

Sunday Update
14th March 2021

Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 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 flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 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, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

I was conducting a wedding. All of the main participants from the wedding party were standing in front of me, doing what they needed to do, saying what they needed to say, at all the right moments. I was aware of the flower girl, but not paying her very much attention. After the service, one of the guests told me that every time I mentioned her name, the flower girl looked up at me, thinking that I was either talking to her or about her. This was unusual! Of course, I asked “What is her name?” “Grace” came the reply! John Newton writes about “Amazing Grace” is his famous, fabulous hymn, the grace “that saved a wretch like me”, as he tells something of his story and how that story changed when God intervened with His grace to transform Newton’s life. Grace is one of *the* most important church words: it changes the way in which we think about ourselves; it shapes the way we understand Jesus; and it changes the way we see God.

The piece from Ephesians 2 above doesn’t feel like a story, but it is your story and mine. This is the story, in one way or another, of every Christian. It doesn’t start well, but it finishes in a blaze of grace and glory. God has done marvellous things for us and grace tells us why! Grace is all about the motives that lie behind the actions that God takes to save us. There are lots of ways to define grace; the simplest one that I’ve found came from James Philip, once minister of Holyrood Abbey Church in Edinburgh: “grace is God’s love to people who are not worthy of it!” A slightly fuller description came from James Denney, professor of New Testament at New College in the early 20th century: “Grace is the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful, unearned, at work in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinful men...” An even more simple way of describing grace comes in the form of an acrostic: **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.**

The story that Paul tells doesn’t start very well. He uses some very strong words to tell us that we have got things wrong. There are times when we have all made mistakes; there are times when we have missed the target of what is good and right; there are times when we have missed the road and gone off on the wrong path completely. When he adds God into that equation, Paul tells us that we have pushed God out of the picture almost totally at times. None of us is immune from this story; it is the story of all of us in one way or another. Every human being is the fascinating mixture of brilliantly good qualities, capable of the deepest love and self-sacrifice on the one hand, and faults, selfishness, and carelessness on the other. Tom Wright sums us up: “We live in a world where human beings, left to themselves, not only choose the wrong direction, but remain cheerfully confident that it is in fact the right one.” Paul describes our predicament: “*you were dead in your transgressions and sins*” (verse 1)

2 words turn the story around: *“But God...”* (verse 4) God has changed the story. The story changes with Jesus and especially with the notion of Jesus being raised from the dead. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the events right at the heart of the gospel story and right at the centre of what God has done to save us. When Jesus died and was raised, He completed the work for which God has sent Him into the world, the task of salvation for us. The cross was a place of death for Jesus; the sky turned black on Good Friday as a sign of the darkness of the soul felt by Jesus as He took our sin on His shoulders. If the story had stopped there, then Jesus would just have been another martyr, dying for a cause close to His heart. But Easter Sunday is the day of resurrection; God raised Jesus from the dead, telling the world that salvation is complete; God has done this; Jesus has finished what He came to do. The One who was dead has been raised to new life. This becomes a good news story for us when Paul talks about God who *“made us alive with Christ... God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms”* (verses 5,6) We have been given a new life; our feet are set on a new road; our sins are forgiven.

God did this so that He *“might show the incomparable riches of His grace... it is by grace you have been saved.”* (verse 7,8) God loves us when we don't deserve to be loved. God loves the world when the world doesn't deserve to be loved. We have done nothing to deserve the gift of salvation; God didn't send Jesus into the world as a reward for the world's good behaviour. God sent Jesus into the world to save us from ourselves and the consequences of our faults and mistakes. Grace tells us that God loves us when we don't deserve to be loved. It is this amazing grace that changes our lives and that turns our story from being dark and grim, to being full of life and hope and glory. There is nothing like grace; it is an amazing quality in God, loving us and saving us at Christ's expense; thanks be to God.

Grace has the most wonderful impact on our lives.

