

Grace on Display

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February 17-18, 2001

"I Believe in the Church" Series

Ephesians 2:7-10

I love stories of discovery where some intrepid person, through sheer persistence and ingenuity, finally locates what they have been looking for for a lifetime. A few years ago I read an amazing book called "Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea." If you are looking for a good read, a great adventure story, get "Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea" by Gary Kinder.

The story begins with the California Gold Rush back in the 1850's. Men would work in the Gold Mines in California for several years and bring their gold to San Francisco where it would be melted down and converted to coins. Then these men, often with their wives and children, would sail from the coast of California to the West Coast of Panama. Then they would travel by land across Panama, because the canal wasn't yet built, and take a steam ship from Panama up to the East Coast of the US, where they could live off the gold they had mined.

Well, in 1857 several hundred folks coming back from California sailed from the coast of Panama on a steam ship called The Central America. On board were several million dollars worth of gold coins along with stacks and stacks of gold bouillon. This ship carrying a cargo of gold and several hundred passengers got caught in a hurricane somewhere off the coast of Savannah, Georgia. It was blown out to sea 100-200 miles. After heroic efforts to save the ship, the ship finally sunk to the bottom of the ocean in 8000 feet of water.

Many of the passengers were saved after telling stories of an incredibly frightening time trying to salvage the ship. They were picked up by a passing vessel. But a lot of the men for whom there wasn't enough room on the lifeboats lost their lives. They went down with the ship.

The story begins with the sinking of The Central America in 1857 somewhere a couple of hundred miles off the Southeastern Coast of the United States. And then it fast forwards to the 1980's to Columbus, Ohio. Here in Columbus Ohio there was an engineer named Tommy Thompson who decided that he was going to try to locate and salvage this ship and raise from the ocean floor 8000 feet down all of its gold.

He faced several major hurdles. First of all, no one knew where the ship went down. He literally had to look for the ship in hundreds of thousands of square miles of ocean. He had to locate the ship. Second, there was no equipment in the world that was then developed to actually go down and dig the gold up, even if you located it. Third, he needed to develop equipment that would not only just

pull this from the ocean floor, but be sensitive enough to not ruin the gold coins. He didn't want to go down there with a big shovel because the value of the gold was not only in its gold content, but actually in the rarity of the gold coins. The fourth problem was there was a lot of competition from other treasure hunters. Finally, all of this was very expensive, so he needed to raise a lot of money from local people here in Columbus to go and try to locate the gold.

And so the story of how this man, Tommy Thompson, over the course of a decade leaps one hurdle after another, searching, searching, searching for the gold. He has setback after setback—in terms of weather and equipment. He literally worked day and night checking old weather maps, reading over the stories of those who were picked up at sea. He plotted how a storm would blow an 1857 ship out to sea so that he could find out exactly where it had sunk. Then, as an engineer, trying to solve the deep water problem of digging up gold from the ocean floor.

It is a great story. And again because so much of the action takes place in Columbus, Ohio, where Tommy Thompson lived after graduating from the Engineering School at OSU, it's a particularly fascinating story for Central Ohio residents. "Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea."

I don't know how many of you know the story of the discovery of King Tut's Tomb, but it is an equally fascinating story. Several years ago they had the contents of King Tut's Tomb brought here to Columbus where the whole cache of burial treasure – the King's gold mask and his golden throne, gold pendants and all the stuff that the King was going to need, apparently, in the afterlife. It included all these cups, fruit baskets, boats, and games. All of it was on display.

But what is considered to be one of the greatest archeological finds in history would not have occurred apart from the persistence of an archeologist named Howard Carter. Back at the turn of the century, archeologists were convinced that all of the burial chambers of the Egyptian Pharaoh's had long been discovered and looted over the course of the 3½ millennia that they had been buried. It was the practice of the Egyptian Pharaoh's to be buried in these royal tombs along with a lot of their earthly belongings that would ensure them a happy afterlife.

There were elaborate measures taken to protect their death chambers from grave robbers. They used to mine the burial chambers in secret at night. The engineers would build false passages and pile up rubble from floor to ceiling to protect the huge doors that protected the chambers. Then they would bolt everything shut.

