

Trophy of Grace

Blueprint: God's Design for the Church

Ephesians 2:1-10

What a privilege to be here this morning. If you have your bibles, go ahead and open to Ephesians 2:1-10, and let's stand together as we continue our sermon series from the book of Ephesians. We're looking for core values as we walk through the book of Ephesians. These core values are things we have just woven in to the DNA of Hardin Baptist Church. We've seen the core value that Hardin believes we're saints, not sinners. We believe that salvation is God's work for God's glory. This morning, we're going to start seeing another core value of Hardin Baptist Church, and that's God's grace. The definition of grace is that grace is God's enabling power, but we will talk about that a little bit later. If I were to title the message from these 10 verses, I would call it Trophy of Grace. While I read these verses, see if you can figure out why I gave this Scripture that title for this message.

Scripture

"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— 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. 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. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Everybody say wow! Is this a passage of Scripture, or is this a passage of Scripture?

I don't know about you, but from time to time in our household, we have this conversation: Why are we putting this in the attic? Normally, stuff we put in the attic when we clean out the attic, we go to the dump with it. So I just question now as I get older why we are putting this in the attic. Celisa will tell me that this is valuable. I struggle with if it's really valuable when in ten years it is going to the dump. Anyway, back in the spring we were cleaning out the attic in the shop. For the first time, I came across something that even I thought was really valuable. There in the attic, we had put hundreds and hundreds of trophies years ago. As I began to clean out the attic and hold those trophies in my hands, some of them were about this tall, had a motorcycle on top, silver or gold, a lot of wood, and then there would be a little plate, and that plate would say whatever place and racetrack that race had been in. I noticed the older those trophies were there were a lot of fourths and fifths and thirds. But as I got closer to today, there were more firsts, and firsts, and firsts, and firsts. All of a sudden, I'm holding a trophy from a regional qualifier for the Nationals at Loretta Lynn's. I remember when my son went to Loretta's for the first time and he said as a goal that one day he wanted to race at the national level. Celisa and I looked at each other and said he will never make it. The United States is divided into seven regions, and you have to be in the top six in one of those regions to qualify for nationals, which only the top forty-two riders in the nation qualify, and now I'm holding a trophy in my hand that brings back a remembrance of when our son, Kory, went to the Midwest Regional Qualifier and won first, both in the 250 class and the 125 class. In one of those classes, I was holding a trophy where he won first place in all three moto's. I want to be honest with you, as I was holding that trophy, never one time did I brag on that trophy. Never one time did I go, "Wow, look at this little motorcycle! Look at this little plate! Look at this wood!" No, that trophy that I was holding in my hand was reminding me of the accomplishment of my son. That's what trophies are for. Trophies are never meant for us to look at the trophy and brag on the trophies; trophies

are reminders of the accomplishment to whom the trophy has been awarded. Does everyone get that? When I read Ephesians 2:1-10, I have this thought. I, Ricky Cunningham, am a trophy of God's grace. My life isn't supposed to be about me, but my life is supposed to bring glory to God. If there was a before picture and an after picture, you would see a big difference. The one who made the difference in my life is God. Do you feel that way about you?

Paul is writing to the Ephesian church, all of the church, not just the pastor, but the entire church, reminding them that they are trophies of God's grace. When you walk out of here this morning, I pray you realize you are a trophy of God's grace. What we're going to do this morning is look at this Scripture passage and see that it divides into three parts: verses 1-3, verses 4-6, and verse 7. In Paul's original letter, verse 1-7 is one long continuous sentence. In this sentence, Paul tells us what we were saved from, what we were saved by, and what we were saved for. Then in verses 8-10, which most of us can quote verse 8, he just recaps what he says in verses 1-7. So when you leave this morning, if I've done my job, you will see what you were saved from, what you were saved by, and what you were saved for. Can I ask you a question? Have any of you ever asked somebody to pray for you and because of who you asked and their relationship with the Lord, you had 100% confidence that God was going to answer their prayer because they were praying the prayer for you? Do you remember last week? Kory preached on the prayer of Paul for the Ephesian church. We know the Apostle Paul was praying for the Ephesian church, but we know he was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and God had a purpose, not just for this letter to be read by the Ephesian church, but He had a purpose for it to be read for us here at Hardin too. So we believe that the letter to the church at Ephesus is not just for the church at Ephesus, but it's for the church at Hardin too. Therefore, Paul is not only praying this prayer for the Ephesian church, in essence, through the Holy Spirit, he was praying this prayer for us too. I don't know about you, but I've got a lot of confidence in Paul as a prayer warrior. So I just happen to believe that while he's praying this prayer for the Ephesian church that there were many people's eyes open to the truth that he was praying for their eyes to be open too.

