

# Trophies of Grace

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 2:4-7  
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Let's take our Bibles and let's go to Ephesians 2. I did not have any plan to stay in Ephesians long but it keeps drawing me back. This particular section of Scripture is such a massive horde of wonderful joys and blessings of grace as the prophet, the apostle I guess I should say rather, is writing to the church at Ephesus and he has built precept upon precept, glorious truth on glorious truth of God's saving grace toward us and we get to Ephesians 2 and he comes to something of a concluding purpose in verse 7, but I want to read the flow of the whole context to get all of it here. Ephesians 2:4-7,

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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 ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Now, looking back and blazing through chapter 1, we remember the strong irrefutable truths of sovereign grace. God foreknowing us, and God predestining us, and God choosing us. Then you jump all the way over to chapter 2, the first part, and we see those powerfully penetrating words about our natural standing before this transcendent holy God. One thing that concerns me about Grace Life Church, is that we have endeavored to so mine out the truth of God about man's standing and God's holiness, that it has become commonplace to us. We can lose some of the awe, some of the trembling, some of the awesomeness of who this infinitely holy transcendent God is and so when you read a passage like this, it's almost like reading a story about someone else because in verses 1 through 3, again, he talked about us naturally being dead in trespasses and sins, and deviant in our course of life, and then demonized, that demons work and have an ownership of such over all the unconverted. We were willfully and wantonly disobedient to God; we were deranged in the sense that our sense of right and wrong, good and bad was warped and perverse and we were also damned before the true and holy and righteous and just God and that's where we stood. A picture of hopelessness could not more adequately be portrayed. Then we come to our text and he has that awesome conjunction "but," and then "God."

Now, I entitled this exposition "Trophies of Grace," and I do that because do you know what a trophy does? Nothing. A trophy does nothing. A trophy, traditionally speaking, sits on a shelf and shows what someone else did. The trophy itself does nothing. It expresses the accomplishment of another and that's where Paul is getting to, that all of his children, his elect children, his predestined children, his chosen children, when you see the love here, I'm sorry but the pastors and the theologians who try to take these expressions and say, "This is a general expression for all mankind," radically miss it. That would be the same as you saying, "I have the same general love for all women." No you don't. You have a special love for your wife; a unique, directed, special on many levels with your wife that you do not have with any other person. So God's children, God's elect here are the focus of the expressions of this text and God, though he does love all mankind in many ways, there is a special covenant love for his children, you. That's radically unique and wonderful beyond comprehension and he's showing us this love all to the end that we might be the trophies of the accomplishments of his grace.

Now, notice in the text he says here, "But God," did something. He does not say, "But angels," did something. God did not send angels to help us. Angels are powerful creatures, they are glorious creatures, they are loyal and obedient creatures before God, but angels do not have the power to grant or restore life to the dead. They cannot create life. They are impotent to save us because we're dead in trespasses and sins. In the broadest sense, the text does not say, "But creation." Creation, all the material universe. I mean, you can send out a call to all the created order, you can shout it out from the mountain tops and call for some part of creation to come and save us, yearn, plead and cry for someone, something, somewhere to come and save man and you're not going to get any answer. You'll only get the hollow echo of your own desperate cry for creation cannot create life, it's the created. And thank God he doesn't say, "But man," man can do something. I mean, you mean dead, deviant, demonized, disobedient, deranged and damned man, the man that we just saw described in the first three verses of chapter 2, that man is going to somehow pull himself up by his own bootstraps, turn over a new leaf, ethically reform his life to somehow obtain a standard that a holy God would say, "Yes, I'm pleased with you"? Absolutely not. Man will not right himself. He cannot raise himself. He cannot remove himself from sin and Satan's dominion. He cannot make atonement for his own sin. What unbridled foolish and corrupt thinking that would be. As the text has told us, man is deplorably wicked before the eyes of God and he cannot save himself. Listen, man cannot even desire to save himself. He does not and if he could on his own, out of his own being desire to save himself, he would not have the ability or the capacity to do so anyway. He's dead and dead men cannot perform anything. But the text does not say, "But angels," did this and that. It does not say, "But creation," can perform this or that. It does not say, "But man," can do this or that. "But God." Paul's point here is that God does desire to save us and God can perform it and the motivation from the heart of God is that he can accomplish this, that he might make us trophies of this favor, this unmerited love and favor that he shows towards us.

