

INTRODUCTION

Today I want to talk to you about “Trophies of Grace.” Whenever I visit in someone’s home, I’m always looking for a point of conversation so I can talk to them about some of their interests. You can learn a lot about a person by looking around to see if they have any trophies in their home. If there is a deer head mounted on the wall, I know the man is a hunter. If there is a bass on the wall, I know he likes to fish. If there is a trophy on the mantle with a golfer on it, I know he likes to play golf. If there’s a bowling trophy, I know he likes to bowl. You can learn a lot about a person by their trophies. You can learn a lot about the grace of God when you understand you and I are trophies of God’s grace. If you don’t understand what that means yet, you will by the time we finish this message.

Ephesians 2:1-7. “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 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. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 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.”

I. OUR PAST: GUILT

This morning and next Sunday, I want to talk to you about the wonderful grace of God. In this passage of scripture, Paul tells us something about our past, our present, and our future. First, notice our past. It is a picture of guilt. This is only your past if you are a believer. I know some of you are believers, but there are some of you who are not believers. You have never been born again. If you are a Christian, this is your past. If you have not yet accepted Jesus Christ, it’s not talking about your past, it’s talking about you right now. He describes your condition.

1. We were dead

He uses past tense in verse 1. “As for you, you were dead,” that’s the first word describing our past position. We were dead. This is not talking about physical death. “You were dead in your transgressions and sins.” In the Bible there are two Greek words used for death. One is the word, *nekros*, which means “physical death” but, that’s not the word here. The other is the Greek word *thanatos*, which means “spiritual death,” and that’s what this is talking about. *Nekros* means the separation of the spirit from the body—physical death but, *thanatos* is talking about the separation of a person from God. We are all born dead, if you will. We are all born separated from God. All of you who are now Christians were at one time spiritually dead, but now you are alive. Jesus said in John 3:36 he said, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

I remember when I was a teen; I saw one of the craziest, weirdest movies I think that has ever

been produced. It was called, "Night of the Living Dead." We are living in the day of the "living dead." There are a lot of dead people walking around, driving on the loop with you in the morning. You say, "Well, it looks like some of them are acting like it." I am not talking about physically dead; I am talking about those who are spiritually dead. If you have Jesus, you have life. If you do not have Jesus, you do not have life. Life does not begin at forty. Life begins with Jesus. These people may look alive; in fact, some of them make themselves look pretty good, but if they don't have Jesus, they don't have life. It's like when you go out during the Christmas season and cut down a Christmas tree. You bring it into your home and you decorate it and make it look better than it ever looked out there in the pasture, but the moment you cut it off from its roots, it was dead even though it may look alive and it's got all the lights and tinsel on it; it is dead. There are men and women, teenagers, and boys and girls who look wonderful, but because they are cut off from the source of life, the Lord Jesus Christ, they are dead. You and I were dead at one time.

2. We were devilish

There is another word that describes our past. Number two, we were devilish. In other words, we lived serving the devil. Look at verse 2. "You used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit," that means the devil "who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Jesus said, "There are only two families." He pointed his finger at the Pharisees who were not true, righteous believers even though they were very religious and said, "You are of your father, the devil." There's God's family and there's the devil's family. Whether you like or not, we are all born into the wrong family. We are born into the devil's family and we are a slave to the Satan as long as we are a slave to sin. When you become a Christian, you transfer families. Last week we talked about being born spiritually into the family of God, and then God adopts you and gives you the legal standing of a true heir. Until that happens you are still in the wrong family.

There are some of you right now who are not believers. When I say you are following the devil, you may think that's ridiculous and that there is no devil. Whether you believe in the devil or not, the Bible says if you are not a Christian, you are a slave to Satan. You say, "I'm not a slave! I'm free. In fact, I'm more free than you folks down there at that church are. Why, I'm free to do anything I want to on Sunday and you folks have to dress up and go to church. I'm free. Don't call me a slave!" Let me describe a person who is not a Christian: They are free, but they are only free to do what they want, they are not free to do what they ought. The problem is they want the wrong thing. You take an alcoholic—and as sad as it is—if you put a bottle in front of him, and you put a Bible in front of him and you say, "Choose which one you want." You know what he will choose every time. He's free to choose what he wants. He's not free to choose what he ought. There are a lot of people out there who think they are really free and they don't even believe in the devil. What they don't realize is they are a slave to the devil, because the Bible says he who continues in sin is a slave to sin.

