

God Gives Grace

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[0 : 00] Page 70, we're reading Exodus chapter 34, verses 1 to 7. Exodus chapter 34, verse 1.

Yahweh said to Moses, Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you broke.

Be ready in the morning and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain, and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain.

So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai as Yahweh had commanded him and took in his hands the two tablets of stone.

Yahweh descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name Yahweh.

Yahweh passed before him and proclaimed, Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

[1 : 39] Our second Bible reading is from Ephesians chapter 2, the first ten verses. You'll find that on page 949 of the Pew Bibles.

Ephesians chapter 2. You were dead through the trespasses and sins 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.

All of us lived once 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.

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, by grace you have been saved, and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the result of work, so that no one may boast.

[3 : 12] 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. I'm the pastor of this congregation, and if you are new, I want to bring you up to speed with where we're at in Ephesians.

We're doing a nine-week series through the book of Ephesians, and really the big idea of the series is that God is a God of grace. The big idea of Ephesians is that God is a gracious God.

He gives gifts to his people, and so over the last couple of weeks we've seen that God, really from start to finish, from eternity past to eternity future, is securing the salvation of those whom he's called.

That God has chosen for himself a people in eternity past, and made promises to them that they will inherit eternity future. And then last week we saw that really it's not enough for us to know that truth, not enough for us to know the gospel, but we also need to know it more deeply.

We need to spend time in God's word, where he promises to speak to us, and grow in our knowledge of God. And now, tonight we come to one of the best passages in the Bible, for my vote.

[4 : 29] This is just an incredible passage about who God is, about his graciousness to us, about the fact that though we don't deserve it, though we're enemies of God, God took the initiative to save us.

So it's a beautiful passage. We'll get into it in just a second, but I want to pray for us first. So let's bow our heads. Father, we do thank you for this book of Ephesians. Thank you for what you're teaching us through it, through these sermons, through our community groups, through study. I pray that now, tonight, you would come again and speak powerfully through your word. And I pray particularly right now for those of us here who don't know you as Savior, those who haven't put their trust in you.

I pray that they would see you tonight both as a just judge and a loving Savior. I pray that you would move, even now, by your Spirit.

We ask that you do this in faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen. I'm going to start tonight by just telling a story, really three stories, about three friends I've got.

[5 : 42] We'll get to the point in just a second. Adam is an average, hard-working, Aussie bloke. people love Adam.

His friends love his sense of humor, his loyalty, his larrikin lifestyle. Adam loves Australia. The weather, the beaches, the girls, he loves his job too.

And at work, he gives 100%. And he enjoys spending the money that he earns on clothes, toys, cars, regular nights out with the boys.

Adam believes in what he sees and lives by what he knows. The world around him is all he cares about. The here and now is all that matters.

He's here for a good time, not a long time. Adam follows the course of this world and is spiritually dead. Sarah is one of the most lovable girls in the world.

[6 : 52] She's smart, good-looking, she makes friends with anyone, anywhere. The elite private school she attended elected her as school captain unanimously.

Sarah prides herself on being open, accepting, and tolerant. Sarah believes that all things are divine. God is everywhere and in everything.

She believes that all religions are one and that the true mark of godliness is tolerance. She believes that Jesus was an enlightened teacher whom the church has misrepresented.

Sarah follows the ruler of the power of the air and she is spiritually dead. Tim wouldn't hurt a fly.

He's an all-round, nice guy and he tries to get along with everyone. He doesn't have many close friends but he is friends with everybody. He works hard to please his parents, please his lecturers and do right by everyone.

[7 : 59] Tim is also completely addicted to pornography. pornography. He spends hours downloading videos of people having sex. He's noticed that the videos he likes best are getting more and more extreme and he's starting to think about his friends in pornographic ways.

Tim follows the desires of the flesh and he is spiritually dead. These are my friends.

