

## **Saved by Grace** **Ephesians 2:1-10**

### I. Introduction

#### A. What is grace?

- Philip Yancy tells this story in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?*
  - At a British conference on comparative religions, the participants started discussing the following question: what belief is unique to Christianity?
    - They suggested the incarnation, but in other religions such as Hinduism, God takes human form
    - What about resurrection? Again, other religions, such as Judaism, have a doctrine of resurrection
  - Into the discussion walks C. S. Lewis
    - Curious, he asks what all the talk is about
    - When told, he responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."
- Grace is unique to the message Christians bring to an ungraceful world, but what is grace?
  - *The New Harper's Bible Dictionary* offers this definition of grace: "The grace of God is therefore that quality of God's nature which is the source of men's undeserved blessings, in particular those blessings which have to do with their salvation from sin."
    - It notes that in the New Testament there is particular emphasis on the person receiving grace as being entirely lacking in merit for the gift of grace
    - Don't you like that "entirely lacking" bit?
  - Interestingly, Jesus, who practiced and taught a message of grace, never defined it
    - Jesus saw grace everywhere and pointed it out:

- The lilies of the field, which neither spin nor weave, yet are clothed more beautifully than Solomon in all his glory
- The birds of the field who find shelter in the mustard plant and raise their young among its branches
- The sun and the rain which shine and fall, respectively, on both the just and the unjust
- Jesus conveyed God's grace through his parables, his teachings, his ministry, and ultimately through his death and resurrection
- Grace defies definition, but we know it when we see it, when we experience it, and when we need it
  - Lewis Smedes writes in his book *Shame and Grace*, "What I needed more than pardon was a sense that God accepted me, owned me, held me, affirmed me, and would never let go of me even if he was not too much impressed with what he had on his hands."
  - I think that's what we want too

#### B. Grace central in the Methodist tradition

- I've told you this story, but it bears repeating
- Went with a group to prepare breakfast for homeless men at the Open Door Mission in East Houston
  - One of the men helping us asked what church we were from and I told him that we were from a Methodist church
  - "So," he asked me, "what makes Methodists different?"
  - I had to think about that for a moment and then it came to me
  - "Grace," I said. "Methodists focus on grace."
  - He was skeptical; "All churches talk about grace."
- And that's true, but grace is central to us as Methodists
  - Wesley's classic sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" was all about God's grace

- Our denominational motto is Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors, a statement of grace
- In a charge conference several years ago, my DS talked about our churches being a place where those who have been wounded can find a safe place, in other words – grace

## II. Saved by grace

A. This passage is one of the seminal statements of our understanding of grace and its saving power in our lives

- **Read Ephesians 2:1-10:** <sup>1</sup>You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. <sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup>not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

B. The Before picture

- Have you ever looked at one the advertisements for the latest wonder break-through in weight loss, or the newest treatment for wrinkles or other signs of aging?
  - Often contain these before and after pictures
    - The Before picture is a pathetic, sad, poorly lit image
    - The After is an energetic, attractive, buff contrast
    - Aside – how does a weight-loss pill manage to give a guy six-pack abs???

- These first three verses are our Before picture, before God’s saving grace
- Strong words describe us – we are dead in our sins and trespasses
- We have lived our passions and let them control us
  - “All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.”

### C. The After picture

- God could have responded in anger
  - Our trespasses were against God and it’s understandable that God would be fed up with us
  - Our After picture could be one of abject misery and suffering under God’s wrath
- But that’s NOT what God did!
  - “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...”
  - God saved us, is saving us, and will save us
    - Salvation comes from God, and is pure grace, undeserved and unmerited
    - Savor that for a moment: God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Christ
    - God looks past our deadness and sees the person made in the divine image, God’s child of blessing and promise
- Sometimes the After picture is as dramatic as the After pictures in those ads
  - These are the stories of the addict picked up out of the gutter and literally given a new life at a mission like Open Door where I served breakfast
  - I think most of our stories have After pictures that are more subtle, internal, and harder to define

- Denise Hildreth offers this kind of picture in her book *The Will of Wisteria*
  - Mary Catherine is the youngest daughter of a very rich man
  - Her life has been all about experiences and things
  - Her father's death changes that for her
  - One evening she returns to the church she attended as a little girl
  - "Slowly she laid her head down in the pew, as she had when she was a little girl. Her tears began to fall and puddle on the wood beneath her cheek.
  - "Mary Catherine opened her eyes. 'I've been so selfish,' she whispered into the darkened sanctuary. 'I've forgotten how to love, how to give. I've forgotten so much...The stuff took over. My wants. My things. My life. It didn't leave any room for anything else, anyone else. Not even you. And now look at the mess I've made.'
  - "Something began to happen, although Mary Catherine couldn't really explain what it was. A warmth, a presence, something living and real and vaguely familiar.
  - "Nothing had changed, not really...But something *had* happened. And tonight that was enough."
  - She experienced grace
  - Have you ever had that kind of experience of grace?

### III. Responsible grace

#### A. Methodists understand this about God's grace:

- It is ours by faith, we can do nothing to earn it
- But we must lay claim to it, we must respond and accept God's gift
  - Randy Maddox: "Wesley was convinced that, while we *can* not attain holiness (and wholeness) apart from God's grace, God *will* not effect holiness apart for our responsive participation."

- B. C. S. Lewis describes grace as gift-love and distinguishes it from need-love
- Need-love is that hungry love that seeks to fill inner emptiness and is all about me, the self
  - Gift-love is like an overflowing fountain that gives of itself so that others may drink
  - But you know the old saying: you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink
    - Here's the fountain, overflowing with God's grace
    - When you drink from the fountain, you share in God's love through God's grace
    - You don't put the water in the fountain, but YOU have to decide to drink; God doesn't force your head under the water
- C. Paul warns us about taking credit in this passage
- Don't boast, he writes, even about your acceptance of God's gift of grace
    - Can lead to the sin of thinking we saved ourselves
    - Salvation is God's gift to us and is all grace
- D. Conclusion
- I saw a picture of grace at a wedding which I officiated
    - Story of couple with the little girl who wanted her mother
    - And, of course, her name was Grace
  - Ours is a world of ungrace that tells us our worth is found in our bank accounts, our diplomas and certificates, our work, our children's accomplishments, and the list goes on
  - That's not how God works
    - You are saved by grace through faith
    - And God has provided all the grace we need to be saved, surrounded you with everything necessary
    - The fountain is overflowing, and you are invited to drink deeply of the living water

- Praise God!