Howard Carter had an interest in archeology. He worked in Egypt for many years and was fired from his position after an argument with an important tourist. He always believed that King Tut's Tomb had not yet been discovered. In 1907 a

very wealthy friend of Howard Carter's convinced him that the two of them should look for King Tut's Tomb. His wealthy friend provided the money and Howard Carter provided the expertise. He worked on excavating the Valley of the Kings near the pyramids. But he was interrupted by WWI. Then after WWI he continued for four more years to look for King Tut's Tomb. People thought he was crazy.

On the morning of November 4, 1922 some of his men reported that they discovered some ancient huts near the northeast corner of the tomb of Ramses VI's Tomb. Ancient huts were often used by laborers who were working on a tomb. He had the workers continue to dig and they discovered a step beneath one of the ancient huts. They continued to dig more feverishly and discovered that this step was the first of a stairway that led down to a corridor. They excavated the corridor and found a sealed doorway.

Howard Carter dug through the doorway and he brought down a torch and a flare. He saw this pile of stones down another corridor piled high. After they cleared the stones, they found another sealed door and the inscriptions on the door made it apparent that it was the doors to the tomb of King Tut. November 26, 1922 Howard Carter carved a hole through the door. As he climbed through and in the midst, way down in the ground, as the light from his torch lit up the room, Carter saw strange animals and statutes and gold everywhere in the room. He was the first human being in nearly 3300 years to enter King Tut's Royal Gallery, an incredible archeological discovery.

For the apostle Paul, the grace of God was the most amazing discovering that any human being could ever make. The apostle Paul was a proud, fiercely religious Jewish man, zealous for God's law, fanatical about observing all of the commandments that we read about in the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, as well as following the oral traditions of the rabbis. The apostle Paul was a self-righteous man, a man who was so upset about what he considered to be a new heresy – Jews believing that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, springing up from within Judaism. In the apostle Paul's zeal, he violently tried to suppress this new heresy.

Many of you know the story that as he was on his way to Damascus to arrest some Jewish believers in Jesus and bring them back to Jerusalem to face heresy trials, he was apprehended on the road by Jesus Christ. He saw the risen Christ. And this proud, self-righteous, zealous Pharisee was broken. He came to see himself as he really was in the sight of God, as a sinner, an opposer of God's plans in the world, a persecutor of God's people.

As he met Jesus on the road, he found something else – he found grace. Like Tommy Thompson discovered that treasure on an ocean floor and Howard Carter discovered the tomb of King Tut, the apostle Paul discovered grace.

But he not only discovered grace, he considered himself lifelong to be exhibit A of grace. At the end of Paul's life in 1 Timothy 1:15, the apostle Paul says, "Here's a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst." No longer does he say about himself, "I am the most obedient Jew. I faithfully follow all of God's commands." He says, "I am the worst of sinners." And then he goes on and says, "But for that reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."

I am Exhibit A. I am the display item for the grace and patience of God. That's what every Christian is meant to be. You, if you are a Christian and have been saved, are meant to be Exhibit A of God's grace, a showcase, a display of the grace of God.

I have called today's talk, "Grace on Display." Let's pray.

Ephesians 2:7-10 "[And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,] 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. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Last week I used a picture of the movement of the first six verses of Ephesians 2. The picture was of a trip that my family took to Palm Springs in which we got on a cable car and moved from the desert floor up to the top of a 9000 foot mountain. I called the message "Moving from the Pit to the Mountaintop." That's what Paul is doing in the first six verses. He talks in verse 1 about being dead in your transgressions and sins. We were spiritually dead, he said, out of touch with God and out of touch with spiritual reality. We were people who couldn't make heads or tails of the Bible. We opened up the Bible and we didn't understand it. It seemed like a boring book. The spiritually dead person is a person who sits through a worship service and has no inclination at all to direct their hearts toward God. They are flipping through the bulletin, looking around the room, counting the ceiling tiles, or they are noticing the colors on the wall and the architecture. But they are not alive to the presence of God. They aren't even seeking the presence of God.

Paul said, "That's what you were. You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live." He goes on to say we "were enslaved to the world, when you followed the ways of the world enslaved to Satan and to the ruler of the kingdom of air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient and we were also enslaved to ourselves and our own lusts (verse3).

All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”

How did it come to be that we might be spiritually alive? How was it that we were set free from our bondage?