They're all my really good friends. I love them very much but they represent for us all three of them together a picture of life outside of Christ.

a picture of spiritual death. And that's what this first half of the passage tonight is really all about. Read it with me.

If you turn to page 949 we'll read the bad news. This is verses 1 through 4. Paul says this You were dead.

[9 : 11] You were dead through your trespasses and sins 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.

All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh following the desires of flesh and senses and were by nature children of wrath like everyone else.

Leave it there. That's the bad news. that's the truth. That's the reality of the human condition apart from Jesus. And what I want to do in telling you about my three friends is really illustrate three aspects of disobedience three aspects of life outside of Christ.

So first of all I told you about what it is to follow society. You see that in verse 2 the start of verse 2 he says let's read from the start he says you were dead through your trespasses and sins in which you once lived following the course of this world.

What is it to follow the course of this world? Well I'll tell you what it isn't. It isn't following and indulging in a particularly bad society. The people that Paul was writing to weren't members of a particularly corrupt or sinful society.

[10:38] They were living in a society much like ours that did not submit to Jesus that was not obedient to Jesus. The pervasive philosophy of our society and of ours was one of indifference to Jesus if not opposition.

So the problem with my friend Adam is not that he loves cars and clothes and money and his job and his friends. The problem isn't enjoying society.

In fact Jesus prayed in John 17 that his disciples would be in the world but not of the world. He said Father I pray not that you would take them out of the world but that you would keep them from the evil one.

So Jesus' plan Jesus' desire for us is to be in society to be active members of society to be reaching friends neighbours colleagues in society with the gospel the sin of following the course of this world of following society is that we start to adopt their views about Jesus and society's views about Jesus I don't need to tell you are not good.

Our society doesn't follow Jesus. Our society isn't obedient to Jesus. Our society doesn't confess Jesus as Lord. So to follow society is a mark of spiritual death.

[12:11] What about number two following Satan? Let's read through from the start again. You were dead through your trespasses and sins 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.

In the ancient world they had this idea that between earth and heaven the air was the sphere of the spiritual realm.

So this is where demons and spiritual authorities and powers were at work. Earth, the air and heaven. And also thrown into the mix in Ephesus and these regions that Paul was writing to there was a lot of magic, witchcraft, spiritual kind of activity, quite a lot like us today really with our new age and occult and weird ideas about crystals and spirits and angels and fairies, that kind of thing. That was their situation as well. And so he speaks to them in their own language and says that those who are spiritually dead not only follow the ways of the world but they follow the prince, the ruler, the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.

And we know from the rest of scripture, indeed from the rest of this book, that that spirit is Satan himself, the prince of demons.

[13:48] The book of Ephesians actually talks about the spiritual realm about authorities and powers and demons more than any other book in the New Testament. It's got a lot to say about this, particularly when we get into chapter six, we're going to see what it is for us to do battle with those spiritual powers.

The problem with my friend Sarah is that she is following the power of the air without even knowing it. She thinks that to be tolerant is to be godly.

She thinks that saying that God is the God of Islam and the God of every other religion is to be tolerant, is to be loving, is to be godly, when in fact she is being deceived and indeed following Satan himself.

it's not a bad thing to be tolerant. We ought to give big people the opportunity to make up their own mind about Jesus, about other religions, that's for sure.

But to say that God is not God above all other gods, it's to say that Jesus isn't who he said he was, the way, the truth and the life, that no one comes to the father but through him, is to believe the lies of the father of lies, Satan himself.

[15:23] And he's the spirit who's at work in those who are disobedient and chief among disobedience is the kind of willfulness that denies who Jesus really is.

That third aspect, following self, back it up and read through again. He says, you were dead through your trespasses and sins 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.

All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of the flesh and senses and we're by nature children of wrath like everyone else.

The difference between this aspect of our spiritual deadness and the other two aspects is that this is internal where they're external. So society, the environment around us, happens outside of us and impinges on us.