That's like the old story I heard about from the Wild West. It's about the old mining prospector who came down out of the mountains into the old western town. He had his old ugly, dirty, smelly pack mule loaded down. He walked up and hitched his mule to the hitching post. There were some cowboys inside the saloon and one of them said, "C'mon outside. We're going to

have some fun with this ole boy.” He walked out there and he said to that prospector “Old man, have you ever danced in the street?” The old man said, “Nope.” The cowboy said, “Well, you’re going to dance now.” POW! POW! He started shooting at the old prospector’s feet, who started dancing a jig. Everybody was laughing and having a good time. The cowboy ran out of bullets and before he could reload, the old prospector reached into the packs on his mule and pulled out a double-barreled shotgun. By the time the cowboy had his guns reloaded and looked up, he was looking down the double barrels of a shotgun. The old prospector said, “Cowboy, have you ever kissed a mule?” The old cowboy said, “No, but I’ve always wanted to.” He wasn’t free to do the right thing, he was free to do what he wanted—but you might say he was under strong compulsion. I said that in order to say this: A lost person is free, sure, but they are free to do what their nature tells them to do to do what they want, and they want the wrong thing. When you become a Christian, God sets you free to want the right thing.

3. You were depraved

You used to be dead. You used to be devilish. There’s a third word that’s in this passage of scripture that describes our past: Depraved. There is a doctrine we believe called the Doctrine of Human Depravity, meaning we are all sinners by nature and by choice. Look at verse 3. This describes the depravity all of us are born into. “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” In other words, you and I are born with a tendency to sin and we are born with a desire to sin. We are born wrong. We are depraved!

Sometimes you hear people say, “Man is basically good. Give him the right kind of environment, the right kind of education, make sure he is not hungry and the goodness of man will come out of him.” secular humanists teach that, and the New Age Religion teaches that, but the Bible teaches just the opposite. The Bible teaches, “We are all by nature sinners.” The Bible says we are born with a “sin nature” and unless that nature is changed, we die with that “sin nature.”

A few years ago there was a television commercial that illustrated this. (I didn’t like it very much) It was sponsored by the Ad Council. It said “Don’t leave your keys in your car.” Then it said, “Don’t help a good boy go wrong.” That commercial was saying all these teens on the street are basically good and how dare you push them into sin and crime by leaving your keys in your car! The reason that guy is going to try to steal the car in the first place is because he’s not good. He was born with a sinful nature. Why do we even have keys in the first place? Why do all of you have keys in your purse or in your pocket right now? Because we have locks. Why do you have locks? Because of the depravity of mankind, the sinful nature with which we are all born.

I could take a rattlesnake as soon as it’s born and put it in a nice little terrarium, making sure the lighting is just right. I could play beautiful soothing music by Brahms, feed it choice food and make sure he had everything he ever wanted but when that rattlesnake grows up, what do you think is going to happen the first time I reach my hand in there to grab it? He will bite the life out of me, because it is the nature of a rattlesnake to bite. Some people think if you give someone the right kind of environment, their inherent goodness is going to come out. No. You can never accept Christ until you first admit you are a sinner by nature and by choice I’ll never be good enough to earn salvation, I must depend upon the grace of God to be saved. We are all sinners.

The Bible says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child," meaning you don't have to teach a child to steal or to lie. You do not have to teach a child to hit their friends; you teach him *not* to do that. I know that some of you are saying, "Well, now preacher, I know that's true of most people, but it's surely not true of my precious little grandchildren. (That beautiful little darling, that precious little angel. Don't you *dare* call him a sinner by nature or by choice.) What they are is just some beautiful little flower that just needs to be free to blossom and bloom." A lot of you know from personal experience that unless something is done about that "sin nature" and unless that precious little flower is trained to go in the right direction, that precious little flower will grow up to blacken your eye and disgrace you. We are all dead in our sins and trespasses. We are all devilish. We are slaves to the devil and we were all depraved. That's the bad news. That's the past. That's the picture of guilt. Thank God we can leave that now and move to the second thing.

