

## Theme: What is Grace, Really?

### Ephesians 2:4-10

<sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

**Grace.** It's one of the most important and most familiar words in the whole Bible. In the New King James Version the word grace is used almost 150 times. **Grace** is the name of many churches (including the church we rent in Hayward). **Grace** is the main subject of many Christian hymns, including our hymns this morning. In fact, it is the subject of one of the most famous hymns of all time: "Amazing Grace" (which we have also sung today).

But what does **grace** mean and why is it so important? **Grace** means, "*undeserved love.*" (The 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students in my catechism class could probably tell you that!) But do we fully understand what this concept of **grace** truly means? Have you ever tried to fully comprehend what God's **grace** toward us really means? These verses in our text are some of the most important verses in the Bible when it comes to understanding **grace**, what it means that we are "**saved by grace,**" and how important that is to our Christian lives.

The verses of our sermon text are the perfect basis for our "Evangelism Sunday." Why? Because God's **grace** is the essence of the Gospel—the "Good News!" After all, the "Good News" about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the story of God's **grace!** "**By grace you have been saved**" (v. 8) as verse 8 of our text tells us. These are great words to build our faith and all our teaching and preaching upon. **Grace**—God's undeserved love—means our salvation has absolutely nothing—*nothing*—to do with us and everything to do with God from beginning to end.

Paul makes this perfectly clear in our text. So clear, in fact, that you have to wonder why so many people throughout history and even in our day have gotten it wrong. Or why we have to keep rebuking our own natural inclinations to think otherwise. By nature, and even from our experience in this world we are led to believe that there is no such thing as a "free lunch;" that anything of any value needs to be worked for and earned. So we, and all mankind, by nature apply this same type of thinking to God and our salvation: In order to please God, in order to gain His salvation we've got to "work" for it. We've got to be good enough. We've got to do enough good, etc. and surely in the end God will let us in to the "pearly gates." But that's not **grace!** Paul tells us in our text "**it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast**" (v. 8-9).

Well, perhaps we're far too "Lutheran" to fall for that lie. We know we're not saved by our works; we're saved by "faith," just like Martin Luther preached back in his day, and as our passage states (v. 8). But maybe there's a part of you that thinks that you're a believer because somehow, in some small way you "deserve" to be one. "After all, I've been pretty good," we think to ourselves, "At least I'm not as bad as most people. I don't cuss or swear (much), I haven't committed any of the really 'big' sins before, I'm always helping people out, and I go to church every Sunday. It makes sense that God would want me on His 'team'! That must be why He chose me to be one of His own." But that's not **grace** either!

Why has God **“made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (v. 5-6)?** Paul says in our text, **“because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses” (v. 4-5).** God’s **grace** is that He loved us even though there wasn’t anything in us in the slightest that deserved His love or deserved His favor. It was only because of His **“rich mercy”** and **“because of His great love with which He loved us” (v. 4).** **Grace** is a love that loves the un-lovable, that shows mercy and kindness to the un-deserving. **Grace** is sending your only Son to die to pay for the sins of the un-loving and even the un-believing—even for you and me!

Well, maybe instead we’re like far too many people in our day who confess to be Christians, who even confess to believe that they are saved by God’s **grace** in sending Jesus to die on the cross for their sins, but the faith part; the believing in Jesus part? Well, “That was my decision. I turned my life over to Jesus. I asked Jesus into my heart. I decided to live for God. I chose Jesus.” Well, that’s not **grace** either!

What does Paul say in our text? He reminds us that in our natural state when we were born into this world **“we were dead in trespasses” (v. 5).** That was our spiritual condition at birth: DEAD! Not sick. Not wounded, impaired, or even paralyzed. Dead! A dead man can’t make himself alive again. A dead man can’t choose. The only “choosing” he can really do is to “choose” to stay dead. A dead man can’t receive a gift even if it’s a free gift! A dead man can’t do anything!

But notice what Paul says and see how the verses of this text help give us a fuller understanding of God’s **grace: “But God...made us alive together with Christ...[God] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (v. 4-7).** In case that wasn’t clear enough Paul goes on in the very next verse to remind us that even our faith which receives God’s **grace** is actually a gift from God as well: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (v. 8-9).** (The phrase **“and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God”** is referring back to the entire act of God saving us, namely by His **“grace”** through **“faith,”** as Paul states in this verse. The entire act of our salvation—both God’s **grace** and our **faith**—Paul clearly says is **“not of ourselves,”** or *from ourselves*, **“it is the gift of God”!**)

**Grace** means that from beginning to end our salvation is God’s work, not ours. Not by our decision, or by our cooperation, and certainly not by our own works. In fact, God is so completely the author of our spiritual life that Paul reminds us in the last verse of our text that even the good works that we do as spiritually reborn children of God are all God’s work and God’s preparation. **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (v. 10).**

How much did you have to do with being born into this world? Nothing, right? In the same way our “rebirth” as God’s children through faith had nothing to do with us and everything to do with God. We are **“His workmanship,”** His “work of art.” He **“created”** us **“in Christ Jesus for good works” (v. 10).** That was one of the reasons God saved us and made us His children so that we would do **“good works.”** He didn’t just save us so we could “sit on our hands” and wait for heaven. No! He **“created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (v. 10 NIV).** Works that benefit our fellow man and glorify our Savior and show our love and thankfulness to Him. Yet even these works **“God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (v. 10).** God is the one who creates the very situations and opportunities for us to honor Him and serve our fellow man, and He is also the one who supplies the motivation and ability that make it possible for us to perform these works.

Do you realize what all this means for our lives? What security we have! What assurance! God's love saved us; His power made us alive through faith in Christ which is itself a gift of His grace. He preserves us in that faith, He moves and motivates us and empowers us to do the good works He has prepared for us. None of this depends on us or on our powers. So don't rely on yourself or your own strength! Rely on God's and rest on His **grace!** For He has told us in His Word just like He told the Apostle Paul, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness**" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

**What is Grace, Really?** This is **grace:** That we who were dead have been made alive! That we in whom there is nothing good are declared to be righteous and acceptable to God and are now empowered to do good works! That we who know and feel our guilt and sin are forgiven and freed by the cross of Christ's sacrifice! That we who were once heirs of hell are made heirs of heaven! Can there be anything more precious to us—or more amazing—than **grace?** Amen.