Verse 4, “But God [we found] who is rich in mercy.” A Christian is someone who can say two things about themselves without reservation. I was dead, spiritually dead, completely out of touch with God. And apart from God, I am still spiritually dead. I was enslaved to myself, to the world and to the enemy. The first thing Christians says about themselves as they look in the mirror is, “I was dead. I was enslaved.”

The second thing a Christian says, [verse4] “But God made me spiritually alive. God changed me. I know that I am alive to God. I am aware of being spoken to by God through the Bible. When I read the Bible, I am aware of the voice of God underlining things for me. I am aware of his voice through the Holy Spirit. He has turned on my spiritual receiver. I was enslaved, but I am being set free. I see that about myself. A Christian can say that.

Now why did God make you alive? Why did he set you free from slavery? Why did God save you?

You might say, “Well, God reached out to me and saved me because he loves me, because he cares about me, because he had pity on me, because he is a merciful God.” All of those things would be true. But you would be missing one of the really important reasons why God decided to save you, if, indeed, you have decided to become a Christian. That’s verse 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.”

God saved us literally to put the incomparable riches of his grace on display. You are moving from spiritual death to spiritual life, from slavery to freedom, your salvation displays grace. Not only grace, but look at this in verse 7, “The riches of his grace.” Not just the riches of his grace, but the incomparable riches of his grace. Our salvation is chiefly about God displaying who he is, what his character is like, and especially how extensive and immeasurable his grace is.

Have you ever seen a really incredible display? I love to go back home to NYC where I grew up, especially at Christmas time, because they have these marvelous store window displays in all of the major department stores along 5th Avenue. The department stores and toy stores put up these huge window displays and they literally have to rope the streets off so that people will walk in a single file, double up on themselves for blocks, in order to see the window displays in stores like Saks 5th Avenue. Inside the displays they will have all these little moving dolls doing different things. Elves working in Santa’s toy shop.

You will see these things moving along the assembly line. These little pieces being assembled and toys coming out the bottom end of this elaborate machine. Sleighs flying through the air. It is like Disneyland without the stupid song, "It's a Small World" playing in the background.

What we read here is not only a display, but a display of riches. Several years ago I was teaching in England and I got to visit the Tower of London, where the Crown Jewels are on display. You are talking about all the various crowns and jewels that would be used in a coronation ceremony of the crowning of a new Queen or King. There is one particular piece called "The Sovereign Scepter" with a cross on top, which signifies the King's power in this world. Along with 393 gems in it, it has at the top the Cullinan, the first diamond. This diamond weighs in at just over 530 carats. The Cullinan, the first diamond, is the largest top quality cut diamond in the world – much larger than the Hope Diamond. You walk down and see case after case of jewels – a extraordinary display of riches.

Paul says that salvation is not just a display of riches, it is a display of the riches of grace.

Every year my wife Marlene invites the pastoral staff and their spouses over for a Christmas dinner at our house, along with the church council. We have about 35 people over for a Christmas dinner. Marlene literally cooks for about four days. If dinner is going to be Tuesday night, Marlene will start cooking on Friday or Saturday. She might make two large roast beefs and a big turkey, 4-5 different vegetable dishes, dozens of homemade rolls and biscuits, a couple of enormous sheet cakes and pies, 3-4 different kinds of cookies, a huge salad. She will cook from morning until night for four days. When you see all of this food laid out on the table, it is a display. It is not just a display of riches, it is a display of grace. Marlene does this because she loves the staff here at the church and she loves the Lord.

Nothing displays the incomparable riches of God's grace more than what God did in saving us. You know, creation displays God's power. Look at the Grand Canyon or the Pacific Ocean or Niagara Falls and you come away feeling that God is so great, so powerful. But nothing puts on display God's grace more than his activity in saving us. We who deserve nothing more than condemnation, we who deserve nothing but wrath. Paul says in verse 3, "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." We, through our salvation, become displays of the riches of God's grace.

How can we measure God's grace? These incomparable riches? Something that goes beyond the Crown Jewels or anything that one human being could do for another? How can we measure this incomparable grace?

Well, certainly we become aware of the riches of God's grace through our own experience of God's intervention in our lives at a time of our great need or a time

of our great failure. When we experience God's intervention we say, "Ah, there I am beginning to get some glimpses at the riches."