II. OUR PRESENT: GRACE

For Christians, what is our present condition? It is a picture of grace. This is the contrast.

Ephesians 2:4-6. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

1. We are spiritually revived

What's the picture of your condition right now? Number one, you are spiritually revived. I could use the word resurrected, but I don't want to confuse you, because for Christians there will be a future resurrection of our bodies. This means you who were spiritually dead, God has given you life and said, "You are alive!" The only way you can have eternal life is for Jesus to come and give you that life. You can't earn it; you can't discover it. The only thing a dead person needs is life. You can go over to a physically dead person and say, "I want to give you an example of what it is to be alive. Watch me." That won't help that dead person. You can load him down with books and that won't help him. You can try to encourage him and say, "Come on now. Get up out of that coffin." He doesn't need example. He doesn't need education. He doesn't need encouragement. He needs life! There are entire groups of Christians who teach that you can be saved by living the right kind of example by educating yourself or by just encouragement. The only thing that will cause you to be a Christian is the life Jesus gives to you.

Some people are so afraid of physical death itself, they do everything they can to postpone it, to not think about it. Some people are even trying to escape physical death by paying hundreds of thousands of dollars so that when they die, they will be frozen. Cryonics is a science (I guess you can call it a science) that supposes when a person dies, you can put them in a deep freeze and you keep them there for centuries or decades or whatever it takes and when science and technology has advanced to a stage where there is no more physical death, you get them out of that deep freeze, thaw them out and give them the cure and they escape death. If that happened to me, I am sure somebody would take the plug out. I'm glad to be a part of God's chosen instead

of the devil's frozen. By the way, Michael Jackson, has paid hundreds of thousands of dollars and said that when he dies he is going to be put on ice.

The Bible says, "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment." You cannot escape physical death, but the Bible says, "Much more important than overcoming physical death is overcoming spiritual death." When Jesus comes into your life, he gives you life. He revives you. For some people that may be an easy step. When a child grows up in church, and hears the gospel, they know Jesus loves them. When they get old enough to understand the difference between right and wrong, the age of accountability, and a parent or a Sunday School teacher or their pastor shares with them how they can accept Christ, they are gloriously saved! What happens? They were spiritually dead and they get life.

Sometimes we look at a 50- or 60-year-old man who has never darkened the doors of a church in his life and is an awful scoundrel. We look at him and we say now it's easy for the child to have life, but it's so hard for this older man to receive life No, it's not. It takes exactly the same amount of grace to save a child as it does a 60-year-old scoundrel and it is just as much of a miracle when a child accepts Christ as when an old man accepts Christ.

This is illustrated in the life of Jesus. There were three people Jesus physically raised from the dead and revived. One of them was Jairus' 12-year-old daughter. She had only been dead a couple of hours. In fact, the warmth and the blossom of life was probably still in her cheeks when Jesus got there and said, "Little daughter, get up." And she got up alive. Then there was the widow of Nain's son. He had been dead almost a day, because it was his funeral. Jesus comes to that funeral, disrupts it, and gives him life. The third person Jesus raised from the dead was Lazarus, who had been dead four days. Do you remember when Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha said, "Oh, no, Lord, don't remove the stone. He has been dead four days and he stinks. Corruption has already set in. You can't raise him from the dead." but, Jesus said, "You just watch!" and Lazarus came forth. Which of these was the greater miracle? 2 hours dead, 24 hours dead or 4 days dead? You'd say, "All of them are miracles." It's just as much of a miracle when a nine-year-old accepts Christ as when a 60-year-old man finds life in Jesus.