Several things here. First of all, I. we are trophies of grace in that he has directed his love and mercy toward us. Now, one might say that God, generically speaking, has love and mercy for all creation but, friend, listen to me: there is a unique and special love and

mercy directed toward God's elect, those who will believe and those who will be saved. Verse 4 says, "But God, being," that means he remains in this state, he never cannot be this, that is, "being rich in mercy." He goes on to combine this with love, but Hodge says that phrase, "rich in mercy," has all the miserable for its object. Mercy is the idea of withholding judgment which is properly deserved, and God is rich in that attribute. God has this immense capacity to withhold judgment from vessels and creatures who in every way according to his own justice deserve the retribution and the judgment. But he's not just wrath and justice, he has the capacity to withhold justice in the greatness and the richness of his mercy. Romans 2:4 has the same basic idea. Romans 2:4 speaks "of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience." The last part of the verse there in verse 4, he is "rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us." This mercy flows out of his love. Someone said he raised us from spiritual death because of his love, and his love is unquenchable. Justice, you see, was satisfied when he died for us on the cross and love was satisfied when we were raised from the dead. Love here is the basis of the great mercy that flows toward his elect children. Love here is focused on definite individuals. Again, it's not just a generic love for mankind, its specific individual persons and I want you to think that way. I want you to cause yourself to think in terms that, "I specifically and personally was on the heart of God and God's Son, Jesus Christ, before the foundation of the world. He marked me out to perform special, merciful, loving acts that he might win me and keep me forever."

Does that not cause you to adore him more and treasure him more and be more devoted to him than ever before? God desires to save men but God has no obligation to do so because man deserves nothing better than the fallen angels deserve who will receive no saving grace at all. But God's children by the simple sovereign choice of God himself, are the special objects of his love. And we remind ourselves that God doesn't just do something – listen to me – God doesn't just do something, God does what he does because God is who he is. Did you hear that? God does what he does because God is what he is. He is a God rich in mercy. He is a God with this unbounding love and he has chosen in his sovereignty to pour out the weighty love and mercy that he has on his chosen elective vessels of mercy.

Let's be reminded that God is in every respect perfection and man is in every respect imperfection. God is morally upright, holy and just. Man is morally corrupt, unholy, unjust. God is in every respect immeasurably superior to man. God therefore possesses attributes that are beyond our comprehension. For example, when you study the Scriptures and you read about the wrath of God and the great retribution that God is going to bring against all sin and, yes, sinners. We like the phrase, "Well, God hates the sin and loves the sinner." In a sense that's true but it breaks down biblically because when God returns, he's not just going to judge their sin, he is going to judge the sinner. And it's awful beyond really comprehension, again, the weightiness of God's wrath and retribution, but wonderfully and equally so, it is beyond our comprehension at the greatness of God's love and a great love that produces mercy. Love and mercy he has toward his children who naturally speaking, and here's what's so shocking about this and that's why we have verses 1 through 3: this abundant love and mercy that he chooses to pour out on objects and vessels that are utterly deplorably offensive and unattractive to

him. There is no other way to slice this. You can't look at verses 1 through 3, dead, deviant, deranged, disobedient, damned, all of these things that characterize what we naturally are, but God has this unbelievable capacity to say, "I'm going to love you." And he didn't just hold his nose and stick out just a finger of love, he poured the great wealth and richness of his love and mercies toward us vessels who were by nature the children of wrath, the text tells us. 1 John 4:8-10, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love," and here it is, "not that we loved God," anything but that, actually, "but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

