

## "Amazing Grace" Ephesians 2:1-10

### Introduction

- It's amazing what some people will do to earn God's favor. On September 18, 2003, Genshin Fujinami, a 44 year-old Buddhist priest nicknamed the "Marathon Monk," finished a seven-year, 24,800-mile journey in the Hiei Mountains of Japan. It was intended to be a trek to enlightenment. Once a monk starts this journey he must finish or kill himself. According to an Associated Press article, for the first three years the pilgrim must rise at midnight for 100 consecutive days to pray and run 18 miles per day, stopping 250 times to pray along the way. During the next two years, he must up his schedule to 200 days. In the fifth year the pilgrim must sit and chant mantras for nine days without food, water, or sleep in a trial called doiri, or "entering the temple." In the sixth year, he must walk 37.5 miles every day for 100 days. In the seventh year, he must run 52.5 miles for 100 days, 18 miles for another 100 days, and then complete a 234-mile trek back to his home base.
- And yet, according to the Bible, not even that would not be enough to earn God's favor. As much as we might be impressed with Fujinami's dedication, his discipline, his spirituality, his quest to get to God, to be purified, is inadequate. No matter how difficult we try, nothing we could ever do, no human effort can ever get us to God.<sup>1</sup>

### Proposition

- **From first to last, salvation is a gracious gift from God**

### Transition

This morning, I want to talk to you about God's grace. God's grace is unique. The story is told of C.S. Lewis and his colleagues at Oxford. One day Lewis' cohorts were discussing Christianity's contributions to religious thought and none of the professors could come up with something unique. Each of the things they suggested could be found in some sort in another religion. Lewis walks into the room and asks what they are talking about and quickly responds that God's grace is unique. You see, of all the religions in the world, you will not find another one that will tell you what I am going to say to you today. And yet, for all its uniqueness, God's grace is misunderstood or it's cheapened or sadly enough, it's forgotten. I am convinced that we don't really understand the grace of God because we don't fully understand the place from which we've come. We don't understand how bad off we really were before the grace of God. God's great purpose for his Church, for this church, is that we understand the grace of God; that we become people who live and eat and sleep grace. My prayer this morning is that each of us would appreciate God's grace just a little bit more than before.

### Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 2:1-10 describes three situations relating to our salvation by God's grace**

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<sup>1</sup> Citation: "'Marathon Monk' Ends Seven Years on the Run," *Chicago Tribune* (9-20-03); submitted by Lee Eclow, Vernon Hills, Illinois

## Background and Setting

- As we move through the book of Ephesians, you'll notice that the first three chapters are very theological. The last three seem to be more practical. The first three chapters describe what God has done through Christ, what has been accomplished by the cross. The last three chapters describe the day to day outworking of this theology. In other words, if God has done this for us, then this is how we should live. The last three chapters won't make sense if we don't nail the first three. Right now, as we begin chapter two, Paul is continuing his discourse on God's power. Specifically, he focusing on God's grace and the part it played in bringing us to God. Again, the message of this passage is clear, **from first to last; our salvation is a gracious gift from God.**

## Transition

Let's look at the first situation relating to our salvation by God's grace. The picture in verses 1-3 describes our situation before God's efficacious grace took hold in our lives. The picture is dark, despairing, desperate, without life and without hope. **Without God's grace we are nothing more than "dead men walking."**

## Main Points

### I. Without God's grace we are nothing more than "dead men walking" (2:1-3)

#### A) Validation

- i) Life before Christ can be summed up with one simple word. Death. All who live apart from the grace of God are no better than walking corpses. We were dead because of our sin. But not only were we dead, all who live apart from the grace of God are enslaved to sin. All the while waiting. Waiting. Waiting for God's wrath to be justly poured out against that sin. **Without God's grace, we are nothing more than dead men walking.**

#### B) Explanation

- i) Paul begins in verses 1-3 by explaining our condition before Christ. We were dead. *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.* What does Paul mean by dead? "The death to which Paul refers is not a figure of speech; it is a factual statement of everybody's spiritual condition outside of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Why were we dead? Paul uses two words that explain why we were dead. Transgressions and sins. "These two words seem to have been carefully chosen to give a comprehensive account of human evil. A trespass is a false step, involving either the crossing of a known boundary or a deviation from the right path. A sin however, means rather a missing of the mark, a falling short of a standard. Together the two words cover the positive and negative, or active and passive, aspects of human wrongdoing."<sup>3</sup> As John Stott says, "Before God we are both rebels and failures."<sup>4</sup> We were dead. But people without Christ seem perfectly alive? Yes people are alive in one sense. But in