You try for years to become pregnant. You go through all the fertility clinic stuff and your body gets messed up by taking shots and all these scheduled hormone treatments. You have tried just about everything – thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars worth of fertility treatments for three years and you don't get pregnant. And so you decide to stop. You and your husband say, okay, enough. Enough is enough." And as a woman, you resolve before God that if for some reason God doesn't want you to have children, you are still going to live life for God. And if God is handing you this cup of disappointment, that you are going to drink from it, that you don't understand why God is testing your friendship at a point so personally important to you. But you resolve before God that you are going to drink from this cup of disappointment because you just want his will. You settle the matter before God and then two months later miracle of miracles you discover you are pregnant after you have settled the matter. It's just grace. Sheer grace. You did everything a person could do to get pregnant and nothing. And then God gave you this gift.

Or maybe you made a series of terrible choices. You violated trust in your marriage. You had an affair. Everything in your life tumbles down. You can't believe where you've ended up. You never thought that you would walk away from your marriage, but you have. You have totally screwed up. You have shredded your reputation. But God intervened on your behalf when you were flat on your face. God who is rich in mercy brought you to a place of radical honesty about your sin. God makes you honest about who you are and has you deal with yourself in a way that you really had never dealt with yourself before. And your spouse forgives you. Your marriage is restored. In fact, it is better than it ever was.

Friend, have you ever just gotten down on your knees and said to God, "The only way that I have made it this far is because of your grace. I just dodged a bullet. I was rescued from my own stupidity." Have you ever said that looking in the mirror. It's grace, it's all just grace.

But you know, to get some measure of the incomparable riches of God's grace you just don't look at your own experience or how it is that God broke in at one moment or the other in your life and rescued you. The apostle Paul says that you need to look at Christ. Look at this phrase in verse 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." That little phrase at the end, "expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" is easily overlooked. We love to delight in the notion of God's incomparable grace. But this incomparable grace finds a focal point in Christ Jesus. We love to allow our minds to wander and to speculate about how abundant, how limitless, how unfathomable is God's goodness. But

the Bible doesn't speak about the grace of God in the abstract. It talks about God's grace as it is displayed in Christ Jesus.

This is really important. I want you to get this. See, there are all kinds of people who love to talk about God's grace and God's love in the abstract. They are the kind of person who might say, "I don't think God would ever do that. God would never do this. I don't believe that a God of love would ever cause any person to suffer. To me, a God of love must be inclusive of everyone regardless of their particular religious views or what their lifestyles are. I know that because God is a God of grace and a God of love, therefore, he must save everyone who is sincere. It is just enough that a person is sincere. It doesn't matter what they believe. I like to think that God in his grace will save every sincere person."

The Bible never speaks like that ever. It never says, "Think of your concept of love or grace and then project that up onto God and that's what we mean by the grace of God. Think of your postmodern concept of inclusiveness and project that onto God. That's what we mean by the grace of God." The Bible is far more concrete. It is not interested in your idea of grace or what you think God is or isn't allowed to do. The Bible speaks about God's love and grace as being chiefly manifested in Christ Jesus. That he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

If you want to understand God's grace, forget about your ideas of what grace has to be like. I would tell you that you have to go even beyond your experience, your present experience of grace, and look at Jesus. Jesus is the expression. Jesus is the focus. Jesus is the display case of the grace of God.

Consider Jesus. Here is the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, who chooses to give up the prerogatives of deity. In coming to earth, Christ didn't give up his godhood, his deity, but he gave up the prerogatives of deity. He gave up the worship that was due him. He gave up the honor of being invisible God. He gave up the obvious glory and the display of glory. There we find grace: the Son of God leaving his Father's house and being born. But not born in a palace, not born to a king, born in a stable there on Christmas morning. There we find the grace of God wrapped up in strips of cloth, this miracle of grace, witnessed only by his mother Mary and his adoptive father, Joseph and some cattle.

Not only is Christmas the story of grace, but as you look further at the life of Jesus, we see grace, grace, grace all through his life. God comes to his own people, but his own people don't receive him. Like a soldier returning home after years of fighting for freedom, fighting for his country, fighting for his family – the soldier writes letter after letter to his family saying, "I am coming home. Meet me at the dock. I am coming home." The ship pulls in and the soldier looks out and he doesn't see anyone there to receive him. He makes his way to his home and his own family rejects him.