So many times I have tried to find an illustration of God's love and God's mercy but all the illustrations I've ever heard and I've heard all lot of them or read a lot of them, they are woefully deficient to describe the awesomeness of the love and the mercy of our God. Really to grasp the depth of it, you must experience it, but once you're genuinely converted and born-again and you taste something of his love and mercy – listen – the Bible says you still only see through a glass dimly. And I think that's part of what heaven is, the glass is going to get clean and then you're going to take more of who he is in his love and mercy toward us unworthy, undeserving vessels, and then you're going to have a perfect mind. I've told you this many times but I like to say it. You're going to have a perfect mind to take in the infinite qualities of his love and mercy so every moment of heaven will be an increasing of pleasure and joy and happiness over the person of God that you'll have the capacity because of his grace to know and receive from him all that he is.

So Paul writes here in verse 4, "You are trophies of grace in that God directed his love and mercy toward you." But secondly, not only that, you are trophies of grace because he has given you new life. He has granted life to you. Verse 5, he continues on and he says, "even when we were dead." He's building on what he said in verse 4, this great mercy and love toward us wretched undeserving vessels was shined on us and wrapped up in that, one of the components of this great love and mercy was that he granted us life "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." When he says "even when we were dead" in verse 5, it means "and being dead." You were dead, you are dead, you would continue dead. You were not going to change that and no one else was going to change that. It's much like Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners," while you were a sinner, continued to be a sinner, will always be a sinner, but in that state, "Christ died for you." So you were in this state of complete death, spiritually speaking, before a holy God and God made you alive. There was a moment in time when God imputed spiritual life to your heart and that's why you begin to be grieved and aware and sense the weightiness of your sin and your wanting and your offensiveness to God, and that's why from a moment in time, you begin to have a new desire for the Bible, a new desire for the preaching of the word, a new desire for God's people and God's church. Something has changed in you. What is it? It's the impartation of life. He made us alive in Christ Jesus. Many many years ago, I decided as a pastor I am only going to pastor the kind of church where those who have been made alive by the Spirit want to come. Amen?

Because that's the only kind of church really there is. It's a great way to live. It's a great way to pastor. It's a lot easier than building a congregation built on other stuff.

In imparting this life, God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves and what no one else could do for us. By his own omnipotent power, he called us forth from spiritual death, bringing us to life just like he did for Lazarus in the physical realm. There was a moment in time when God, in one form or another spoke, "Jeff Noblit, whomever, come forth!" And immediately life came in you, evidenced by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. So in a spiritual sense, we hear the voice of God and we come to spiritual life. Jesus taught this in John 10:26-27. They were complaining about not believing he was who he said he was, I mean, the religious leaders had a real hard time with Jesus claiming to be God's Messiah, God's only Son, and Jesus responded and said, "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep." He did not say, "Since you will not believe, you're not my sheep." That's not what he said. He said, "you do not believe because you are not of My sheep." He says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Brothers and sisters, with all of my heart, I am convinced the biblical text leaves it unequivocally clear that you were his sheep before the foundation of the world and in his divine providence there was a moment in time in his sovereignty when he wanted you, his sheep, to hear his voice and he brought you to life. That's what the apostle is teaching us. Go home and put your head on the pillow and contemplate that and say, "O Christ, you are too wonderful. Your love is so matchless. It's so beyond comprehension. I owe you my all." That's where he wants to get us.

