

October 22, 2006

“CPC: Increasingly Gripped by His Grace”
Ephesians 2:1-10

FCF: Mistaken motives

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Having been saved by God’s amazing grace,
(anchor) our lives should be an expression of gratitude and joy.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“Saving Private Ryan” – set in WWII – the tale of a group of men sent to rescue a soldier. His brothers have been killed in action. Orders are given to protect this last son, Private James Ryan. The mission is perilous, claims the lives of several, but they press on. And then comes that line. In the final battle scene, as the Captain himself is dying, he whispers his last words to a dumb-struck Private Ryan: “*James – earn this – earn it.*”

Fifty years pass and an elderly James Ryan has returned to Normandy. He kneels beside the grave of the Captain, tears filling his eyes. (READ quotes) “*My family is with me today...Every day I think about what you said to me that day on the bridge. I’ve tried to live my life the best I could. I hope that was enough. I hope that at least in your eyes I’ve earned what all of you have done for me.*” Then he turns to his wife and asks with some anxiety, “*Tell me I’ve led a good life...Tell me I’m a good man.*” Private Ryan has lived his life with the last words of his rescuer ringing in his ears. “*Earn this. Earn it.*” Those words have driven him. And crippled him as well. The burden is too much.

I relay this to you because I’m convinced that far too many of us are far too driven in very similar ways. And crippled for it. And I’m convinced God has something else in mind for us. This message is addressing underpinning of the third clause in our church’s Vision Statement – “*Increasingly gripped by His grace.*” Let’s look at our text.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ephesians 2:1-10

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

“*But...but...but...*” Sometimes it’s the last word we want to hear – especially as parents from our children. More often than not, what’s behind it is some level of frustration regarding a position or stance we have taken. The natives are restless. And the parent is too. “*But...but...but...*” Sometimes it’s the last word we want to hear.

But sometimes it’s the very word we most need to hear (READ Ephesians 2:4). “*But God...*” It is the contrast between our ruin and His remedy. The theme is the scope of God’s eternal plans for all humanity. The context is Paul’s prayer that his readers might come to know the power of God at work both in the resurrection of His Son and in the lives of His people – a power measured by the crisis it has overcome – a grave crisis. Imagine the worst scenario you can. Falling, drowning, choking, speaking in front of large groups. Horrible, each one. And nothing compared to what Paul is describing here.

“*But God!*” That is Paul’s message. It is a study in contrasts. Where we were and where we are. What we deserve and what we receive. How should we respond to a love that pours itself out in such surprising, incomprehensible ways? How should we respond to the One who has poured Himself out and lavished us with such affection? Having been saved by God’s amazing grace, our lives must then be full expressions of gratitude and joy. Consider with me this study of contrasts. And let the wonder soak in.

I. BUT GOD – WE ARE NO LONGER DEAD

It begins with this. We were dead. But no longer. We’ve been made alive.

A) *Once Dead*

(READ Ephesians 2:1-2a) Strong, sobering words – we were dead.

1. Cause

Dead because of our “trespasses” – our transgressions, false steps, crossing the lines. Dead because of our “sins” – our missing the mark, falling short of God’s standard.

2. Effect

“*This is how you once walked,*” Paul says. You had no desire to love and serve God. You were unable and unwilling to please and honor Him. And with no way to change.

Illustration:

You were moving around like something from a lame horror movie – a zombie, the “living dead” – physically moving but spiritually dead. There was no life within you.

Paul refuses to sugarcoat this. He refuses to wash over how things were for us before we gave our lives to Christ and for anyone who has yet to give their life to Him.

B) Now Alive

“But God...” Those once dead have now been made alive. The contrast could not be more stark (**READ Ephesians 2:1-2a, 4-5**). Once dead, “but God,” now alive.

1. Cause

But how? Our union with Christ. Bound to Him, one with Him, His death is our death. His life is our life. We died with Him. We are now alive with Him – now, right now.

2. Effect

The “living dead” are now the “living alive.” He has renewed and is renewing us through and through. Slowly but surely, not all at once, but really and truly being made new.

Application:

How does that strike you? Is this not the news you’ve been waiting to hear? Does not your heart burn, wanting to grow in living this out? Let me ask you. What would it look like if we believed we were no longer dead? What would it look like if we believed we were no longer dead, really alive, and it was God who had made us alive?

“*God loves me. He sent His Son for me, to rescue me, that I might live. How He must love me. How He must long for me. He’s made me alive. There’s life in me now – His Spirit indwelling me. I can change. It doesn’t have to be this way anymore. Despite my past. Despite all that’s happened. I’m not dead. I’m alive.*” Do you see it? Having been made alive by His grace, our lives must be expressions of gratitude and life.

II. BUT GOD – WE ARE NO LONGER ENSLAVED

Once dead, made alive. But that’s not all. With another study in contrast, Paul also tells us that we were once enslaved. Once enslaved but now raised.

A) Once Enslaved

(**READ Ephesians 2:2-3a**) Again, strong words. No sugarcoating or whitewash.

1. To the world

We were enslaved to “the course of this world” – caught and trapped, affected and infected by a value system with no room for God. A conformity that never stops to think.

2. To the flesh

We were enslaved to the world. And to the flesh and its “passions” – not to the physical but to the sinful nature. To the “desires of the body” – natural appetites loved too much. To the “desires of the mind” – pride, ambition, rejecting truth. It is the self gone to seed.

3. To the devil

And behind it, we were enslaved to the devil – “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” His is a kingdom of darkness. His influence is real. How it operates we are not told here. That it operates we are told.