Satan, demons, spiritual forces are outside of us in the air, opposing us, oppressing us, but this, this aspect of spiritual deadness is internal.

[16 : 48] Our desires, our thoughts, our feelings, our actions all come out of our heart and the heart of those who are spiritually dead is corrupt. That's what he's getting at when he says, following the desires of the flesh and senses, that's about thoughts, feelings and actions.

He's really summarizing the whole bit for us there. This is where we get the doctrine of total depravity, that every part of us, thoughts, feelings, actions, every part of us is tainted by sin. The Bible teaches that God made us perfect, made our first parents, Adam and Eve, perfect, perfect relationship with him. They sinned, the whole race fell and now we are born dead. We are spiritually still born and every part of us is tainted by sin. It's not that you are as evil as you could ever be, but that every part of you is tainted by sin, thoughts, feelings, actions, your will, the decisions you make.

That's what happens to you when you're spiritually dead. problem with Tim is that he's serving himself rather than serving God.

[18 : 28] He's fulfilling his own sinful desires, using other people who have been made in the image of God to satisfy his own sinful lust.

When it talks about fulfilling the desires of the flesh, it's not just talking about sexual sin either. So, pornography is an example, but it's not the only one. You're reading Galatians, that also includes, the flesh also includes things like greed, envy, dissension, quarrels.

So, it's every aspect of who we are. It's a pretty depressing picture, right? Four verses, they made you depressed, God's love, God's kindness.

I feel like having a bit of a cry myself. Every one of us is born into this situation. That's why it says that we are by nature children of wrath.

Our very nature, our very sinful nature makes us the objects of God's wrath. So, we're going to talk about God's mercy, God's love, God's kindness, but we need to talk about God's wrath.

[19 : 48] Not a lot of churches talking about God's wrath these days, but you can't go very many pages in the Bible without hearing about God's wrath, or His anger, or His justice, or His holiness. And that's really what His wrath is about.

It's not an angry God with a beard and a stick just waiting to hit you. That's not the picture of God we get in the Bible. It's actually God who's perfect and just and righteous.

And just like any just judge, when God sees sin, iniquity, disobedience, He can't abide it. He can't live with it.

And so you get some grace in your life here on earth, but the time will come where your sin needs to be dealt with, needs to be judged. And that's where we get the wrath of God.

That when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, either when He returns or when you die, if you have sin, God's wrath comes against you, undiluted, forever.

[20 : 57] And Paul says, it's not just the rapists, it's not just the serial killers, every one of us.

Read it. We were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else, Jew, Gentile, pagan, whoever, by nature children of wrath.

So this is a pretty depressing picture right here. And what we need, if you believe this, what we need is for something to happen to change our situation.

We need a miracle. And that's what we get. Check it out. Verse 4, let's just read through 7. He says, but God, just stop there.

I think Martin Luther said, these are the two sweetest words in the Bible, but God, 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.

[22 : 26] By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

But God, think about the situation. everyone is dead, spiritually dead. So what are we going to do? What are we going to do to get out of this situation where dead and God's wrath is coming against us? Dead people can't do anything. Dead people can't respond.

Dead people can't be good enough. Dead people stay dead and get judged forever. But God takes the initiative. 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 is so rich in mercy. we heard it in that reading from Exodus. Remember Andrew speaking a few weeks ago about hesed, the Hebrew word which speaks of God's unexpected, unlooked for,

surprising, mercy and love.

[24 : 03] That's what we've got here. God who is rich in hesed, God is rich in unexpected love and mercy. if you expect God to love you, if you expect him to be merciful to you, you've got it wrong.

This is surprising. When we were dead, when we were enemies, God acted. God saved us and did three things here.

He took us from death to life. He took us from hell to heaven. He took us from wrath. wrath to kindness. Let's take a look at him. Verse 5 says this, even when we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ.