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<sup>2</sup> Stott, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Stott, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> Stott, p. 71.

the “sphere that really matters” people are dead. Not some spark of spiritual life, not a smolder, a flicker, dead. No life. Those without Christ are unable to respond to God; as unresponsive as a corpse.

ii) Wait. It gets worse. Not only were we dead. We were enslaved. Look at verses 2 and 3. *In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.* Paul says that our enslavement to sin comes from multiple sources. The culture, or as the text says, the ways of this world. Speaking of this, Stott says, “We drifted along the stream of this world’s ideas of living.” Boy does that describe the way most people live, the way most people in the church live. Just drifting along the stream of this world’s ideas of what it means to live, what’s right and wrong. Then Paul says we are enslaved by the devil, or as the text says, the ruler of the kingdom of the air. “Ephesians speaks of an ultimate power of evil behind the other powers. He is the ruler of the air or heavenly realm who remains at work among the disobedient.”<sup>5</sup> The devil is actively at work in the lives of those who don’t know Christ. Lastly our own selves, again as the text says, our sinful desires and thoughts. Our fallen, self-centered human nature that craves what the passions of both body and mind. The key being both inside and outside forces enslave the non-Christian. In other words, “the idea of this text, then, is that the devil controls non-believers both externally (the environment or domain of the air) and internally (attitudes or spirit).”<sup>6</sup> That was what we were like before God got a hold of us.

iii) Wait, it gets worse yet. Not only were we dead and enslaved. We were condemned. *“Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”* Ephesians 2:3. Because of our condition, our situation, we were ready to receive God’s just punishment for sin. His wrath, his anger poured out on us because of his intense hatred for sin. We were condemned in our state of death and enslavement. Our pre-Christian state is despicable. Condemned, enslaved dead men. Children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Now let me say a word about God’s wrath. God’s wrath is not like man’s wrath. As one commentator said, “it is not a bad temper, so that he may fly off the handle at any moment. It is neither spite, nor malice, nor animosity, nor revenge. It is never arbitrary, since it is the divine reaction to only one situation, namely evil.”<sup>7</sup> So what is God’s wrath? “It is God’s personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, his settled refusal to compromise with it, and his resolve instead to condemn it.”<sup>8</sup>

#### C) Illustration

i) A number of years ago, Sean Penn starred in a movie with Susan Sarandon called *Dead Man Walking*. It was the story of a man from the Deep South on death row for murdering two teenagers. As Penn’s character is being led to the execution chamber the guard on hand cries out so all can hear, “dead man walking.”

#### D) Application

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<sup>5</sup> NDBT, Spiritual Powers, p. 800.

<sup>6</sup> Wallace, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> Stott, p. 75-6.

<sup>8</sup> Stott, p. 76.

- i) That's your neighbor right now. That's your family members, your son, your daughter, your spouse without Christ. That's us before Christ. Dead men walking. And to this we must say, who can get us out of this mess? What can we do? What can be done? What can a dead man do? Nothing. And that's the point. We are utterly powerless to do anything to reverse this despicable deplorable condition. In response to this, John Stott makes the point and I wholeheartedly agree with him. He said, "It is a failure to recognize this gravity of the human condition which explains people's naïve faith in superficial remedies."<sup>9</sup> When you realize our condition, our status before God all of the remedies that we as humans come up with to get to God are superficial. Trivial. Petty. Useless. Ineffective. Like putting a Band-Aid on a sucking chest wound.

## Transition

But if that were all, then despair is a good response. But there's more. Following verses 1-3, the first word of verse 4 is the best word in the Bible. *But*. Let's look now at the second situation relating to our salvation by God's grace. God's response to our situation. Praise God for the other half of the story, for the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Our desperate condition is reversed by God's great grace.**

## II. Our desperate condition is reversed by God's great grace (2:4-7)

### A) Validation

- i) *But* God didn't leave us as enslaved, condemned dead men. Because of God's great mercy and because of his great love, he saved us—he actually made us alive when we were once dead. This is God's grace. Not only did God make us alive, but he enthroned us with Christ—to reign and rule. And God did all of this because we deserved it. Right? No. Condemned enslaved dead men deserve nothing but what they have, condemnation and death. God did this so that he demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace expressed in his kindness for us through Jesus Christ.