When we hear his voice, 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation," a new creation occurs. John 5:25, the verse before, five chapters before John 10 that I just quoted, "Truly, truly, I say to you," this is Jesus speaking, "an hour is coming and now is," it's as if Jesus was saying, "We've been waiting for this particular moment in time from eternity past when this type of thing would start happening." Okay, Jesus, what is it that now has come and is going to be a part of your working in the world in men's hearts? "An hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live." He's not talking about physical resurrection, he's talking about the spiritually dead coming to spiritual life because physical people weren't popping out of the grave, I mean, all of the time. Now, he did bring people from the dead. That wasn't the commonplace. He was talking about the hour has finally come when the Father is releasing his Spirit to save men in a way he has not done before, and bring them to new life. Now, at the future resurrection, God will speak and the bodies of his children will come to life, but not only that, the bodies of those who are not his children will come to life and face judgment. But until that day, Jesus is speaking. How does he speak? Sharing a witness. Bible study. I heard a radio broadcast, a preacher on a radio broadcast. Primarily his means he has ordained is the preaching of his word and he speaks and says, "Come forth," and something in you becomes alive.

He says there in verse 5, notice how it is worded, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ." That's such an important phrase, those three words, "together with Christ." This expresses that vital union that exists between Christ and his children. As a matter of fact, in chapter 1, verse 1, he said, we are

faithful, now listen to this, in Christ. Chapter 1, verse 3, we are blessed in Christ. Chapter 1, verse 4, we are chosen in Christ. Chapter 1, verse 5, we are predestined as sons in Christ. Chapter 1, verse 7, we have redemption in Christ. Chapter 1, verse 12, we have hope in Christ. Chapter 1, verse 13, we believe in Christ. Not that you believe in Christ, you believe because you're in Christ. Did you get that? Now in chapter 2, verse 4, we are made alive in Christ. This union is expressed in many many ways like he says, "I am the vine, you are the branches," in many ways, in many metaphors. We're the body, he's the head. But this notion of being in Christ is the heart of the Apostle Paul's theology. A. W. Pink, the great expositor who, if you buy Pink, you've bought something good, he said, "The subject of spiritual union is the most important, the most profound and yet the most blessed of any set forth in sacred Scripture and sadly there is hardly any which is now more generally neglected."

It's all in him. What you've got to do is you've got to take your mind and think in terms of before there was anything there was God and God's Son, Jesus Christ, and in him – listen to me now – in him was the totality of all that the church and all the individuals of the church would ever be or do. In him. He is the entity. He is the sphere in which it is all done. And since he is eternal, he didn't have to think about it in terms of time, eternally it was set in him. But then he worked it out in time and, by the way, all of this was to show forth and illustrate what he could do and how matchless and glorious he is and so in Christ, you were chosen. In Christ, you were predestined. In Christ, you were called. In Christ, you believed. In Christ, you were made alive. In Christ, you are now being sanctified. In Christ, you will one day be glorified. It's all in Christ, this vital union in him, with him, that we've had since before the foundation of the world.

Well, he says, "You are trophies of what I can do. You are trophies of the greatness of the wonders and the works of my grace, first of all, in that I directed my love and mercy toward you. I just chose, I'm going to throw love and mercy on those ones. Secondly, in that I have given you new life." Thirdly, you are a trophy of grace because he places you in his kingdom. Verse 6, he continues on and he says, "and He raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him," twice already, with him now, not just beside him but with him, "in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Now, that notion of being seated with him in the heavenly places pictures the abode of God or the kingdom of God and that's the meaning here. The truth is the kingdom is in you, it lives in your heart, but in Christ, you are in the kingdom already, I mean, the perfected kingdom of God. There is a sense in which Christ is in you but you're in him already. Talk about eternal security.

Now, this is the opposite of verse 2. Back up in verse 2, "you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." You were a child of Satan, a son of disobedience, but in Christ you have now been made a citizen of Christ in his heavenly kingdom. Colossians 1:13, "For He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." If you're one of God's children and have believed on him, you do not fully and legally even belong to planet earth. Your citizenship is in the heavenly kingdom. You dwell in the realms of God's kingdom. You are under its laws and in Christ you have title deed to all of its privileges and all of its

blessings. You even now possess the spirit of the new kingdom, the Holy Spirit that lives in you. It's the spirit of a new kingdom. It's a kingdom with higher purposes and higher values and higher convictions and higher ideals, and that's why when we get together as a church, we don't function like the world would say we ought to function. We don't do the things, we don't make priorities of things the world system makes priorities. Why? We are functioning according to a new citizenship and a new kingdom as revealed in his word. We are citizens of God's kingdom of grace and we are now free from the citizenship of the condemnation of law and we are free from the lethargy and pollution of sin and spiritual death. We are partakers of his Spirit, adopted into his family and have all the rights and the privileges of the sons of God both in this life and in the life to come, and it's our union with Christ that provides all of this.