2. We are raised

Number two, we have been raised. Chapter 2:6 says, "And God raised us up with Christ." A dead person needs more than life they need liberty. Let's go back to Lazarus for a moment and use an example of his reviving. Lazarus came out of the tomb and he was wrapped up in these grave clothes like a mummy. He couldn't talk, he couldn't walk, he couldn't move. Jesus said, "I've given him life, now I need to give him liberty. Loose him and let him go." They took those grave clothes off and suddenly, he could move and was alive again. Some of you who have been the recipients of divine life—you've been born again, but you are still bound by the old grave clothes of your past vocabulary, the old grave clothes of your past habits, the old grave clothes of your past relationships. God wants to raise you up, give you liberty, free you up so you can be where Jesus wants you to be.

3. We are resting with Jesus

Here’s the third thing, some of you have not understood this yet. Look very carefully again at chapter 2:6. “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms.” Remember, this is not talking about Heaven; it is not talking about future. It is *past tense*. This is something God has *already* done to you. You are right at this moment seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. Look in chapter 1 again. There is an earthly realm, a physical realm, and a spiritual realm, “the heavenlies,” the Bible says. You are either plugged in to this physical world or you are plugged in to the invisible spiritual world. Jesus has all authority in that spiritual world. Last week we talked about how everything has been placed under his feet, and I told you nothing that is under his feet can be over your head. You are seated right next to him; and if everything is under his feet, and he has everything under control, that’s exactly where you are. Some of you haven’t figured that out yet. It’s still like that 3D picture I talked about last week. You are still trying to stare at it to figure it out. Do you know how I know you haven’t figured it out? I can tell by your faces. Some of you say, “Oh, how wonderful. Pass the Tylenol.” I guarantee, when you discover what this is all about, it will change your whole outlook on life, because when you understand you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, things look different down here on this earth.

I’ll give you an example from my life. When I was just finishing college, I started working on receiving my pilot’s down in Alabama. This was about twenty years ago. When you are getting your pilot’s license, you have to do a lot of practice take offs and landings called “touch and goes,” where you take off, go in a pattern, land, and take off again without stopping. It’s just a practice and it gets kind of monotonous. One time I was practicing “touch and goes” at this little airport in central Alabama. There was a highway that ran right beside the airport with a gentle slope and a curve to the right. There was about a two- or three-mile stretch when I would fly downwind and I could look down and see the highway. It was kind of boring, so I was looking down at the highway. On one of my downwind legs, there was a logging truck loaded down with logs chugging up that incline. You could tell he was in low gear. Behind that log truck was a compact car. I don’t know why, but I could just imagine there was a woman driving. I couldn’t see who it was, and maybe that’s the wrong thing to say, but he or she would pull out into the passing lane and then go back in, then pull out and there wasn’t a yellow line there, but because of the slope and the curve, the driver of the car couldn’t see if anything was coming or not. I was watching this car pull in and out, and in and out. From where I was sitting up above it all, I could look up the highway and I could see that for 4 or 5 miles there was not a vehicle coming. I thought, “If the driver of that car could look at everything from where I am sitting, they wouldn’t be afraid to pass. They wouldn’t be intimidated. If they could see what I see, they’d just pull out and pass because nothing’s coming.”

A lot of people are just like that little compact car in the earthlies—scared to death, so intimidated wondering, “Can I make it? Am I going to make it? Can I make it through this difficulty? Can I pass this crisis?” When you understand you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and you are looking at things from His perspective, you know you can overcome it. Why? Because God has put everything under his feet. If you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, you’ll look at things quite differently. It’s like I told you last week. “How are you doing?” Folks say, “Well, I’m doing okay under the circumstances” well, you are not supposed to be under them circumstances are kind of like that mattress you slept on last night. You get under the mattress, you’ll suffocate. You get under the circumstances, you’ll be in trouble.

You're supposed to be on top of circumstances and when you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, you look at things differently.