This is what it was like to be Christ. Hundreds of years of letters to his family, to his people, in a book called the Old Testament. God says, "Be prepared. Look for me. I am coming home. I am coming home." And then when the ship pulls in – nothing. He came to his own people and his own people didn't receive him. Incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his life of poverty, in a life of rejection.

And then look at Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying for us, praying about his suffering. Struggling with the Father's will and finally resolving to drink from the cup that the Father was handing him. Sweat forming on his forehead like drops of blood. And most especially at the cross – there is Christ hanging from the cross, nails pounded into his hands, nails driven into his feet. Listen to the only Son of God cry out, "I thirst." And in particular, listen to him in anguish cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" as he bears the sins of the world and as he bears the judgment of God.

You want to get some sense of the incomparable riches of God's grace? Certainly do not start with your ideas of grace – what you think of when you think of God's love. Don't even stop with your experience and say, "Based on my current experience, I am going to estimate the grace of God." Listen, it is very easy in a time of trial to wonder about how gracious God really is when you are in a chronically bad marriage, when you are in pain over your child, when your prayer for healing or a prayer that you have been praying over and over again about your work situation or your finances or for the salvation doesn't seem to be answered – it is very easy in a situation like that to under estimate the incomparable riches of God's grace, to wonder if God is still gracious.

When you are trying to get some handle on the grace of God, don't start with yourself. Don't even start with your experience. Start with Jesus Christ. Look at Christ. Look at the birth of Christ. Look at the life of Christ. Look at Christ in the Garden. Look at him there on the cross.

Now how does this all work out into our lives? How did we come to be what we are – spiritually alive? How is a person made into a Christian so that they move from the desert floor to the mountaintop?

A lot of people, if you talk with them about their faith, and you say, "Tell me about your Christian faith, how did you come to be what you are right now? I see that you are active in your church. I see that you are someone who reads the Bible a lot at work. You talk about your faith. You seem to give a lot of time to your church. I have watched you and you seem to be very honest. You forgive people. When I asked you if you actually gave 10% of your income to the church, you said that you did. How did you become a Christian?"

A lot of times when you hear someone talk about how they became a Christian, they say, "Well, I made a decision for Christ in 1986. I heard a message and I made a decision."

"I realized after my divorce that there was something missing in my life and so I went to church and I heard a message."

What you hear from folks very often is I-I-I-I. The apostle Paul would agree that yes, you must make a decision. But you are a bit player in the story of how you became a Christian. Verses 8-9 are two of the most important verses in the Bible. Thousands of people have come to Christ by understanding the truth contained in verses 8-9 of Eph. 2. I would encourage you to memorize Eph. 2:8-10, "For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God." For it is by grace that you've been saved. Paul repeats a phrase that he used back up in verse 5, "It is by grace you have been saved" in verse 5. A good teacher repeats himself. We don't get it the first time. And when it comes to grace, you don't even get it the second or third time. You have to hear the message of grace a thousand times, ten thousand times. For it is by grace you have been saved.

Your testimony is not, "I decided on this date and I did this and I did that." How is it that I became a Christian you ask? I became a Christian by the grace of God. Grace is God's gift of favor and salvation that he gives to undeserving sinners. The Greek word is Charis. It is where we get the word charismatic and charisma. When we say someone is charismatic, we mean that they are gifted – they are gifted as a speaker; they exude charm; they are spiritually gifted – grace is God's gift, God's favor, given to undeserving sinners.

Do you know that when the Bible speaks of grace, very simply it means that God doesn't give you what you deserve? You and I deserve condemnation. We deserve to be shunned by God. We deserve God's anger. We deserve hell. We were by nature, verse 3, objects of wrath. But unlike everyone else, God shows grace. Everyone else says, "You made your bed now lie in it." "You screwed up, now pay up." But God is gracious. Not only doesn't He give us what we deserve, but He gives us what we don't deserve.

Grace is not just negative. You are not going to go hell. There's no wrath. There's no rejection. There is no accusation. Grace is positive. God positively gives you what you don't deserve. He gives you acceptance and a clean conscience. And all the blessings that we found in Ephesians 1:3-14 – He brings you into his family. He calls you precious son, precious daughter. He gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit. And to demonstrate the dynamic of grace, that its grace that makes you a Christian, the apostle Paul says, "By grace you have been saved." I want you to see this.

