

**Exploring Grace: The Front Door**  
**Ephesians 2:1-9**  
**Sunday, June 7, 2026**

I remember growing up, my friends and I would ride our bikes down to Northcross Mall in Austin. Part of it was just hanging out. That's what we did back then. We'd walk around. We'd check out the people ice skating, we'd look into some of the stores. We would visit the video arcade, which was awesome. But the thing I remember most vividly from that time is the candy store. My friends and I would always save that till the very last. And when we got there, I would just take a few moments to stand outside, looking in at all the amazing colors and shapes, at the happy faces of the people who were already in there. I could smell the mouth-watering smells of popcorn and taffy. It was like I was standing just outside another, different, much better world than the one I was living in.

More recently, my family and I have taken several trips to Disney World. And as pitiful as it sounds, one of the things I remember most vividly from those trips is getting to the park bright and early and waiting at the gate before the park opened. Waiting there at the gate, it was as if we were still sitting in the "real" world; the world of jobs and bills and taking out the trash. But there, so tantalizingly close, just on the other side of the gate, was a completely different world. In many ways, a much better world where everything is perfect, where you eat as much as you want whenever you want, ride exciting rides, and never have to take out the trash.

Some of y'all can probably relate. In your case, it may not be a candy store or Disney World. Maybe it's Cabelas, or Nieman Marcus, or a toy store, or some exotic Caribbean island.

But I think we've all had that experience of standing right on the threshold of something new, something amazing, and wanting to go in.

This is the second week of our sermon series where we're exploring God's grace. And, as we discussed last week, one of the best images John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, used to describe how God's grace works is a house. The house represents our faith, our life lived in relationship with God. So, last week we talked about prevenient grace, the grace that comes before; God's activity in our lives that gets us up on that porch, preparing us to enter into the house; preparing us to enter into a relationship with God.

But, as we know, we weren't made to live on the porch. We were made to live in the house. We were made to go through that front door and into the house. And going through that front door is what we're going to talk about today.

Now, there are lots of different ways to talk about going thru that door, and one that we use in the church is the idea of "justification." When we walk thru the door—when we walk from lives lived for ourselves into lives lived in relationship with God—we say we are justified. Which, the first time I heard it, didn't make any sense. I thought of justification as that thing you do when you've been caught doing something wrong ... it's like making excuses, trying to justify your actions.

But that's not what justification means here. Here, it's more like justification in a word processing document. You know how you can click the button to make the text line up on the left side of a document, or on the right? That's it. Or if you've got kids, maybe, right before you say, "don't make me pull over," you'll say something like, "y'all better straighten up, you'd better

get in line.” You may have heard the term, “Get right with God.” That’s what we’re talking about. It’s getting lined up with God’s will. It’s getting justified.

But that still leaves us with the question, why would we want to do that? Why be justified? I mean, most of us think of ourselves as basically decent people. Why do we even need to go thru that door? We may feel like we’re doing fine out on the porch or maybe even camping out in the yard. Why be justified?

Well, if you’re asking that question, you haven’t been paying attention to the dumpster fire that is the world around us. We’ve talked before about Adam and Eve. God tells them they can eat anything in the garden other than the fruit of one tree. So, of course, they make a beeline for that tree and start eating. They don’t trust God, the one who created them and gave them the garden. Instead, they think they know better, they go their own way. And that’s a perfect illustration how all of us live. We think we know better. We think we can take care of ourselves better than God can.

And so, for instance, the people on the opposite sides of the political and cultural wars that are now raging in this country probably think of themselves as basically decent people—all the while hating or looking down on those who think differently than they do. The people on the opposite sides of the religious wars that are raging around the world probably think of themselves as basically decent people—all the while hating and killing those who believe differently than they do.

The fact is, we are all—every single human being ever born—broken at a basic, fundamental level. We all are, or at least have been, on the outside of that house looking in. We go our own way and we do our own thing.

Which wouldn't be so bad, except for the fact that that going our own way and doing our own thing isn't without cost. We were created, like Adam and Eve, to live in that garden with God; to live in joyful, loving union with the creator of our souls; to live in the house of God's grace. And regardless of how much fun it may seem at the time, when we don't do that, we suffer.

For some of us, that suffering is pretty obvious. There are people all around us, and maybe some with us here today, whose lives seem so miserable they may actually be considering suicide. Others have sought to treat the pain and anguish of alienation through alcohol, drugs, or other things, and now find themselves addicted. We're seeing an epidemic of depression and suicide, especially among our teens and young adults.

And even for those folks who seem like they're doing just fine, the suffering is just below the surface, expressing itself in stress, worry, compulsions, and fear. We were created to live out loud, to be filled with joy and hope. Yet far too many of us are content to simply survive from day to day, hoping to live as long as we can while avoiding as much discomfort and pain as possible in the process.

Which is crazy. I mean, right on the other side of that door is Disney World. Right on the other side of that door is the candy shop, or Cabelas, or Vegas, or whatever it is for you, only 10 million times better. It's there. But so many of us choose to hang out on the porch. It's just crazy.

And it's this sort of craziness that Paul was addressing in his letter to the Ephesians. In this letter, Paul is writing to a group of Gentiles ... non Jews. And so, Paul begins the passage I just read with a summary of the crazy, decadent, idol-ridden lives the Gentiles had lived before. And he doesn't pull any punches. He says that in following the ways of the world around them—in going their own way, looking after themselves, and not acknowledging the one, true God—they had been pledging themselves to the devil (Paul calls him the prince of the air). And because they had indulged themselves instead of trusting God, they had actually become “**dead** in their trespasses.” That's what he said: dead. This is serious folks. Paul's talking about spiritual **death**.

But, thankfully, that's not the end of the story. There is good news. And it's THE good news. We talked about it last week. In his letter to the Romans (8:38-39), Paul wrote: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in ALL creation, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” NOTHING can separate us from God's love. God wants us in that relationship. God desperately wants us in that house.

So, how do we get there? Well, that's what Paul explains next. In verse 8 we read that famous phrase, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.” Saved by grace through faith. Justification, getting right with God, going through the door and into the house—that's what God offers us, as a gift of God's grace.

God, the creator of the universe, is inviting us into his house, into a relationship with him. All we've got to do is decide we want to go in. We've got to decide that what's on the other

side of that door is better than what's out here. We've got to admit that we're broken, we're messed up, our world is messed up, and that God's got something better in store for us inside that house.

Of course, as we all know, this is harder than it sounds. It's not as easy as deciding to go into the candy store or Disney World. We can't actually see or hear or smell what's waiting for us on the other side. And the fact is, even if our lives on this side of the door aren't great, at least they're familiar. We know what to expect. Why would we exchange what we know for something new and different? It's a good question

And Paul gives us the answer in verses 4-6: "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 ...." On the other side of that door is life. On the other side of that door, we will be raised up with Christ. Jesus described it as new life, born again life, abundant life, eternal life, a totally different sort of life, made available to us by his death and resurrection. All we've got to do is trust him.

In other words, all we've got to do is have faith. More than just some intellectual belief in a set of doctrines, we need to trust that Jesus is right when he says his life, death, and resurrection have enabled us to enter a new sort of life.

And when we do that, the bonds of sin and death are broken. We've got a new king, and he's a good king. In fact, we receive our king's very Spirit into our hearts as a downpayment on the new life that awaits us. We walk through that door, into a new and wonderful world.

If you haven't walked through that door yet, this is an invitation. Jesus is waiting. All you've got to do is trust him.