### B) Explanation

- i) *But*. Surprise! *But*, God has taken action to reverse our condition in sin. *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.* Is there better news in this world following the reality of verses 1-3? What has God exactly done to reverse our condition? He saved us by grace. He did something for us that we couldn't possibly do for ourselves as dead men. And to get his point across, Paul uses three verbs to describe God's gracious salvation through Christ. He made us *alive together* with Christ even though we were dead; he *raised us up* with Christ even though we were dead, and *seated us* with him in the heavenly places even though we were condemned criminals. When we think about Christ's resurrection, his ascension and his rule at God's right hand, which are the things Paul is alluding to in these verses, we usually don't think of these things in terms of ourselves. *But* that's the gracious reality of what God has done for us through Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> Stott, p. 79.

- “We were dead, and dead men do not rise, but God made us alive with Christ. We were slaves, in a situation of dishonor and powerlessness, but God has raised us with Christ and set us at his own right hand, in a position of honor and power.”<sup>10</sup>
- ii) Now the question is why God did this? What motivated God? Paul makes it clear that God’s mercy, his love, his grace motivated him to show kindness to us through Jesus Christ. You see, God delights in mercy. Micah 7:18 says, *“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.”* As John Stott aptly puts it, “We were dead, and so helpless to save ourselves: only mercy could reach the helpless, for mercy is love for the down and out. We were under God’s wrath: only love could triumph over wrath. We deserved nothing at God’s hand but judgment, on account of our trespasses and sins: only grace could rescue us from our deserts, for grace is undeserved favor. Why then did God act? Out of his sheer mercy, love, grace and kindness.”<sup>11</sup>
- iii) And God did all of this, he took you who were dead and made you alive, he loved the unlovable rotting stinking corpse called you, in order that he might demonstrate for all eternity the immeasurable riches of God’s grace. There are riches in this world. There are treasures of gold and silver, there are fortunes and holdings and investments and things to cherish, but none of them remotely compare to the riches of God’s grace.

#### C) Illustration

- i) To get across God’s love for us in spite of our condition, D.A. Carson wrote this.
- ii) Picture Charles and Susan walking down a beach hand in hand at the end of the academic year. The pressure of the semester has dissipated in the warm evening breeze. They have kicked off their sandals, and the wet sand squishes between their toes. Charles turns to Susan, gazes deeply into her large, hazel eyes, and says, "Susan, I love you. I really do." What does he mean? Well, in this day and age he may mean nothing more than that he feels like testosterone on legs and wants to go to bed with her forthwith. But if we assume he has even a modicum of decency, let alone Christian virtue, the least he means is something like this: "Susan, you mean everything to me. I can't live without you. Your smile poleaxes me from 50 yards. Your sparkling good humor, your beautiful eyes, the scent of your hair—everything about you transfixes me. I love you!" What he most certainly does *not* mean is something like this: "Susan, quite frankly you have such a bad case of halitosis it would embarrass a herd of unwashed, garlic-eating elephants. Your nose is so bulbous you belong in the cartoons. Your hair is so greasy it could lubricate an eighteen-wheeler. Your knees are so disjointed you make a camel look elegant. Your personality makes Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan look like wimps. But I love you!" So now God comes to us and says, "I love you." What does he mean? Does he mean something like this? "You mean everything to me. I can't live without you. Your personality, your witty conversation, your beauty, your smile—everything about you transfixes me. Heaven would be boring without you. I love you!" That, after all, is pretty close to what some therapeutic approaches to the love of God spell out. We must be pretty wonderful because God loves us. And dear old God is pretty

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<sup>10</sup> Stott, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Stott, p. 82.

vulnerable, finding himself in a dreadful state unless we say yes.... When he says he loves us, does not God rather mean something like the following? "Morally speaking, you are the people of the halitosis, the bulbous nose, the greasy hair, the disjointed knees, the abominable personality. Your sins have made you disgustingly ugly. But I love you anyway, not because you are attractive, but because it is my nature to love."<sup>12</sup>

#### D) Application

- i) God's love is so unlike the love of man. We love because there's something in it for us. We give because of what we might get in return. We serve because of how it makes us feel. We care because we know one day it will come back around to us. That's how we live. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. But that is not how God operates. He loves when we were condemned to die. He brings life even though we're dead. He does for us what we can't do for ourselves. He shows grace. Unmerited favor. Favor and kindness and mercy and love through the cross of Jesus Christ, not because we deserve it but because he deserves to be known as the God of grace and truth.