Here's what I believe too. This morning, if this hadn't happened to you, God's going to open your eyes as a believer to the truth. See, what truth did Paul want us to know? He wanted our eyes to be opened to this truth...what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us as believers. Remember how Kory said last week that you just couldn't really measure that. So what Paul did was describe it, and he's described it this way. It was the same power that God used to reach down and raise Jesus when He was physically dead in that tomb, God's power reached down, put life back into Jesus' body, raised Him up, didn't just raise Him up, but seated Him in the heavenlies at God's right hand side, and He is there at this very moment. Here's what he's praying, that your eyes be opened to this truth. The same power that God used to raise Jesus is at work in your life as a believer. That's why he starts out chapter 2, verse 1, "And you..." Jesus was dead, physically. The same power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead is at work in our life, so Paul reminds us, "And you were dead." How many of you believe in the Word of God? I've got this question. If the Bible says, and you were dead, why has the church in its history painted man as not dead, but just merely drowning? Do you know what I mean? If you're my age, you've heard, at some point, an evangelist come to the church, a pastor stand before a church, and they paint this picture of humanity in this big sea of sin. And all lost people are in the water, and they're paddling to keep their head above the water. And God's put the church as the lifeboat in the middle of the sea, and we've got this preserver, and we throw the preserver to a sinner who's about to drown. If he will just grab hold of the preserver, we will pull him safely into the boat, the church, and he will be saved! Come on be honest. How many of you have heard that before? Paul didn't say, and you were drowning. He didn't say, and you were about to go under for the last time; you're about to take your last gasp for air. He said, and you were dead. Whoa! So if we're going to have this illustration of a sea of sin, there are no sinners trying to keep their head above the water. There is no sinner waiting for us to throw him the gospel. They're all dead, just like we were! Here's the picture. They are facedown, no life, rotting corpse in the water. Truth be told, there aren't many still on the surface of the water; most have been spiritually dead so long they floated to the bottom of the sea. You can throw a life preserver to a dead man, and he can't respond. Wow.

Saved From Being a Sinner

Do you see what Paul is doing? He's reminding us who are believers who were used to be, and the before picture of us before Christ is we're dead, not drowning. Do you understand why in today's culture most churches no longer preach the truth of God's Word? We preach pop psychology. The world wants to believe that all man needs is a helping hand, just a little boost, just a little help, just point him in the right direction. Yet, we're the one people on the planet who know the truth about man outside of Christ. Man is dead, and we were dead in trespasses and sins. See, what Paul is trying to tell us is what we were being saved from. Here's what he's going to teach what we're being saved from. You are saved from being a sinner. Did you hear that? Why were you a sinner? Because you were dead, spiritually separated from God. So you were alive to trespasses and sins in your deadness. In other words, you were a spiritual zombie.

I don't like those horror movies, but sometimes you can't help flipping through the channels, and there's a zombie movie. You can always tell the zombies from the alive people. But the zombies look like they're alive, but they look dead at the same time. Before you and I met Christ, we were a spiritual zombie, dead, but didn't know it because we were dead in trespasses and sin.

This word, trespass, means 'to go astray, to step over the line.' It doesn't mean to go astray or step over the line because you made a mistake, but that you saw the line and stepped over it anyway. You took the wrong road because you intentionally took the wrong road. Don't look at me like that. You all used to do that. Don't tell me you haven't been on the side of the road where the sign says, One Way, and you're supposed to go that way, but where you're going is just right there and you don't want to go all the way around to be right there, so you look both ways and you go on the wrong way, intentionally go the wrong way. You know...the sign says, Follow the Sidewalk, but the door is right there and the sidewalk is here. You decide to go there, but then you see a sign that says, Stay Off the Grass, and you went on and stepped on the grass. You intentionally made the decision to disregard what the person didn't want you to do, and that was step on the grass because you thought you stepping on the grass

would not hurt the grass, so you stepped on the grass. That was you, dead in trespasses, lived a lifestyle where you disregarded the signs because you did not think it applied to you. Why? Because you were a sinner and you didn't have others on your mind; you had you on your mind and what was best for you, so you disregarded the signs of life. You were a zombie.

