



The Need for Grace

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Ephesians 2:3-7

Clint Pressley

³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

(Pastor prays)

All of humanity exists in two groups: those who are alive and those who are dead. And since you are hearing what I'm saying, we will assume that you are alive. What is true physically, is also true spiritually—all of humanity exists in two groups, and in the text, there are those who are dead and those who have been made alive in Christ. What Paul is writing about in Ephesians, and especially in this passage, is in fact a sequence. Verses five and six reflect the historical act of the resurrection: "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace, you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." If you grew up in a mainline church, you would hear included in the Apostles' Creed the line that says, "On the third day He arose

again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” As Christians, we affirm the resurrection, the ascension, and the session of Christ. But Paul is not writing about Jesus here, he’s writing about us. He’s writing about what happens to us when God breaks into our lives. That’s what this is about. Too many of us here today have let everything around us define who we are, and many of you have had your lives distorted to such a degree that you have a worldview that keeps God out of the picture. This passage invites us to stop looking at life on a horizontal level and lift our eyes up to God and see that...

Only God Can Define Who You Really Are

Let’s follow the progression of this text and see what he says about us.

We Are People with a Past

All of God’s children have something that they are ashamed of, something you wish had never happened, something you wish you hadn’t said or done or thought. All of us have these things. Look what Paul tells the Ephesians in verses one and two: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” There are a few things about who you used to be—you walked in sin, and you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked, it was the manner of life. When Paul writes to the church at Corinth, he is telling them who will and who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Listen to the list in I Corinthians 6:9-10: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” And then Paul says, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” In other words, every one of us here has something that, if it were left unchecked, would destroy us. We walked in sin in our past.

We followed the course of the world. We were in the shifting standards of right and wrong, and we shifted with the prince of the power of the air.

We were ruled by Satan. Before you came to Christ, you followed the course of the prince of the power of the air. And then in verse three, Paul includes himself. In our past, “we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.”

We are at the mercy of our passions. Paul says that it was a bad scene. Every person here has a past, some in public and some in private, but it is there. Look, you can’t solve the problem of mankind until you know the truth of mankind. The truth is we all have a past, and Paul says it in I Corinthians 6:11, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” When you come to the cross, what is in the past stays in the past. We are people with a past.

We Are People That Are Powerless

Let me show you what I mean in verses one through three. Paul paints a fairly bleak picture of who we are when left to ourselves. We are dead in trespasses and sins. We followed the course of the world. We followed Satan. We lived in the passions of the flesh. We carried out the desires of the body and mind. We were children of wrath. And then something happens in verse four. Paul has just shown us that without Christ, we were in the worst possible situation, and then in verse four: “But God.” Martin Lloyd Jones said that these two words—in and of themselves—contain the whole gospel. The gospel is about what God has done, not what we have done. It is God intervening. It is someone coming from outside of us, working in us and through us and for us. For example, in Genesis 50:20 Joseph told his brothers, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” And the Psalmist said in Psalm 73:26, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my

heart and my portion forever.” You see God breaking in with those two little words. We were dead, “but God” made us alive.

Too many times, however, instead of “but God,” we want to try “but I.” I was going down a wrong road “but I” cleaned up my act. I used to, “but I.” The only thing is, we are people that are powerless. You think you have power. Try to eat one golden Oreo or one Pringle, you don’t have the power to change. Remember what Paul says about us in verses one through three. Paul says we were dead in our trespasses and sins, we followed Satan, we lived by our flesh and we were children of wrath. Those were four ways that we were condemned. And in verses four through seven, Paul says that God breaks in with four words that save us. Let’s read it: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” There are four powerful words in the four verses.

Mercy. This is God not giving us what we deserve. He reaches beyond our sin.

Love. The is great love, *Agape*. It is the highest, most selfless love.

Grace. Is us getting what we don’t deserve. It’s a gift.

And kindness. Think of it like this: we were dead in sin, but God showed kindness. We were children of wrath, but God showed us mercy. We were following Satan, but God showed us love. We were lost in the passions of our flesh, but God showed us grace. And this love and mercy and grace and kindness are wrapped up in the power of the cross. We are a people with a past. We are people who are powerless. Only God can define who you really are.

We Are People with a Purpose

The question you have to ask is, why? Why does God do these things? Why does He take somebody like you or somebody like me with our tendency to sin in our selfish lives? See those two words in verse seven, Paul tells us right here—"so that." Here is the reason, the purpose, behind God saving us in Jesus Christ: "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." His purpose in verse seven is that we become living evidences of His kindness. You become the picture of what God does and how good He is! He takes your past and your sin and your life and your reputation and the fact that you are dead in sin, and He breaks in and awakens your mind and heart to it. You see sin for what it is and the goodness of God's forgiveness in Christ. You turn from your sin and turn to Christ and His work on the cross, and you become a living picture of how good God is. And in your life, He alone gets the glory. We are people with a past. We are people who are powerless. We are people with a purpose. Only God can define who you really are. We were dead in sin, but now you are alive in Christ.

(Pastor prays)