I love watching cop shows, but I always get them completely ruined by my wife. Because she's a paramedic, dead. She can't help but butt in on every scene that has anything to do with any kind of emergency and correct it.

She'd make the worst critic, maybe the best. But any time that someone's been in a ute in the bottom of a dam for 15 minutes and they rip him out and pump his chest a few times and he gets up and hugs his kids or whatever, she can't take it.

[25 : 34] partly because she's tried bringing people back from the dead plenty of times and it rarely works and then partly just because they don't ever seem to do it right.

But it's frustrating for her because the truth is that dead people very rarely come back to life. Even with our best efforts and our medicine and our techniques and our machines, dead people don't come alive again.

And here, when we're talking about spiritual death, there is no option for resuscitation. You've been spiritually dead since the day you were born.

It's a long time for a lot of us. Resuscitation isn't an option. Getting up out of the grave isn't an option. We need God to do something and that's what Paul incredibly says that he does.

God made us, didn't offer us new life, he made us alive again in Christ Jesus. And then beyond that, he goes even further, he didn't just make you alive, he didn't just take you from death to life, he took you from hell to heaven.

[26 : 53] Verse 6, he raised us up with him, that's with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

God raised you from spiritual death and then he seated you. Think about what that means in the world view that I was talking about. He seated you above the power of the air, above Satan and his rule.

He's lifted you above the influences of society and the negative views about Jesus. He's seated you with Christ. So he seated you there now, above all other powers, in order that you might live a holy life of obedience and he seated you there for the future, so that for eternity you sit with Christ, you sit with the King, no more satanic influence, no more secular diversion, just heaven with Christ.

Took you from death to life, from hell to heaven and also from wrath to kindness. Verse 7, this is so sweet. See, he raised you from the dead, he seated you in heaven, so that in the ages to come, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

I don't know about you, but if God saves me from spiritual death and seats me in heaven, I'd be pretty happy with that. That would be enough. Just to get away from torment and condemnation and Satan and hell would be enough, but he goes beyond that.

[28 : 43] he lavishes his grace in kindness upon us for eternity. We saw in chapter 1 that the reason God saved us is so that we would worship Jesus forever.

That's really the big idea. It's to get more worship for his son. It's to get eternal worship for his son who's worthy, but in addition to that, God saved us so that he might be able to show to us the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness.

At one point, somewhere in your life, I don't care what kind of life you've led, I don't care if you're a Christian kid or a non-Christian kid, at some point in your life you were spiritually dead and your destiny was all about wrath, condemnation, anger and justice.

And now, all that's changed if you're a believer. It's now kindness, love, mercy, the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness.

It's what you've got to look forward to. I've been reading this biography of John Newton.

[30 : 05] He's the guy who wrote Amazing Grace, just the biggest loser in the world really. like he said, a wretch, involved in slave trade, indiscriminately killed black slaves on ships, threw women and children overboard, drunkard, sexually promiscuous to degrees that you don't even want to

think about.

But, you can see why he wrote the words amazing grace. But I tell you what, amazing grace is an understatement.

It's an understatement. understatement. I mean, the words of the song are really quite nice, but they're an understatement. We'll never be able to express what it means to be saved by grace. listen, look at me.

We will never truly worship Jesus as we ought until we understand what it is we have been saved from.

[31 : 31] you've got to get your nose down close to the grave and the casket where your rotting corpse lays. Spiritually dead.

Not just a bad person. Not just a sinner. Not just a non-church goer. Spiritually dead.

And by nature, a child of wrath. We're expecting our first child in January and I just can't wait.

I always love kids. But I know that when that baby's born, it is going to be a child of wrath. The sweetest little child is a child of wrath.

sin is not just what we do, it's who we are. And if we don't get that, if we don't understand that, if we can't smell the stench of our own sinfulness and death, then we won't get amazing grace.

[32 : 50] We won't understand grace at all. people. That's why Paul uses such rich language. He wants us to feel it.