- It changes the way that we see ourselves; we don't need to prove ourselves anymore because God loves us and accepts us as we are; we can't be any more loved than we already are by God's grace.
- We don't need to be afraid of failure; God forgives us our sins because of Jesus and because He loves us; any fear of failure can be banished.
- We don't need to be afraid of God; we can be convinced that He loves us as we are, warts and all.
- We are inspired to live our lives for Jesus, inspired to live our lives in ways that are good and right, ready to do good in the world and to love other people.

Grace is God at His brilliant best. He loves us when we don't deserve to be loved. He saves us in Jesus when we don't deserve to be saved. He continues to love us each and every day, even on the days when we are struggling and even in the days when we forget all about Him. Grace – *“God's love to people who don't deserve it!”*

Prayer: Father, we thank You for Your love; we thank You that You love us warts and all, when we struggle, when we fall, when we fail, when we fall short, when we walk the wrong road, but are convinced we are right. Thank You for Your grace; help us to understand grace and be glad in it; to understand how amazing it is and to revel in it. Inspire us to do good in the world and to love others in the way that You have loved us, with grace and patience.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

*To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For people living with a sense of failure, that they have made mistakes, have got things wrong, have broken relationships and see no way of setting things right. Open their eyes to discover grace, that they are loved in Christ.
- For people walking the wrong road, but are convinced it is right; may Your Spirit open their eyes to see, to acknowledge their sin; help them to turn to You in repentance and faith, and turn to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation.
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them, under pressure by the numbers of people in hospital and trying to manage the care they provide.
- For people who mourn because a loved one has died; help them to find comfort and peace.
- For the roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for those waiting for the letter; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.
- For people who are isolated again by lockdown, spending time on their own again and feeling lonely; for people in care homes, again cut off from family and friends, and the staff who care for them.
- For schools: pupils at home and some in schools; for families trying to manage their children and helping them to take part in learning however it is delivered; for teachers working in new ways and finding that very demanding.
- For businesses that are shut: the pubs and hotels, hairdressers, and others; for those who own these businesses and it is their livelihood; for those who work and are again on furlough; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Churches, with buildings again closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love.

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| Jesus is Lord, the cry that echoes | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLJFpxOcGKk |
| God you're good to me | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzZiwHjkgOU |
| The Church's one foundation | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1YBYrJ8Hzg |
| Dear Lord and Father of mankind | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAXiN0egN-I |
| We are marching in the light of God | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSOWN0_0lrk |

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the "sermons" tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk

- If you have a smartphone, a tablet or an i-pad, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of **"Word For Today"** and **"Word For You Today"** Booklets for February, March and April are now available. Please contact Michael Merriman who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Ian Aitken. **Let the Bible feed you.**

trypraying

Over the past few years our Church family have actively supported the "trypraying" campaign both financially and prayerfully, contributing to both the advertising campaign on buses or outside our church building and making available the trypraying booklets to "people who don't do church", encouraging them to start their journey of faith and try praying.

During this difficult year almost a hundred of the trypraying booklets have been taken from the box attached to the railing outside the church. Hopefully they have helped bring some light, hope and peace into the lives of those in our community who picked one up.

For 2021, the trypraying campaign is wanting to adapt and try something new, to take the campaign where they know people will be - on their computers and phones. The average user spends nearly two hours on social media each day.

By investing in the setup, content and management of new social media profiles, they will be building a new platform for the long term, making this and future campaigns reach more people than ever. This will largely target Millennials and Generation Z, using social media to "do" ministry and not just "promote" ministry.

A creative idea being considered is trypraying live. This would turn the seven day trypraying guide into a live stream on You Tube guiding users to think and pray along with the video, asking questions or for prayer from the team using the live chat.

Raising the £24000 needed to run these social media platforms for a year and create quality videos would be an amazing blessing. Later in the month we will be raising some money for trypraying, so watch this space.

