

A SHOWCASE FOR GOD'S GRACE

Ephesians 2:1-10

Introduction:

→ Illust. – Robert Deffenbaugh tells the following story:

It isn't often that one finds good theology written on the back end of an 18 wheeler. Nevertheless, I encountered a truck a while back which had some good theology written on its tailgate. The truck was one of those extended dump trucks, belonging to a demolition company. The truck passed me quickly, and all I had time to do was to read the signs painted on the tailgate. The first sign was written in large letters, and it read: "We Could Wreck The World." The second sign was on the bottom of the tailgate, written in smaller letters. It read: "Jesus Saves."

He goes on to say, "I couldn't believe my eyes. Did the owner of the truck intend for these two signs to be read and understood separately, or were they meant to be understood together? The lettering on that truck expressed some mighty good theology. I don't know how one could sum up the contrast between men and God more concisely. Men could wreck the world, and only Jesus can save it.

The Apostle Paul's theology is not written on the back of a truck; it is recorded in the New Testament epistles which he wrote. In the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul summarizes the condition of mankind, the kindness of God, and the nature of the salvation which He has provided for lost men in Christ.

There are three main segments in this passage: (1) Verses 1-3 focus on fallen man, and his hopeless condition (dead) as a result of his sin; (2) Verses 4-6 focus on God, and on His mercy and grace in making a provision for man's salvation in Christ; and (3) Verses 7-10 focus on the purpose of salvation, which is for the praise of the glory of His grace. All together, they give us a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Man's Problem: Dead in Sin

In vv. 1-3 we have the terrible news of man's lost condition laid out for us clearly and succinctly.

Verse 1 – AV says, "And you hath he quickened who were dead..." That phrase "hath he quickened" is not in the original. The translators added it because it is implied.

But I want you to notice the word "you..." Greek language is more expressive than English. The word is plural accusative – *expand*. The NIV actually does a good job of giving the sense, saying, "As for you, you were dead..." You can almost see Paul's finger pointing as he makes the case for what we all once were like.

"...you were dead..." – dead in trespasses and sins—spiritually dead. Paul's statement is true of every one of us. We are sinners, and there are many reasons to back up that statement.

First, we are sinners because we were born with a sin nature. When Adam disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world and ever since then, every human being has inherited that sin problem. In Romans 5, Paul makes this case in an extended argument, that through Adam, sin entered the world and death through sin. And we are all under that same judgment of death.

Second, we are sinners because we sin. We follow the course of this world, Paul says. As sinners we follow its course of sin and rebellion. Sinners love and seek out others to share in the thrill and, unknowingly, the penalty of sin. We are admonished by Paul in Romans 12:2 – "**Do not be conformed to this world**, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Third, we are sinners because we are led about by the schemes and the influence of Satan. Not always willingly, but he is there taking advantage of the unbeliever. Paul says, "...following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience..." The Bible describes Satan as one who "...prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." And as unbelievers, we unwittingly fall into his evil schemes and traps.

And **fourth**, we are sinners because we surrender to the evil desires and passions of our own sinful nature. As Paul says, "...we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind..." These are the natural, self-serving impulses and desires of fallen men. And it includes not only the sinful passions of the body, but also of the mind.

Note that there are three key pressures mentioned here—the course of this world, the influence of Satan, and the passions of our own sinful flesh. The world, the flesh and the devil are all working in the unbeliever to drive him into sin.

And Paul says that we all once lived this way. We were all in the same boat, and that boat was headed for destruction and wrath. Note his words, "...[we] were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

There is not one person who can claim an exemption from this condition. We are all, by our very nature, children of wrath, destined for judgment. As Bob Deffinbaugh says, *"In and of ourselves and apart from God, we are desperately and hopelessly lost. We are not "sick," we are "dead." We are without life, without hope, without potential, without "worth." Any value we may have, or any hope, must come from outside of us. And so it does come, in Christ. This is the good news of the gospel, and that which Paul explains next, in verses 4-6."*

God's Grace: Alive in Christ

In v. 4 we come to those two words that change everything – **"But God..."** The NIV separates those words, but in the original they come together. "But God..." is a beacon of hope in a sea of despair. Our situation would be hopeless if God had not come to our rescue.

Paul begins with the motivation of God, which prompted Him to provide a way of escape from our condition of sin and eternal death. God was motivated by His mercy and His love for us.

