

God's Plan of Redemption - Grace

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Well, good morning. What a beautiful Lord's day it is, isn't it? Snow is beautiful, right?

Well, for the last two and a half months pastor Viars has been leading us to produce a plan for this plan to sort of accomplish as much for the Lord as possible. And the series was entitled, "Becoming a Person with a Plan." After all, our annual theme is... what is it? Planning to grow. We have been thinking about this theme from three different perspectives. So let's do a little audience participation. So there ... a little bit of help.

What is the first aspect of this that we have been looking at? Hint It is in your bulletin. What is the first thing we have been looking at? I can't hear you. Shout it out. Refining and discussing and {?} our {?} process. We want to get stronger at connecting with one another and hasn't it been exciting to see people being baptized, being connected in ABFs? And we want to continue and grow in that way this year.

How about number... that is number one. How about number two? What is number two? Faith West. Isn't exciting to see that building go up? If you go inside, the inside is like different every week. It just keeps changing and getting closer and closer to opening. So it is exciting and something we want to continue to grow in the ministries that are going to be taking place over there. That is number two.

What about number three? What was that? Whispers, whispers. Nice and loud. Strategic ministry planning. We want to work together as a church family to develop our next five year strategic ministry plan. Now the survey is a huge part of this, a huge part and I am going to talk more about that in a minute, but just be thinking about how big the survey is as we go into the next five year strategic plan.

So today we are going to be shifting gears. We are shifting gears from the plans that we are making to one of the glorious plans that God has made, a plan of redemption, God's plan of redemption. And I can't think of a better topic to discuss on Palm Sunday, can you? That is plan of redemption and tradition tells us that today, 2000 years ago Jesus entered Jerusalem with crowds yelling Hosanna to initiate the final steps to the cross, the place where redemption was made possible. So I am excited to launch this series, especially on a day like today with snow and everything, because it is great to be thinking about what the Lord planned for us.

Let's pray and just focus our hearts on God's plan of redemption.

Lord, I just want to take a moment and calm our hearts before you as we open your Word. As we are getting ready to consider your plans, what you plan, Lord, to redeem people to the person and work of Christ, Lord, I pray that we will just be amazed at your Word and that your Word will change us as we see what you have planned, and not only what you have planned, Lord, but what you carried out. Lord, help us to praise you as we study your Word today in Jesus' name. Amen.

So as we move on to a series of God's plan of redemption, I want to provide an analogy that explains what we as a church are going to do over the next 10 weeks.

So whenever a girl, especially a young girl gets engaged, correct me if I am wrong, but she spends a fair amount of time looking at her ring. Is that true? She gets the ring and it is like she can't take her eyes off of it. And she begins to investigate it from every angle, seeing how it glistens in different kind of light, inside light, outside light, halogen, incandescent. How does it look? And she is looking at it just comparing it and enjoying its beauty. She cleans it regularly, not wanting any dust, dirt or grime or lotion to dim its brightness or, you might even say its glory. And then she purposely shows it off for others. Isn't that right, how you just kind of show it up? Has that happened? How are you doing? It is good to see you.

But she purposely shows it off for others, because she wants to show the ring off. And she wants to have as many discussions as possible about the upcoming wedding. Is that right? It is an opportunity to discuss the excitement that that ring represents. That is what we are going to be doing with God's plan of redemption. We are going to be taking at it and investigating it from many different angles in order to learn all that we can from each one. We are going to enjoy, rejoice and get excited about every aspect.

It is our hope that you would be like way fired up about God's plan of redemption and you would want to engage in as many conversations as possible about it just like the giddy, engaged girl. We want to show off the plan of redemption to the world around us.

So are you ready to get into it? Ready to look at the beauty? Well, our first turn investigates God's plan of redemption from the perspective of grace. We are going to start with grace. So with that in mind, please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter two starting in verse one. That is on page 151 in the Bible in the chair in front of you.