"And sins." Now, this word, sins, is a little softer sin. It's the picture of the ancient bow hunter who draws back his arrow. He has his target in mind and he aims his arrow, it flies toward the target, it's looking really good, but as it approaches the target, it falls short. So he backs up and he pulls the arrow back a little further back or he steps a little closer, and every time he releases the arrow, it travels toward the target, he means well, he means to hit the target, but his arrow always misses the target. That was you. That was me. yes, there were times when intentionally we did what we knew we shouldn't do, but there were times when we tried to do it right, but even when we tried to do it right, we couldn't get it right. "And you were (past tense) dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked." This is a phrase that the Greeks used to talk about a lifestyle. So when it talks about walking, it's not just about taking a stroll; it's talking about the life you live. So what Paul is trying to teach is we used to be dead in trespasses and sin and the life that we lived, we lived as sinners. We followed the course of this world. We followed the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that right now is still at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we once lived by the passions of our unredeemed flesh, carrying out the desires of our flesh and mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just like the rest of mankind. This is kind of strange. The gospel was presented to me that I wanted to be saved from going to Hell. Hell isn't in this passage. How could we have done what we've done? Do you know what we're being saved from in this passage? We're being saved from being a sinner, being saved from living a lifestyle of sin. We're being saved from living the life we used to live where we just do what the world does. It's funny, the world thinks we Christians are enslaved when in reality they're the ones that's enslaved because they're following the prince of the power of the air, Satan himself, the spirit that right now is still at work in all the sons of disobedience. You know, when we were dead and we realized that we had lust, desires, fleshly thoughts,

and fleshly passion; do you know what we did? We carried those out. Do you know why? Because we were children of wrath, just like everybody else.

Some folks believe that Ephesians is the shortened version of Romans. What Paul spends eleven chapters in Romans teaching, he succinctly puts in the first three chapters in Ephesians. If you'll remember, in Romans 1, he talks about the wrath of God being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Basically, when you read Romans chapter 1, 2, and 3, what you come to discover is that the wrath of God is not one day when God is going to cast sinners into hell, He will do that one day, but the wrath of God is already right now being released in the life of people who are sinful. Here's how his wrath is being released; He lets man be as sinful as man wants to be. So when we were dead in trespasses and sins, we were by nature a child of wrath. We were under God's wrath where God stepped back and let you be as sinful as you wanted to be. Please tell me you're getting this. When you got saved, you were getting saved from going to Hell; you were getting saved from being a sinner and living a lifestyle of sin.

"And you were dead... (Verse 4) But God..." I love it when the Bible starts a verse with 'but,' because there's going to be a big contrast. "And you were dead..." "But God, being rich in mercy." We do not serve a poor God; we serve a rich God! He's rich in mercy "because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses." Wow! Do you get this picture? We are spiritual zombies, we are dead in sin, but God, rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us while we are spiritual zombies, made us alive with Christ. Just as God reached down in the Palestinian tomb, breathed life into Jesus' dead body, and raised Him up making Him alive, the Bible says the same God with the same power made us alive, together, all of us, with Christ. Then he stops here. He can't go on to say, 'and raised us up and seated us with Him in the heavenlies,' but he's got to make sure we get this, "by grace you have been saved." Please don't let the default of what your grandparents or the church you came from said; listen to the Word of God. You who were dead and are now believers in Christ and have been made alive; you were saved by grace.

That word 'saved' is used by Paul in the letter to Ephesians. It's a word picture of a ship that's been wrecked and a rescue is taking place. The picture is when the rescuer gets there and rescues the people on the ship, there is a sense in which they are rescued, they're now in the boat, but they're not completely saved until they get to the shore. Now Paul is giving us this context. What are we being saved from? We are being saved from being dead in trespasses and sin. We're being saved from being a sinner. This is why the first core principle of Hardin is 'saint, not a sinner.' Don't let anyone tell you you're just an old sinner saved by grace. You were an old sinner, but what you're being saved from was being a sinner. So if you're still a sinner, you didn't really get saved! Tell me that makes sense.

"By grace you have been saved." I can't tell you how fortunate I was to be educated at Faxon. I loved grammar. The Bible says you have been saved. Some people look at that and think it's a past tense verb, but it's a perfect tense verb. Perfect tense verbs mean the action has taken place in the past and it's completed, but the result is still going on now and always will be going on. Did you catch that? By grace, you have been saved from being a sinner at a point in the past, but the result of that salvation is still going on in your life today, so you're still free from being a sinner and you always will be free from being a sinner. You can't ever go back to being a sinner. You can commit acts of sin, but you can never go back and live a lifestyle of sin ever again, not because of what you do, but because of what God has done for you when He saved you by His grace.

Now what is grace? I hate bringing up the past, but as a little kid sitting in church, I got the idea that a lot of Christian people thought grace was God making salvation available. Like God did His part, which was to put Jesus on a cross and let Jesus die for our sin, and then God just kind of stopped there. Now He is just waiting to see what we want to do. That's the picture I had of grace, and then I began to read my Bible and I couldn't fit that definition in. I believe if you study all the grace passages in the New Testament, you'll come to agree with me on this definition of grace. Grace is more than availability; grace is God's enabling power. It's God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can now do what He did, and that's live an obedient life to Christ. Catch this. By God's enabling power, you have been saved from being a sinner at some point in your

past, you are still saved from being a sinner today, and you always will be saved from being a sinner. Wow!

Why does it have to be grace? It has to be grace because we're not drowning; we're dead. The same power that put life into Jesus' physical body put life into our spiritual body. He made us alive, He raised us up; He did not leave us in our sin! If you hear what we're saying when we say we're still a sinner saved by grace, what you're saying is God saved you but He left you in sin. He did not leave you in sin! You are not dead in trespasses and sin; you have been made alive in Christ! You've been raised up out of sin and you have already been seated in the heavenlies at the right hand thrown of God in Christ Jesus, so that where He is, that's where you are! It's by His grace I have been saved. What have I been saved from? I've been saved from being a sinner. What have I been saved by? I've been saved by His grace.

Now, what have I been saved for? Verse 7, "So that in the coming ages, He might show forth the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." That's where I get that we are a trophy of grace. God did what He did so He could show us off, which shows off the immeasurable greatness of His grace when He was kind to us. Can I be totally honest with you? Most people that I meet, who has had someone do something against them, are not kind. They're kind of harsh. That's why so many husbands are harsh. Their wives are always doing things wrong to them, and the first reaction of the husband is to be harsh. Be honest! How many guys are really kind as long as she's being really kind? But when she sins against him, he's harsh. Everything can be going great with the kids and they suddenly do something wrong, and mom and dad are harsh with the kids. Employers are great as long as the employees are doing good, but when the employees start doing wrong, the employer gets harsh. Are you listening to what this is saying? When we were sinners, sinning against a holy God, He was kind. Why? Because the immeasurable richness and greatness of His grace! He's rich in mercy; He's rich in grace because of the great love with which He loved us. Do you get it? You didn't deserve mercy, you didn't deserve grace, and you didn't deserve kindness. But God wants the world to see how kind He was to you, so He took you from being

dead and made you alive so He could use you as a trophy to show off what He had done for you in salvation.

Now you know why you're where you're at. You're where you are to be a trophy of grace. Don't tell me how hard it is. I've got spiritual zombies in my life too, and you're surrounded by spiritual zombies. Everybody at your work is; people in your class are; people on your ball team are; and you want to question why God has you there? God wants them to see that He saved you from a life of sin, and the before picture and the after picture are so different that you're a trophy to the enabling power of God's grace. That gets me excited! You want to put yourself in the attic? You want to move to Montana? Really?

For by grace you have been saved through faith! What he's going to do now to make sure we didn't miss it is recap what he's already said, but he's going to add a little detail that just blows us out of the water. How can anybody believe that you and any work you do has a part in salvation when the Bible says by grace you have been saved through faith? He says and that is not of yourselves; it's a gift of God, not of works so that no one may boast. The reason God didn't design salvation to be part Him, part us is because we would boast. We would take credit. Can you imagine how miserable Heaven would be if salvation had been by works? Noah would have never shut up about building that boat! 'How many times are you going to tell that story, Noah?' All Moses would want to talk about is those grumbling griping Baptists he was leading out of Egypt! Whew! Can you imagine what you would be telling? God doesn't want us to boast down here about us. He doesn't want us to boast up there about us. He wants our boasts to be in Christ. You say, hold it, we've got to believe...yes, we do, but please understand that belief here is not something meritoriously you do, because you're dead. When God makes you alive, He enables you by His grace to reach out your hand and receive the free gift of God in salvation. Literally, what the Bible is teaching is all we're doing is holding out our hands and receiving what God says is true about us in Christ. What does God say is true about us? We've been saved from living a life of sin!

It's by His grace that we've been saved, but we must receive it by faith. Faith means we commit to, trust in, rely upon; we lean on. We quit trusting

in ourselves and what we can do to be made right with God and we totally trust what God did in Christ for us on a cross. It changes everything! The moment you believe, there's this before picture and then there is this after picture. The Bible says, "For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." I don't want to be disrespectful here at all, but on the farm as a kid, I learned that to have extreme confidence in something, you needed to see where it was made. There were some things you used and if you wanted them to hold up you wanted them to be made in the USA, not Taiwan, or China, no disrespect to those nations. If you had a wrench, you wanted it to be a Craftsman wrench, or Snap-on. You wanted it to say made in the USA because when you put it into force, it would never break with you. Listen to me. The Bible does not say we were made in the flesh. The Bible doesn't say we were made in the church. The Bible says we were made in Christ Jesus. God did what He did in your life through His Son Jesus Christ so that we proudly wear the name made in Christ, transformed from a sinner to a saint of God.

We are His workmanship. This word, workmanship, is where we get our English word, poem, from. The New Jerusalem Bible actually translates this, "For we are God's work of art." It literally means, in Greek society, a masterpiece. Whoa! Did you catch that? You are looking at a masterpiece! That's what the Bible says. We're a work of art. We have been saved, still are, and always will be. He's still working on me. Sometimes I just want to put a sign over my heart that says 'Don't judge me yet. There's an unfinished part. He's still working on me.'

I read in the paper where they discovered a Jackson Pollock in an attic in Arizona, and it sold for over ten million dollars! It was in an attic...Last year in France, these people who were living in a really old house had a leaky roof so they went up to fix it and when they tore back the roof layers, there was a hidden compartment in their attic and they found a Caravaggio that sold for over one hundred and thirty six million dollars! Where do you expect to find works of art? You expect to find them in museums. Just imagine you and I are in New York City and going to the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art and we see a Picasso, Michelangelo, a Van Gough, a Jackson Pollock, and a Caravaggio!

That is you. That is me. There is a real sense in which the people who know us best, and as people get to know us, there should be a point when somebody looks at us and says 'Is that a God?' 'I think it is.' 'I remember him. The only explanation I can think of about the change in his life is it must be God.' How can I call you a God? I am calling you a God in the sense that you are the canvas by which God is drawing His grace for the world to see! You are the life He is using to show what a life before Christ looked like and what a life after Christ can be like.

The misconception is God would only hang His saints in a church, so we have this saintly feeling on Sunday morning. We get all dressed up and come to church and try to do it right. No, no, no, God doesn't hang His works of art in a church building; God hangs His works of art junkyard of life. That's why you're at the bank. That's why you're at the plant. That's why you're at the school. That's why you're down at the granary. Do you get it?

"For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus..." not upon good works, "*for* good works." Works are not the root of salvation; works are the fruit of salvation. Your works do not earn you a right relationship with God; your works reveal you are in a right relationship with God. God ordained this beforehand that we should walk in good works. God ordained you to come out of sin, from being self-centered to live a life that focuses on Him so that He can show His transforming grace in your life so that others will see how big and great a God He is. Here's what I know. You've got it now because Paul prayed for you to get it. Do you get it? Then let God take you this week and put you in someone's life as a trophy of His grace. If you're not a believer, this church is never going to hang the carrot in front of you that if you'll believe in Jesus you won't go to Hell. We're going to motivate you with is how would you like to live the rest of your life for the glory of God? A byproduct of that is you won't go to Hell; you'll go to Heaven. But God is not going to wait until you die to change your life; God's going to change your life today if you'll just respond to what He says is true of you. He says, for you, He put His Son on a cross in your place so that you can be right with Him. If you will repent, commit to Him, believe in Him, surrender to Him, He will save you the moment you do and you'll become a brand new person in Christ. As a trophy of God, you will grow, and grow,

and bring honor and glory to Him. I know of no greater life to live than a life lived for the glory of God.