You know, we don't realize now all that we have. It's kind of like we can see it a little bit. We mature in Christ and all the wonders and the glories of what Christ has wrought for us that cannot be altered or changed or thwarted or removed, it's like we see it a little bit. I thought about a little boy whose uncle was a great developer and he had gotten the contract to develop this awesome amusement park, and the uncle even before they started on it, gave his nephew a lifetime free pass into that amusement park. He's just a little boy and he is so fired up, so excited, so much so that he begged his mama to go down there to where the amusement park is going to be built and she said, "Son, there's not anything there. They haven't even started yet." "Yeah, but I want to go down there." So she drives him down there and sure enough, it's just rolling hills and trees here and there and some brush here and there. Nothing is there. A few weeks later, he's got to go back by it. This time, something was happening. There were some giant earth moving machines out there. He was just so excited. A few weeks later, he starts seeing a little bit more. All of a sudden they're pouring some concrete footings out there. He sees the big concrete trucks and the big hoses pumping concrete into all of those special foundations they are building out there. He's so excited. A month or two later, he makes his mom go back by and sure enough, some structures are going up, some things are being built, some steel is being erected. Then he is so excited he makes his mom take him back again and pretty soon he starts seeing colors and things are being painted and things are being put together, the fence has been erected, beautiful landscaping is starting to be laid. He's so very excited because finally the day has come and he is going to be the first one to get to go into the amusement park. Balloons are everywhere. People in costumes. Music is playing. Colors are everywhere. It's just the most exciting thing and he rushes in to enjoy it.

That's a little bit like what we are. We've been given a lifetime pass to this eternal kingdom but right now sometimes it just looks like a field and some trees. As we grow in Christ, it gets a little clearer and a little clearer and one day we're going to get to rush in and enjoy all that he has provided for us, and he even gave us a free eternal ticket to get in. But you're a citizen of it now. You see, it's almost like you are in the suburbs, not in the middle of the great city yet, you're in the suburbs but you're safely within the city limits. I mean, even now we're in there. We are unique and distinct from this world but we're not experiencing all of it that is yet to be for us. We are indeed vessels of grace in a lost and dying world. We are trophies of grace.

Paul writes to the church at Ephesus and says, "You are trophies of grace in that you are chosen, favored vessels he has directed his love and mercy toward. You are a trophy of grace because he has granted you spiritual life. You are trophies of grace because he has made you a citizen already of his eternal kingdom." And lastly, "You are a trophy of grace in order that you might bring him glory for all eternity." Can I remind you again, your salvation isn't primarily about you. Your salvation is not primarily about you missing hell. Your salvation is not even primarily about having your sins forgiven. Your salvation is foundationally about Christ being glorified for all he could do for worthless sinners like us.