It is by grace, you have been saved. I generally don't make too big a deal about the tense of verbs or the particulars of grammar. Sometimes I think that Bible teachers approach the Bible as if it were some kind of technical manual in which every single nuance of every single verb was technically chosen for one particular meaning and not another. I think the language of the Bible is a lot more flexible than that. But here, I believe the verb tense and the grammar is really important because it underlines the sheer graciousness of grace. How extensive grace is. How it is solely grace that causes you to be able to call yourself a Christian.

You have been saved is a perfect passive participle. The verb is in the passive voice. It means that salvation, being saved, is something that is done to a person. Being saved is not something a person does to themselves. Your decision didn't save you. Your going forward didn't save you. Salvation is something that an individual is essentially passive in. We don't make ourselves spiritually alive, God made you spiritually alive, if in fact you are alive spiritually. You didn't free yourself from spiritual slavery, God freed you. We were passive.

And not only is "have been saved" in the passive voice, but it is a perfect participle, which means that we are talking about an activity that was done in the past, but has continuing effects in the present. It is the same verb tense that we read about in the gospel of John when Jesus cries out from the cross, "It is finished." There's Christ hanging on the cross and he cries out, "It is finished." The Greek word is *tetelestai*. It is finished. Perfect participle. It means the work of salvation was and is and forever will be finished by my death on the cross.

Paul doesn't say, in other words, by grace you were saved at one point in the past. Mark it on your calendar. For me, it would be the end of March 1974 – a red letter day because I was born again at the end of March 1974. But when Paul uses a perfect participle, he is saying that at one time in the past you were saved by grace and you continue right now to the present moment to be saved by grace. And you will be saved in the end when you stand before God by grace. It is like footprints in the sand. A man might walk in the sand on one day. And on the next day you look and you see the continuing impression.

How is it that you are saved? By grace, I was saved in 1974. But I don't keep myself saved now. Right now I continue, this very moment to be saved by grace. And on the day when I stand before Almighty God in judgment, what will save me is grace.

Do you get it? By grace you have been saved and are saved and will forever be saved through faith. And even this faith is not of you. The whole kit-n-caboodle, the faith that you have, the decision you made, the raising of your hand, the opening of your heart, all of it's not of you. All of it is from God. Not by works, the apostle Paul says. It is hard for us to get this idea of living moment by the

grace of God into our minds. And so the apostle Paul heaps clause upon clause telling us, "It's the gift of God, not by works, not of you."

In the US we love stories of self-made men and women. Here's what I accomplished. Here is what my hard work has done. Here is the empire, the business empire that I have built with my own hands and sweat. Here's the house I built and decorated. Here's the degree I earned. We are hopelessly works addicted sinners. Every one of us in our pride and sinfulness deeply believes the Smith's Barney ad. Do you remember that old ad, "At Smith's Barney, we make money the old fashioned way, we earned it." That's the way we think about our relationship with God. We do it the old fashioned way. We earned it.

This notion that your relationship with God is purely the result of grace is particularly difficult for a successful person to understand. Successful people get so trained to rely on their own activity and their own accomplishments and their own hard work. In fact, many successful people will fight you and be quite upset as you communicate to them the gospel of grace. I will not allow myself to be spoken of the way you speak. I have done a lot of good. I am not a miserable sinner. I was not spiritually dead, enslaved, in bondage. In fact, I think it is much more difficult for the successful person to grasp grace than it is for the person who has failed and knows it. That's why Jesus says, "It is very difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom." The problem is they fight against the gospel of grace.

I read a story once about a judge in NYC who visited a city mission that was in the Bowery section of lower Manhattan. The Bowery district of lower Manhattan has historically been a place where drunks will sleep in the street. You have to literally step over people who are drunk and homeless and wreaking of alcohol. The story is told of a judge who visited a mission that reached out to the men and women of the Bowery. After the message, this judge was moved and he came forward and knelt down at the altar. Kneeling down next to him was a man the judge had sentenced to prison many years before for public intoxication. They recognized each other and shook hands. The judge got up from the altar and was walking down the aisle when he met the pastor of the mission. The judge exclaimed, "What a miracle of grace." The pastor said, "Yes. Just three years ago that man was sleeping in the street, but he has been completely sober now for several years. He has a job and a nice apartment. He is responsible. He comes out several times a week for prayer meetings."