Where am I right now spiritually? I am seated next to Christ and the way he sees things is the way I ought to see things. Because everything is under his feet, I have victory too. Where are you right now? The Bible says you are seated with Christ, and because everything is under his feet, that ought to be your perspective. You say, "That's so easy for you to say, because you don't have any big problems." And I don't. You say, "But, if you knew the problems I have, if you knew the problems I'm facing, you wouldn't tell me to look at things like that." Let me remind you that when the apostle, Paul, wrote Ephesians 2:6, he was in a damp, dusty Roman prison waiting to have his head cut off. Is there anybody in this room whose circumstances are so bad that you're in prison waiting to be executed? Then, you cannot say, "Don't tell me that I am seated with Christ in Heaven."

I got so excited about that this week, I wrote to a preacher friend of mine and I always like to sign letters with a little Bible verse. I've never done this before, but I signed off on this letter, "Keep looking down. Ephesians 2:6." We always say, "Keep looking up" but when you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, "Keep looking down!" We are revived; we are raised; we are resting.

III. OUR FUTURE = GLORY

Number three, what about our future? It is a picture of glory. Look at verse 7. What does it say about the future? "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 word *show* literally means to display with pride. God will show us off as examples of his grace. That's why we are trophies of his grace, because he's going to show us off. That word "to display with pride" would be a word you would use if you took a classic automobile to an automobile show or if you took a steer to a 4H show to show it off with pride. The Bible says that's what God is going to do to you, and he's going to do to me, he's going to show us off with pride, and say, "Look. There is a prime example of my grace!"

What is grace? Grace starts with God and His love, and His mercy that he places in our hearts. That's what grace is. Salvation is not by the merit of man, it is by the mercy of God. Salvation is not by the goodness of man, it is by the grace of God. The only thing different between the worst sinner out there and the best sinner in here is the grace of God. God's going to show you off one day to each other to the angels to any other intelligent beings that may be in the universe. He's going to show us off and say, "Here's my trophy of grace."

CONCLUSION

I love the testimony of Iris Blue, who for over twenty years was a prostitute on the streets of Houston. All her life was abusive and she just wanted to be a lady, but nobody would treat her like one. She didn't look very feminine—she had been hurt and rejected her entire life. When she was 40, she looked 60. She was no longer even attractive enough to be a prostitute. She was running girls on the streets of Houston, but some men from a Baptist there went onto the streets

in that part of the city and began to tell people about the grace of God. She said, "No, I can't take that. I've been too bad! I've made too many mistakes. God cannot love me." They said, "Yes, God can love you." So, one night, Iris Blue knelt down on the sidewalks in downtown Houston, Texas and by her own testimony said, "I knelt down a tramp and I stood up a lady!"

One day God's going to look at Iris Blue and say, "Look at my grace. It was nothing she did. She didn't deserve it. This is what I did!" God's going to look at you if you are a child of God and he's going to say, "Look at this. It's nothing they did. It's all by my grace."

OUTLINE

I. OUR PAST: GUILT

We were

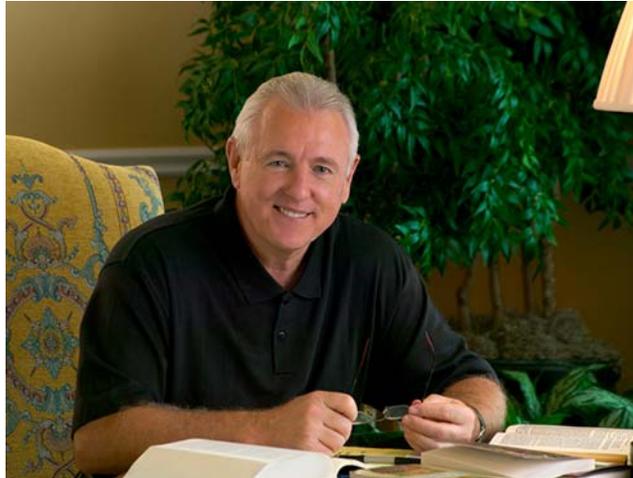
1. Dead
2. Devilish
3. Depraved

II. OUR PRESENT: GRACE

We are

1. Revived
2. Raised
3. Resting

III. OUR FUTURE: GLORY



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes