

## EPHESIANS 2:1-10

<sup>2</sup> You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.

<sup>3</sup> All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

<sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ<sup>[a]</sup>—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

THE HYMN “AMAZING GRACE”, IS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN RECORDED MORE OFTEN, AND BY MORE DIFFERENT MUSICIANS THAN ANY OTHER RELIGIOUS SONG.

THIS HYMN EVEN MAKES ITS WAY INTO SOME CONCERTS OF THOSE WHO DO NOT ORDINARILY PLAY RELIGIOUS MUSIC.

PERHAPS YOU MAY REMEMBER LAST YEAR WHEN ALL OF ITALY AND MOST OF THE WORLD WAS SHUT DOWN BECAUSE OF COVID, MOST CITY STREETS WERE VIRTUALLY DESERTED.

THE PERFORMANCE OF AMAZING GRACE, BY ITALIAN SINGER ANDREA BOCELLI IN FRONT OF AN EMPTY CATHEDRAL, WAS BROADCAST ON THE NEWS AND INTERNET.

PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, FAITHS, AND EVEN LITTLE OR NO FAITH WERE MOVED BY THE PERFORMANCE.

EVANGELIST RANDY ALCORN SAID: “GRACE IS WHAT PEOPLE LONG FOR, EVEN THOSE WHO DON’T KNOW JESUS. AND ESPECIALLY BY THOSE WHO DON’T KNOW JESUS.”

TODAY’S NEW TESTAMENT READING EMPHASIZES THE EXTREME VALUE OF GOD’S AMAZING GRACE FOUND IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON.

THE APOSTLE’S WORDS ARE ADDRESSED TO CHRISTIANS STRUGGLING WITH FAITH, AND WITH ACCEPTING THE FACT THEY REALLY HAVE BECOME GOD’S CHILDREN BY HIS GRACE.

PAUL SUMMARIZED THE REASON WE CAN TRUST GOD, BY REMINDING US THAT WE ARE ALL SAVED BY GOD’S GRACE, THROUGH THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

AND IT IS OUT OF GOD’S GREAT MERCY THAT BY LOOKING TO JESUS WITH THE EYES OF FAITH WE ARE SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD.

WE ARE SAVED NOT BECAUSE WE ARE GOOD, BUT BECAUSE GOD IS GOOD, AND IN HIS GOODNESS THE LORD SENT JESUS TO US SO WE MAY BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.

PAUL, IN THIS LETTER, SEEKS TO GIVE THE EPHESIANS, A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE DIFFERENCE CHRIST HAS MADE IN THEIR LIVES.

HE REMINDS THEM THEIR PAST IS REDEEMED. THEY NO LONGER LIVE AS THOSE WHO ARE ALIENATED FROM GOD, BUT ARE UNITED IN CHRIST WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

TRULY ALL HUMAN BEINGS, IN SPITE OF OUR IMPERFECTIONS AND SINS, OUGHT TO BE CONSIDERED A MASTERPIECE- PAINTED, SCULPTURED, WRITTEN, BY THE HANDS OF GOD.

THIS POINT IS ILLUSTRATED BY A COLLEGE PROFESSOR, WHO AS PART OF HER FAITH, SOUGHT TO REMIND HER STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR INHERENT WORTH AS SOMEONE CREATED AND LOVED BY GOD.

SHE EXPLAINED THAT WHEN SHE HANDS BACK THE FIRST GRADED PAPER IN HER FRESHMAN ENGLISH CLASSES SHE ALWAYS SAYS:

“THIS GRADE IS NOT FOR YOU. THIS GRADE IS FOR A PIECE OF WORK YOU TURNED IN.”

NEXT, SHE TELLS THEM: “I THINK YOU ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD AND ARE OF GREAT WORTH.

THERE IS NO WAY ANYTHING I COULD PUT IN MY GRADE BOOK COULD EVEN BEGIN TO ESTIMATE YOU.”

HERE WE ARE REMINDED ALL PEOPLE ARE MADE AND CHERISHED BY GOD OUR CREATOR.

BUT PAUL’S MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH REMINDS BELIEVERS ABOUT HOW GOD’S GRACE IN CHRIST TRANSFORMS OUR VALUE IN AN EVEN MORE POWERFUL WAY.

HE SAYS ABOUT CHRISTIANS: “WE ARE WHAT GOD MADE US”. OTHER TRANSLATIONS- SAY WE ARE GOD’S “WORKMANSHIP”.

THE WORD FROM WHICH THESE TERMS ARE TAKEN IS THE GREEK WORK “POIEMA” FROM WHICH WE GET THE ENGLISH WORDS “POEM” & “POETRY”.

SO ANOTHER WAY TO VIEW THE PASSAGE IS TO SAY THAT EACH ONE OF US IS A POEM GOD HAS WRITTEN TO THE WORLD.

WE ARE NOT ONLY CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, BUT ARE RECREATED IN CHRIST, TO BE A MASTERPIECE OF HIS LOVE.

AND THERE IS NOTHING THE WORLD, OR EVEN WE, CAN DO OR SAY THAT WILL CHANGE THIS FACT.

HOWEVER, IN THE MIDST OF LIFE IT CAN BE HARD FOR MANY PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THIS TRUTH. AND YET THIS IS WHAT WE ARE IN THE EYES OF OUR CREATOR.

INDEED, EACH ONE OF US IS A ONE-OF-A-KIND CREATION. OUR LIVES ARE MEANT TO SING THE MUSIC OF GOD’S LOVE AND GRACE TO THE WORLD.

AND AS THOSE WHO ARE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, IN HIM WE HAVE NOT ONLY BEEN DESIGNED AND MADE BY GOD, BUT WE HAVE BEEN PAID FOR BY THE LIFE OF OUR SAVIOR.

YEARS AGO THERE WAS A STORY I RECEIVED IN AN EMAIL THAT SPEAKS TO THE APOSTLE’S MESSAGE ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF RECEIVING JESUS.

THE STORY IS ABOUT A MAN AND HIS SON WHO WERE EXTREMELY WEALTHY COLLECTORS OF RARE ART. THEY OWNED WORKS FROM PICASSO TO RAPHAEL.

BUT SADLY THE SON DIED IN BATTLE WHILE SAVING ANOTHER SOLDIER.

THE GRIEVED FATHER RECEIVED A KNOCK ON HIS DOOR ABOUT A MONTH AFTER HE LEARNED OF HIS SON’S DEATH. HE OPENED THE DOOR TO FIND A YOUNG MAN STANDING THERE, WHO SAID:

“SIR YOU DON’T KNOW ME, BUT I AM THE SOLDIER FOR WHOM YOUR SON GAVE HIS LIFE. HE WAS CARRYING ME TO SAFETY WHEN THE BULLET STRUCK HIM”.

HE ADDED THE MAN’S SON HAD SPOKEN OFTEN ABOUT HIS LOVE FOR ART AND THE FAMILY COLLECTION.

HE THEN HANDED THE FATHER A LARGE PACKAGE EXPLAINING THAT INSIDE WAS A PORTRAIT OF THE MAN'S SON, WHICH THE SOLDIER HAD PAINTED.

"I KNOW THIS ISN'T MUCH" HE SAID, "I'M NOT A GREAT ARTIST, BUT I THINK YOUR SON WOULD HAVE WANTED YOU TO HAVE THIS."

HE THANKED THE YOUNG MAN AND OFFERED TO PAY HIM, BUT ARTIST ANSWERED:

"NO SIR, I COULD NEVER REPAY WHAT YOUR SON DID FOR ME. THIS IS A GIFT."

EVERY TIME THERE AFTER, WHEN THE MAN HAD A VISITOR HE SHOWED THE PORTRAIT OF HIS SON BEFORE HE SHOWED THE REST OF HIS COLLECTION.

THEN, WHEN THE ART COLLECTOR DIED, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THERE WOULD BE A GREAT AUCTION.

MANY GATHERED ON THE DAY OF THE AUCTION, FROM PLACES NEAR AND FAR, FOR THE CHANCE TO PURCHASE SOME OF THE GREAT ART WORK.

THE FIRST PIECE OFFERED WAS THE PORTRAIT OF THE MAN'S SON. THE CROWD PROTESTED, BUT THE AUCTIONEER INSISTED ON SELLING THE PORTRAIT FIRST.

"WHO WILL TAKE THE SON?" HE ASKED. BUT, NO ONE WANTED TO BID EVEN \$100 FOR THE PAINTING OF THE SON.

FINALLY, ONE MAN, WHO HAD COME MERELY FOR A LOOK AT THE MASTERPIECES, BID \$10, SINCE THAT WAS ABOUT ALL HE COULD AFFORD.

WHEN NO ONE ELSE WOULD OFFER EVEN A DOLLAR MORE FOR THE PAINTING OF THE SON, THE PORTRAIT WAS SOLD FOR \$10.

THEN TO THE SHOCK OF EVERYONE PRESENT, THE AUCTIONEER LAID DOWN HIS GAVEL AND DECLARED THE AUCTION WAS OVER.

HE EXPLAINED A STIPULATION OF THE WILL, WHICH HE COULD ONLY NOW SHARE. IT SAID:

THE ONLY PAINTING FOR SALE WAS THE SOLDIER'S PORTRAIT OF THE MAN'S SON. AND THE WILL DECLARED THAT WHOEVER TOOK THE SON-INHERITED THE ENTIRE ESTATE.

THE LESSON OF THE STORY IS THIS- GOD GAVE HIS SON TO DIE ON THE CROSS.

MUCH LIKE THE AUCTIONEER, GOD'S MESSAGE TODAY IS: "WHO WILL TAKE THE SON?"

THIS IS THE KEY QUESTION IN LIFE, BECAUSE YOU SEE, WHOEVER TAKES THE SON, GETS EVERYTHING.

THE DIFFERENCE IS WE DO NOT AND CANNOT PURCHASE JESUS OR THE SALVATION HE OFFERS.

PAUL, EMPHASIZED MANY TIMES IN HIS WRITINGS THAT GOD'S SON- IS HIS GIFT TO US.

THUS HE TELLS THE EPHESIANS: "YOU WERE DEAD THROUGH THE TRESPASSES AND SINS IN WHICH YOU ONCE LIVED..."

BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, OUT OF THE GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN OUR TRESPASSES, HAS MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST...

FOR BY GRACE YOU WERE SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING IT IS A GIFT FROM GOD. "

PAUL, ALSO SUGGESTS TO THOSE WHO ARE SAVED- THAT WE SHOULD REMEMBER WE NO LONGER LIVE UNDER THE CONDEMNATION OF GOD'S JUDGMENT.

INSTEAD WE LIVE THE NEW LIFE IN A STATE OF GRACE, WHICH IS GIVEN TO US THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

ANOTHER WAY TO EXPLAIN THIS IS TO THINK OF YOURSELF AS A TRACTOR.

A TRACTOR HAS AN ENGINE THAT MAKES IT RUN. THE ENGINE IS LIKE GOD'S GRACE THAT PROVIDES US WITH NEW LIFE.

BUT THE FUEL TO POWER THE ENGINE IS CHanneled THROUGH THE TRANSMISSION-WHICH CAN BE COMPARED TO OUR FAITH.

OUR FAITH IS WHAT ENABLES THE ENGINE OF GOD'S GRACE TO RUN OUR LIVES.

HOWEVER OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST, HAS A PURPOSE OTHER THAN MERELY EXISTING. JUST LIKE A TRACTOR IS MADE FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF WORK, SO ARE WE.

WE ARE CREATED AND RECREATED AS GOD'S PEOPLE IN JESUS CHRIST TO PROCLAIM GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY.

WE ARE REDEEMED SO WE MAY WORSHIP THE LORD, AND SERVE OTHERS- LIKE JESUS CHRIST SERVES US.

WE ARE SAVED BY CHRIST SO WE MAY DO GOOD WORKS FOR GOD'S GLORY AND NOT OUR OWN.

THUS PAUL WRITES TO THE CHURCH TO REMIND BELIEVERS OF THE SPIRITUAL TREASURES THEY HAVE RECEIVED IN CHRIST.

HE THEN CHALLENGES THEM TO NOT BURY THOSE TREASURES BUT TO USE THEM.

PAUL WRITES TO REMIND THEM THEY HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO DO GOOD WORKS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD!

THE READING FROM EPHESIANS REMINDS US OF THE SAME THING.

IT EMPHASIZES THAT OUR SALVATION IS NOT PURCHASED BY OUR GOOD WORKS.

HOWEVER, PAUL PROCLAIMS THE GOOD WORKS WE DO IS HOW WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE OUT OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

WE DO SO BY USING THE GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN US TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD AS CHRISTIANS.

BUT SADLY, THERE ARE TIMES WE DO NOT LOOK UPON OUR OWN LIVES, OR THE LIVES OF OTHER BELIEVERS, AND SEE MUCH VALUE IN THE WORKS DONE FOR THE LORD.

IN THIS SENSE WE BECOME LIKE THE PEOPLE AT THE AUCTION, WE LOOK ONLY FOR THINGS OF WORLDLY VALUE, AND OVER-LOOK WHAT THE FATHER TREASURES.

HOWEVER, LIKE THE FATHER IN THAT STORY, WE CAN BE CERTAIN OUR WORKS ARE DEEMED PRICELESS BY GOD-AND IT IS GOD'S OPINION ALONE THAT REALLY COUNTS.

AND SO, MAY WE BE MORE AWARE IN OUR DAILY LIVES OF THE OPPORTUNITIES TO DO THE GOOD WORKS GOD PLACES BEFORE EACH ONE OF US.

MAY WE TRUST THAT GOD WILL PREPARE US TO DO WHAT GOD WISHES FOR US TO DO.

MAY WE TAKE SOME TIME TO CONSIDER THE AMAZING GRACE OF GOD, AND THE SPIRITUAL TREASURES WE HAVE THROUGH CHRIST.

LET US ALSO CONSIDER THE TALENTS WE WERE BORN WITH, AND SKILLS WE HAVE LEARNED.

THEN LET US THINK ABOUT HOW WE CAN BE MORE OPEN TO ALLOWING GOD'S SPIRIT TO CONTINUE TO COMPOSE THE POEM OF GOD'S CHOOSING THROUGH OUR LIFE.

A ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN, THOMAS AQUINAS, WROTE A BEAUTIFUL PRAYER SEEKING GOD'S HELP TO LIVE A LIFE TRANSFORMED BY JESUS.

LET US PRAY: "GIVE US, O LORD, A STEADFAST HEART, WHICH NO UNWORTHY AFFECTION MAY DRAG DOWNWARDS. GIVE US AN UNCONQUERED HEART, WHICH NO TRIBULATION CAN WEAR OUT.

GIVE US AN UPRIGHT HEART, WHICH NO UNWORTHY PURPOSE MAY TEMPT ASIDE. BESTOW UPON US ALSO, O LORD OUR GOD, UNDERSTANDING TO KNOW YOU, DILIGENCE TO SEEK YOU. WISDOM TO FIND YOU, AND A FAITHFULNESS THAT MAY FINALLY EMBRACE YOU." AMEN

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HERE IS A STORY TO ILLUSTRATE THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD'S SON JESUS. THERE WAS A MAN AND HIS SON WHO WERE EXTREMELY WEALTHY COLLECTORS OF RARE ART. BUT SADLY THE SON DIED IN BATTLE WHILE SAVING ANOTHER SOLDIER. ONE DAY THE MAN WHO'S LIFE THE SON SAVE APPEARED AT THE DOOR WITH A PORTRAIT HE PAINTED OF THE MAN'S SON.

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