### Transition

If this passage describes the before and after of God's grace. Verses 8-10 describe the after. What God has called us to become by saving us. Let's look now at the third situation, or condition relating to our salvation by God's grace. **With God's free gift of grace we become works of art on display for His glory.**

### III. With God's free gift of grace we become works of art on display for His glory (2:8-10)

#### A) Validation

- i) Salvation through Christ is God's gift. You can't earn it. You can't work towards it. It has to be received. It must be accepted by faith. For without faith it is impossible to please God. And God made it this way so that we might not boast. Does the creature ever boast to its creator? Does a clay pot ever boast about its beauty to the potter? Does a painting ever boast about itself to the painter? The artist is the one who deserves the credit for what has been done. We have been literally made into new creatures with new purposes, with new identities through Jesus Christ. **We are God's workmanship, saved by grace so that we might, as God's work of art, display God's glory.**

#### B) Explanation

- i) The means by which God's salvation comes to us is through faith. These verses are some of the most familiar in the bible. As I read them again, listen to them as if you are hearing them for the first time. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.* We play no part in our salvation. "It is not our achievement nor a

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<sup>12</sup> Citation: D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Crossway), pp. 61-63; used with permission of Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishing, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.com](http://www.crossway.com)

reward for any of your deeds of religion or philanthropy.”<sup>13</sup> We simply accept that this is what God has done for us. We believe by faith that what God says about us in saving us by his grace comes through the person of Jesus Christ. As Galatians 2:16 says, *know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.* And so the only thing that we can boast about when it comes to talking about our salvation is what God has done for us. Galatians 6:14 *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* We are saved by grace.

- ii) Not only is salvation God’s achievement. There’s something more. Paul goes further. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* We are God’s workmanship. This is creation language. We have been created like fresh, new works of art, masterpieces on display. “Salvation is creation, re-creation, new creation.”<sup>14</sup> We are created for a specific purpose. Good works. Doing things that please God, obeying his word, which God prepared beforehand. This is the way we are to walk, to live. This passage began talking about our condition before God’s grace, the fact that we walked in the way of sin and death. The paragraph ends as it began. “The contrast is complete.”<sup>15</sup> After God’s grace, we now walk in the way of pleasing God. Listen to how the New American Standard brings out this idea of walking in the way of good deeds. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* “Throughout time and in eternity the church, this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness.”<sup>16</sup>

#### C) Illustration

- i) Speaking of God’s grace, John Stott writes, “Towards the end of my time as a theological student at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, the Rev. Paul Gibson retired as Principal, and a portrait of him was unveiled. In expressing his thanks, he paid a well-deserved compliment to the artist. He said that in future he believed people looking at the picture would not ask ‘Who is that man?’ but rather ‘Who painted that portrait?’ Now in our case God has displayed more than skill. A patient after a major operation is a living testimony to his surgeon’s skill, and a condemned man after a reprieve to his sovereign’s mercy. We are both-exhibits of God’s skill and trophies of his grace.”<sup>17</sup>

#### D) Application

- i) You see, as God’s creation, when we do good things for his glory, people don’t ask, who are you, but they ask, who is your God? Who painted the portrait of your life that you are now living? Good works don’t save us. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But God brought us new life so that we might live a life of good works for his glory. Serving, caring, loving others, ministering, praying,

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<sup>13</sup> Stott, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> Stott, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Stott, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce, p. 288.

<sup>17</sup> Stott, p. 82.

giving up our time, our energy so that people might notice the artist who painted our lives with his grace and love and mercy and kindness.

## **Conclusion**

An old tale speaks of a man who died and faced the angel Gabriel at heaven's gates. The angel said, "Here's how this works. You need a hundred points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you have done, and I will give a certain number of points for each of them. The more good there is in the work that you cite, the more points you will get for it. When you get to a hundred points, you get in."

"Okay," the man said, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart."

Gabriel replied, "That's wonderful. That's worth three points."

"Three points?" said the man incredulously. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my money and service."

"Terrific!" said Gabriel, "that's certainly worth a point."

"One point?" said the man with his eyes beginning to show a bit of panic. "Well, how about this: I opened a shelter for the homeless in my city, and fed needy people by the hundreds during holidays."

"Fantastic, that's good for two more points," said the angel.

"TWO POINTS!" cried the man in desperation. "At this rate the only way I will get to heaven is by the grace of God."

"Come on in," said Gabriel.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Citation: Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace* (Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 22-23; used by permission of Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, [www.crosswaybooks.org](http://www.crosswaybooks.org).