Notice how he words it here in verse 7, "so that." Everything actually he said so far builds up to the first two words of verse 7, "so that," all of this is done. Imparted spiritual life, made you a citizen of his kingdom, made you the special object of his rich love and mercy so that, to the end, you could say, "in the ages to come," both all the rest of time and then for all eternity, "He might show." You are his show-off piece, "He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." What a thought here. F. F. Bruce said, "We are indeed the masterpiece of God's goodness." The surpassing riches of God was in great demonstration in him saving us and, once again, it was in where? It was in Christ Jesus in this vital union. That's the key point. There is a sense, my friend, since we are in Christ from before the foundation of the world, when he died, we died. When he arose, we arose. When he was seated, we were seated. And they are all in the past tense, by the way. This is not a prospect for us, in God's mind it has already taken place. As a matter of fact, think on this just for a moment. Don't get too sleepy on me yet. In chapter 1, verses 4 and 5, the apostle said in Christ we were chosen and predestined before we were born. Think on that. In Christ, you were chosen and predestined before you were born. In chapter 2, verse 6, in Christ, you are seated in heaven before you die. You were chosen and predestined in Christ before you were born, and you're seated in heaven in Christ before you die. He has taught both of those to us. Christ's resurrection and seating at the right hand of God are his vindication and exaltation and we share in these by the divine mercy and grace. All of these are bestowed on us in Christ and all to the end of God's glory.

As a matter of fact, look back at chapter 1, verse 6 again. All these glorious things he chose us, verse 4, "He predestined us to adoption as sons." Verse 6, "to the praise of the glory of His grace." Then down in verse 12, "to the end," that is, for this culminating purpose, "we who were the first to hope in Christ would be," what? "To the praise of His glory." Then verse 14 of chapter 1, the Spirit has been given to us "as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession," that's us, "to the praise of His glory." Then he gets on that theme again for the fourth time now in chapter 2, verse 7, so that he might "in all the ages to come show the surpassing riches of the grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Listen, God's glory is the vital center of the entire universe. It's not the health of your children. It's not the prosperity of your life. It's God. His glory is the vital center of the universe. He is being glorified even now in four key ways. Right now he is being glorified through creation. All that we see in creation glorifies God. He is being glorified



in recreation. Every time he births another one into life, every time he changes another one, he is doing his second recreation. Pretty soon the first creation will be gone and his only glory will be the second or the recreation. He is right now and increasingly so in the future being glorified through condemnation. Those in hell who do not know Christ are magnifying and glorifying the righteousness of God's justice and wrath that is rightfully against them in hell. He is glorified through creation, through recreation, through condemnation, and then finally he's glorified through glorification. In a new and even more full way or a fuller way, God will be glorified when we are present and glorified with him in heaven. There is a culmination to his glory, let's say to the manifestation of his glory that requires all of us and all of the saved of all the ages, of all the peoples, tongues, tribes and nations, to all be there, all perfected, all glorified, and then his glory will be in its climactic point, the point he has been yearning for and waiting for from all eternity, and it's all going to happen not because of man's wisdom or because of man's works but because we are trophies of grace.

I was an athlete 70, 80, 90 years ago and I think it was junior high, I played rec ball, basketball in the rec league, and I made the All-Stars and they gave me a trophy. I remember looking at that trophy, a little trophy, a little guy on a little stand, and we went to a restaurant there in my home town in Lawrenceburg, and I just thought I'd take the trophy in, and I put it on the table back in the corner, kind of, and my older brother said, "Why don't you put it out on the edge?" I said, "Well, I don't need anybody to see it." Well, why did I take it in the restaurant? I was proud of my All-Star trophy but do you know what? That trophy never did a thing. It expressed what I had already accomplished and that's what you are, God has taken you home as one of his trophies. "Look what I did. This one bears the glory and the righteousness of me, the Son of God. Look what I can do."

Now listen to me: you are saved, you are eternally secure, you are going to persevere, you are going to make it all the way home because Jesus is not going to be robbed of his glory. Every one the Father gives him, Jesus said, "I lost not one of them." Every one. Why? Because his glory is on the line. If you tell me, "My goodness and my merit and my achievement is on the line," then all of us are sunk. But Jesus is not going to be robbed of one tiny fragment of glory he deserves by saving all of his own and getting them all the way home. So the apostle wants you to know, he wants you to relish, he wants you to glory in, he wants you to meditate on that you are trophies of grace. And do you know what this church is? What every true church is? It's God's trophy case until he gets us all home to heaven. Now, all of God's people said? Amen.

Let's stand together and pray.