There's something else that stinks just about as much as a rotting spiritual corpse, and that's religion. I'm going to read why. Let's just read through to the end of the passage.

He says, verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

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. It's a great passage, because it takes us from the bad news to the overwhelmingly good news.

But there's still a problem, because ever since this letter was written 2,000 years ago, so many people have seen their spiritual death, have seen their sin, have seen what God offers, and they've tried to earn it.

[34 : 09] They've tried to do the right things and live the right way and do the right amount of good work so that they might merit God's favour. It's partly because they understand the situation.

They're so bad. God is so good. Don't we have to contribute something? And that's religion, in the negative sense, earning your way to salvation.

I tell you what just sucks about religion, is it always ends up in either one of two ways.

You either become proud or you despair. Like you either do a good job of obeying the law and doing the right things and coming to church twice a week and doing these kinds of things, Christian things, and you start to think, I'm doing a pretty good job.

I understand now why Jesus died for me. So it's pride. You become proud or despair. You realise that you can never do anything to merit his love.

[35 : 24] You always screw up. You've tried reading your Bible every day ever. You just can't wake up in the morning. You try and pray but you fall asleep or you think about something.

I mean, it's just despairing. Pride and despair, they're your options if you want to earn your way to heaven. Paul says it himself, by grace you've been saved.

Remember, grace means free gift, not to be paid for. By grace you've been saved through faith. This is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast, so that no one can become proud. We are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus.

You were born into sin, destruction, death, condemnation, judgment, wrath, but you were born again, you were created again in Christ Jesus.

[36 : 31] Now everything's changed. you know what I'd love to say to my three friends, what I've tried to say to my three friends, what I'd love to say to you here tonight, God's grace, it's available to everyone.

God's offer of forgiveness is given indiscriminately, that Jesus' death on the cross is sufficient even for your sin, the porn addict, the child molester, right, the greedy person who just keeps charging up the credit cards, not being generous to the poor, the proud and arrogant, the loser who's never got anywhere in life, God's grace extends to everyone.

all that you need to do to accept his forgiveness and love, to spend eternity experiencing his immeasurable kindness, all you need to do is acknowledge that you're dead. It takes a fair bit of humility to acknowledge that you're dead, but you need to do it. you need to say, God, I can do nothing to save myself.

I'm in the grave and I can't get out. I'm spiritually bankrupt and I can't earn my way out of here. And then you say, but I trust, I trust when Jesus died on the cross and his blood poured out.

[39 : 05] God, that his sacrifice was sufficient to save me from my sin, to save me from myself, to raise me from death to life and seat me with Christ.

So if that's you tonight, you don't trust in Christ. You're not being obedient to Jesus. you know deep down that you are by nature a child of wrath, that you deserve judgment.

Please don't leave tonight without trusting in Jesus. It can start tonight. You can be raised to life tonight. And if you're here tonight and you've been around for a while, you've started to trust in religion, doing the right things, just even a little part of you wants to earn your way to heaven, you need to repent.

Because God hates religion, takes away his glory, makes grace so much less amazing. So what I'm going to do is just give us a quiet time, just a minute, if you're not a believer, this would be a great time to pray and ask God to save you.

He promises he will. If you're a religious, arrogant, proud person, now would be a good time to confess that to God.

[41 : 05] He promises to forgive you as well. So we're going to do that. We're going to take a minute and then I'm going to pray for us. I'm going to hear you who's going to come to goes.

And I'll hear you after Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

I pray to you because my words will never raise anyone from spiritual death. The greatest sermon in the world can't change people's hearts, but your spirit can.

[43 : 23] So I ask in faith that you would move in our hearts tonight. It's been a serious message, Lord. It's a serious passage.

So I pray that we would seriously think about what it means that you've taken us from death to life, from hell to heaven, from wrath to kindness.

I pray that we would respond with great worship to Jesus as our great God and saviour. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.