The judge looked at the pastor and he said, "I wasn't talking about him. I was talking about me. I am a miracle of grace. I was born in a wealthy church-going home. I went to the finest boarding schools where I was taught from first grade on that I was a gentleman and that I was required to act accordingly. I learned that my word was my bond. I graduated at the top of my class in law school. I have been a judge for 20 years now. I live in a beautiful town house. Only the

grace of God could ever have revealed to me how broken I really am. How much I have offended God. How deserving I have been of God's judgment and wrath. How the only thing I deserve is hell."

It is hard for a successful person to kneel down and say, "I can only come to you, Father, by grace." It is hard for a former failure, who has been changed by God, to realize today that the only way I am coming to God cleaned up is by grace. Do you get it? Do you understand that you don't need a helping hand from God or a leg up? That you need a Savior now. When you look in the mirror, friend, and you say about yourself, "I am a miracle of grace, with all my flaws and all my faults, I am a miracle of grace."

The philosopher Pascal once said that men don't grasp that its grace alone that makes you a Christian, because they don't know what it means to be a man and they don't know what it means to be Christian. That a spiritually dead person could become alive. That an enslaved person could become free. That an object of wrath could become an object of mercy – its grace.

Not only is it grace, not works, but it is grace that eliminates boasting. Very simply, in verse 9 the apostle Paul says, "Not by works so that no one can boast." I often joke in our newcomers' class that if you could earn your way to salvation, then heaven would be populated by the most braggadocios, awful group of people. Heaven would not be heaven. Heaven would be hell.

"Why are you here?"

"Well, I donated a lot of money to a local hospital and they put on a wing of the hospital in my honor."

"Oh, I preached to thousands of people and I tithed for 40 years. I was an usher at my church."

In heaven we are not going to be boasting about what we did. We are going to be boasting about what Christ did. His coming to earth. His birth. His life. His prayer in the Garden. His death. His resurrection. We are going to be spending eternity talking with each other about Christ and the incomparable riches of grace found in Christ.

Where does God want to focus all of this? Why has he saved us by grace? Verse 10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The saved person is God's masterpiece. We come full circle back to this issue of the display of grace again. Christian, you are the work of God. The Greek word here is "poiema" where we get the word poem from. You believer, are the poem

of God. Or as FF Bruce, the commentator, puts it, “you are the masterpiece, the work of art by God.”

I like this word “workmanship.” You see a beautiful handmade piece of furniture, a desk, a dresser, a chair and you say, “Look at the workmanship here.” The apostle Paul is saying, “Christian, that’s what you are. You are a display of God’s workmanship, of God’s craftsmanship. You are like a finely crafted piece of furniture, only you aren’t finished yet. He’s not done working on you.” Do you realize that? That gives us the interpretative grid for life.

Why are you going through the circumstances that you are currently going through? You have tremendous pain in your life. You are going through a season of great testing. Why this trial? Why this illness? Why this struggle? Why do you have to wait so long to have that particular prayer answered that you want so desperately to have answered – why?

Because the master craftsman has got you in a vice and he is working on you. He turns on his lathe and he puts a sharp blade in the lathe. Pain is one of God’s sharpest blades. He knocks out and carves out the rough edges of your life. Waiting for God’s answer is the other major blade he uses. God uses two major blades in his lathe – pain and waiting. Pain and waiting. To show forth his workmanship.

And then he has a job for you to do. We read, “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 not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. You aren’t saved by your activity, but you are saved for your activity. We are passive in being saved, and we are active not in earning grace, but in expressing grace. And all of it, from beginning to end, is to make you, Christian, a display window that people could look at and say, “There, there, I see a miracle of the grace of God.” Let’s pray.

Grace on Display

Rich Nathan

February 17-18, 2001

"I Believe in the Church" Series

Ephesians 2:7-10

- I. The Discovery of Grace**

- II. The Display of Grace (Ephesians 2:7)**
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 - B. In Christ Jesus

- III. The Dynamics of Grace (Ephesians 2:8, 9)**
 - A. Not Just in the Past

 - B. Not by Works

 - C. Not Allowing Boasting

- IV. The Direction of Grace (Ephesians 2:10)**