves this effect in our text by using a literary device called a chiasm. That's where the first element somehow mirrors the last element, and the most important words are in the center like the center of that roller-coaster ride.

“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.

I remember the first time I saw a corpse in a funeral home. The body lay still, unable to move, no signs of breathing. The skin was off-color, almost like a mannequin. Like that corpse in the coffin, we can do nothing toward our salvation. To be dead means to be unable to help oneself. The “deadness” of our own sins means we are powerless and beyond hope. Without God’s grace, we do not even see our lost condition. We have no **“fear, love, or trust in God.”** We were dead in sin by our very natures. We are conceived and born in sin, having inherited the fallen nature from Adam (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12).

Natural man is corrupt and estranged from God. Our nature is hostile to God and opposes him. We are ***“children of wrath,”*** disobedient and evil. Natural man cannot accept the Gospel of Christ when it is preached to him (1 Corinthians 2:14).

As Luther says, ***“A person is like a pillar of salt, like Lot’s wife, . . . indeed, like a log and a stone. He is like a lifeless statue, which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart. . . . Indeed, all teaching and preaching is lost on him until he is enlightened, converted, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit”*** (FC SD II 20–21).

But we also “walked” as dead men, people dead in sin, following the world (Romans 12:1–2) and subject to the influence of Satan (1 Corinthians 12:1–2). We were ***“carrying out the desires of the body and the mind”*** (Ephesians 2:3). Just look around us or turn on the television, a world dead in sin. Did you hear the switch from the pronoun “you” to “we” in verses 1, 2, and 3? Paul is not only describing the Gentiles but also the Jews.

All people, Jews and Gentiles, are equally condemned and hopeless.

Paul himself, that cruel persecutor Saul, thought he deserved God's approval. Extremely religious and zealous, he tried dramatically to be more deserving than anyone. As he proved to himself and to the world, religion with its attempts to "get right" with God is not the answer. The opposite is the truth.

God wants to save people by his grace alone. Paul (who is also called the "Apostle of Grace" because of his conversion by the resurrected Christ) found out that his salvation was entirely a gift from God.

Because of God's grace, we are alive in Christ (vs 4–6). The word but in verse 4 introduces the great change section in Scripture, the center of the roller-coaster ride. The condition of mankind is not in fact hopeless. God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save his lost and dead creatures.

God's love and mercy moved him to rescue us from our lost and condemned condition. God did not give us his grace because we were worthy nor because there was anything good in us. Rather, it is because of his goodness and mercy and love for sinners.

So God sends his Son into the world to suffer and die in the sinner's place while we were yet sinners, while we were still dead, lost, and condemned. We receive his abundant grace through Christ and him alone. We who were dead have been raised to new life with him. We who were slaves to sin have been set free from sin, the world, our flesh. We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

Now we are servants of the one who has given us new life and set us free. And which words that say all this are the center of Paul's chiasm, the key words that pull us out of that roller-coaster plunge? ***"By Grace You Have Been Saved!"***

Even our conversion, being made alive, is a miracle of God's grace. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, through the Word, we are changed in our moral condition. We are no longer aliens but God's beloved children, called out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We are now no longer seen by God in our condition of sin but seen in the light of what Christ has done in and for us. We are forgiven, brought about by the Word and Baptism. A change in our nature has occurred through the ***"washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit"*** (Titus 3:5).

Because we are now justified by God's grace, we have a new desire, a new will, and new thoughts centered in the Gospel. We desire not to sin (even though we continue to struggle with it).

Our desire toward God is now to confess our sins, to repent, and by faith to receive forgiveness on a daily basis. Whereas before we were turned away from him, we are directed to God, to his Word and Sacraments.

We now recognize God as the Father of all mercy, Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer, and in Christ, we recognize God as our Father. God and heaven are now opened to us.

Paul emphasizes that it is God who did all this. Conversion is solely God's work. God has removed our spiritual inability to trust in him, given us new spiritual powers, given us spiritual understanding, a new heart, will, and spiritual emotions.

God moved by his love, mercy, and grace delivers us from our former life of bondage and sin. We are brought to faith through the Word, the Gospel, which alone changes us by God's power. We are now alive by grace . . . and we "walk" in it (vs 7–10).

God's purpose to save the sinner is not just temporal but eternal (v 7). The grace of God is on display for all eternity. Salvation is all of God's doing, this brings him glory for all to know and see. How rich is God's grace! We are saved by grace and not by our works, and this is through faith. No one can boast of what we have done; God has done it all!

Good deeds flow from faith. Sanctification follows justification. Even our good works are produced by God (John 15:5). These works that we do have already been ordained and prepared for us to do. Therefore, we simply “walk in them” walking in the grace by which we have been saved! And all this is a gift of God.

Amen