God's love for us is unconditional, and so different from our love for Him. Our love is a response to his love.

"We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:6-8)

Quote – Deffinbaugh: "God's love is not a response, but a cause. God's mercy is not prompted by our potential or by any qualities we think we possess, but by our own

pathetic condition. Divine grace was not bestowed on us because we were so worthy, or because God found anything good in us, but because of the goodness which is in God Himself. The goodness is in the giver, not the recipient."

Note what it is that God has done to deal with our condition, all because of his mercy and his love for us, even as sinners:

- Because of our sin we were dead, but in Christ we are made alive (verse 5).
- We were formerly dead, but we have been raised up in Him (verse 6a).
- We were formerly enslaved to our own passions, to the world, and to Satan, but in Christ we are seated in the heavenly places (verse 6b)

We are now free from all heavenly and earthly powers that oppose God, and have become enslaved to Him who by love delivered us from our bondage to sin and to death.

And so, our problem is that we are dead in sin, but God's grace reached out to provide a way to raise us up and make us alive in Christ. But there is another important truth in this passage...

God's Purpose: The Praise of the Glory of His Grace

We want to look at vv. 7-10 as a package. We all know vv. 8-10, but v. 8 begins with the word "For..." which builds on the previous statement in v. 7. Look at v. 7 – "so that..."

Here we have God's ultimate purpose for doing what he did—He made us alive, raised us up and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Why did he do it? *Read v. 7.* The primary purpose of God, in sending His Son to die in the sinner's place, was not to produce the happiness of the sinner, but rather to demonstrate of the grace of God for all eternity.

If it is God's grace which is to be on display for all eternity, then clearly salvation has to be all of his doing, not ours. And Paul is clear that the work of salvation is entirely his work. He gives us two statements of evidence to back up that assertion. They each begin with the word "For..." The first statement is found in verses 8 and 9, the second in verse 10.

In vv. 8-9 Paul contends that salvation is not of man's doing, but of God's. *Read vv. 8-9.* People are saved by grace, not by works. We do not enter into eternal life because of our good deeds, but because of God's goodness, in Christ. We have been saved by grace, through faith. This salvation is God's gift, and not compensation for our efforts.

The second reason why God will be glorified for all eternity for His grace toward men is that any good deeds which result from our salvation as also the result of God's grace. *Read v. 10.*

Anything we might do, any good works which we accomplish in our service for Christ, are works which he foreordained, that we should do. We cannot take credit for them.

God's purpose in saving us is to show forth his glory for all the ages to come. As we look back over history we see many glorious trophies of His grace. Think of:

- Augustine – 4th century – godly mother. He abandoned his mother's faith; lived an ungodly immoral life. Mother prayed; he was gloriously saved and became one of the great theologians of the ancient Western church.
- John Newton – rebel; ran away from home and joined up with a slave trader; life of drunkenness and debauchery. Remembering the truths taught by a godly mother, one day in desperation cried out to God and was saved by God's grace. Song: Amazing Grace. What a demonstration of the Grace of God
- Francis Thompson – failed in careers in the priesthood, medicine, the military. Became a vagabond on the streets of London, addicted to opium, living as a bum. Yet one day, God caught him and he became a Christian. Poem: The Hound of Heaven.

Conclusion

What about you? If you are a Christian this morning, you too are a trophy of God's grace. This passage ought to serve as a reminder of what you once were, and of what you now are, in Christ. Without Christ, you too "were dead in your trespasses and sins... But God... made us alive, raised us up with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly places... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace."

The realization of all that He has done in Christ should produce both humility and gratitude. It should stimulate us to love and good deeds, knowing that even the good works which we do are those which God has accomplished in and through us, for His glory.

If any of you are not able to rejoice in these truths, then now is an opportunity for you to receive them for yourself. Verses 1-3 make it clear that you are no worse and no better than any other sinner. Apart from Christ, you are dead in your sins, without life or hope. But in Christ, you enter into the blessing of eternal life. You cease to be the pawn of your own fleshly desires, the world's pressure, and Satan's power. If you acknowledge that you are a sinner, and if you trust in Christ as God's provision for your salvation, you will come to experience God's grace personally. I pray that today will be your day of salvation.

Will you receive God's gift of salvation and become another trophy in the showcase of God's grace?