B) Now Raised

In all these areas, we were once enslaved. But no longer (READ Ephesians 2:4-6a). The image, the reality Paul is speaking of is almost too much to take in. Our union, our bond, with Christ is such that we rose with Him in His resurrection. And the same is true of His ascension. A real work of renewal has begun and has already taken place.

1. Renewed mind and will

Our mind and will – not fully, but truly – our thoughts, plans, inclinations renewed.

2. Renewed affections and conscience

Our affections and conscience – our longings and desires, our sense of right and wrong.

In all these areas, we were once enslaved but have been raised – progressively being renewed but at the same time some real substantial change has already taken place.

Illustration:

The image that comes to mind here would be pardoned prisoners – once locked away under guard, now released and set free. Wouldn't it strike you as a bit strange if they insisted on going back, in living in their cell? What would the guards say? *“Get out of here. This is not where you belong anymore. You've been set free.”*

Application:

Think with me. Paul is talking about us here. Do you believe it? What would it look like if we believed we were no longer enslaved? What would it look like if we believed we were once enslaved, had been raised up, and it was God who had done this?

“God loves me. He really does. He has sent His Son to redeem me from my enslavement. He's raised me with Christ. I'm free, no longer a slave. I've been set free. I've been made new. I can resist these temptations, the pull. I'm no longer a jellyfish, unable to resist the direction of the tides around me. I'm free.” Do you see it? Having been raised by His grace, our lives should be an expression of gratitude and freedom.

III. BUT GOD – WE ARE NO LONGER CONDEMNED

It's an amazing study in contrasts here. Once dead, now alive. Once enslaved, now raised. And there is yet one more – once condemned, now seated.

A) Once Condemned

(READ Ephesians 2:3b) Paul pulls no punches. We were “children of wrath.”

1. By nature

“By nature” – we were born into this state of condemnation, every one of us. It wasn't something we learned or that came on us over time. It was something inherited. Adam represented us and so we fell with him in his first sin, the eating of the forbidden fruit.

2. Children of wrath

This is what we were born into. Which is all the more terrifying considering whose wrath is spoken of here. There is no capriciousness or arbitrariness to God's wrath. It is a divine response to sin, to the spurning of His love, the rejection of His affections.

Illustration:

We fell with Adam. We know something of this – of one standing in the place of a larger number such that their action will affect the rest. In football, a place kicker's performance determines the future of his team. In world affairs, when one king declares war on another, their subjects are brought into either victory or defeat. Adam missed. He declared war. And we went down with him. Christ hit the mark. He made peace. And so we are alive, raised, and seated. Though one with Adam, we are now one with Christ.

B) Now Seated

(**READ Ephesians 2:4, 6-7**) He has been seated. And so have we – with Him.

1. The work is done

What does that mean? It means the work is done (**READ Hebrews 10:11-14**). This seating is a sign of victory, of completion. Sin's penalty and power have been done away with. And one day, so too its very presence. Christ has been seated. The work is done.

2. The rest is won

And the rest is won. The work is done – by Him for us. And our rest is now won.

Application:

Let me tweak the question just one more time. What would it look like if we believed we were no longer condemned? What would it look like if we believed we were no longer condemned, that we had been seated, and that it was God who had seated us?

“God loves me. He loves me. He’s seated me with Christ. I can rest in what He’s done, in His finished work. I can rest in the fact nothing can be taken away from that. And I can’t add anything to it. The striving is over, the victory won.” Do you see it? Having been seated by His grace, our lives should be expressions of gratitude and joy.

CONCLUSION:

It's good to know where you came from. It's also good to know where you are. And it's especially good to know how you got there. Well, here it is. It's God's grace – His calling us from the grave, the cell, the dock. Think of Adam – made from nothing but dust by and for God's delight and pleasure. Think of Lazarus – a dead man unable to do a thing for himself, called forth by but a word from Jesus. Both are pictures of us. Think of Jesus at the onset of His ministry (**READ Luke 4:18-19**). This announcement has been fulfilled in our hearing, in our lives, and needs now to be embraced and lived!

We were dead. We were enslaved. We were condemned. *“But God!”* Because of what He has done, no longer need we be driven by guilt or shame or fear but now by gratitude for His grace! For we are His workmanship – the fruit of His labor. Because of what He has done, we are freed from any vain boasting in ourselves – no longer in how we live or what rules we follow or what we know. We are freed from all that and now impelled to boast in Christ – in His love, in His care, in His provision, in Him.

Because of what He did. And because of why He did it. Why did he do all this? Did you catch it? (**READ Ephesians 2:4**) Why did He do this? *“Just because”* – that's the only thing we're told. And it's exactly what we need to hear. Parents don't like hearing *“But...but...but...”* Children don't like hearing *“Just because.”* Sometimes it's the last thing they want to hear. But when it comes to what's driving this great wind of kindness sweeping through this chapter, it's all we're given. And it's just what we need.

(**READ Deuteronomy 7:6-8**) Do you hear it? Why does He love us? Because He loves us! Just because! Imagine the scene. A restless, troubled little one needing reassurance. *“Daddy, why do you love me? Is it because I'm smart or pretty? Is it because I'm a good artist or can kick a ball? Is it because I made my bed or was nice today or said my prayers? Why do you love me?”* *“Oh, my child. I'm glad for all those things. I really am. But as for my love for you? Oh, dear one, I just do. I just do.”* And, with that, this restless, troubled little one is able to crawl up into the father's lap. And be at peace. Because they have the greatest security of all, grounded not in the labors of the child but in the love of the Father – *“just because.”* And so nothing can touch it. It's unshakable. I pray it's yours. And something we will continue to grow in together.

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