Now I am going to read 2:1-10, but we are going to particularly focus on verses eight through 10. Paul says:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our

flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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 ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as 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 so that we would walk in them.¹

In light of that passage, I would like us to consider three responses to God's plan of redemption as seen through the perspective of grace. Number one, praise God for his amazing grace. Our first response is to praise God for his amazing grace. I mean, you use there:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.²

As I was reading this text I hope that you were thinking about the amazing grace of God and that praise and rejoicing is the proper response to this amazing grace. In fact, if you look in Ephesians in chapter one we see that the Bible explains the role of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. At the end of each description it says;

“...to the praise of the glory of His grace.”³

Look at verse six in chapter one.

“...to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”⁴

Look at verse 12.

“...to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”⁵

And then verse 14.

¹ Ephesians 2:1-10.

² Ephesians 2:8-9.

³ Ephesians 1:6; 12; 14.

⁴ Ephesians 1:6.

⁵ Ephesians 1:12.

“...who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”⁶

God’s grace is to result in praise. And this grace is so amazing, so praise worthy because God’s grace reached us when we were dead in our sins. Ephesians 2:1-3 describes the condition of us prior to conversion. We were without spiritual life. But something happened. God acted in verse four. He helped us see our condition and his grace intervened.

As you go back to the day before your salvation, as you think about that, realize that you were walking around, you were living life, you were breathing air, but you were in a state of being dead. You were a spiritual zombie, if you will. You were dead. That is how God describes us and God’s grace extends all the way into those who are dead in that condition. That is why his grace is amazing and praiseworthy. It reached us when we were dead. And this is one of the reasons we should be rejoicing and praising.

I mean, after all March madness started this weekend. Anybody a basketball fan? Don’t you get excited watching it coming down to the wire, who is going to win, what is going to happen? And we get all fired up about the second, you know, the last second shot to win the game. Well, if we can get fired up about that, surely we can get fired up about a God who is so gracious and showing his unmerited favor and giving us a benefit that we did not deserve and extended us all the way in our dead condition.

You think about the definition of grace. What is it? Grace is unmerited favor. It is getting a benefit or a gift that I did not deserve. It is God’s riches at Christ’s expense. Grace is unmerited favor and he gave that to us in our dead condition. Praise God. That should be our response. In fact, we should say that right now. Can we do that all at one time? One, two, three. Praise God. Yes. We might just do that again. So just prepare yourself to praise God over and over and over again, because that is the proper response to what he has done. Almost there. Just you wait for it. Just wait for it.

As you think about this, one of the applications points us to witnessing. Sometimes we talk to someone who might say, “You know, you don’t know what I have done. You don’t know what I have been involved in. You don’t know how bad I am and what I have done. There is no way that God would give me grace.”

I realize that some people commit more sins than others, but dead is still dead. Do you get that? It doesn’t matter... it doesn’t change the condition of a person how they died. They have a heart attack or cancer or a gunshot. They are still dead. So in that sense every human being is on level ground and it is so important to think about God’s amazing grace being amazing because at the foot of the cross the ground is level.

Consider Romans 5:20.

⁶ Ephesians 1:14.

“The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”⁷

Did you see the last part of that verse?

“...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”⁸

Here is the thing. When sin and grace meet what wins? Grace, every time. Sin and grace meet, grace wins. That is the way to be amazed at how powerful it is, how it always wins and abounds all the more even when sin increases. God’s grace is so amazing it results in praise, not only because it reaches into our dead condition, but also because of the result. God’s grace results in our salvation. Verse eight explains:

“For by grace you have been saved...”⁹

And that should remind us to ask a question. Saved from what? What have I been saved from?

When we were 10, you know, you are in grade school, it is awesome to get the right teacher, because you wanted to be saved from being in the class with the wicked witch of the west, right? You didn’t want the bad teacher, so you were saved from that. Or maybe when you are 18 and you are out driving and it is icy or snowy and there is no cars around and you lose control on the icy roads you might be rescued from an accident and you were just thankful. Or maybe you are selling a house in a tough market and you are able to sell it and you are saved from some financial hardship. All of those we really appreciate. But when we think about the grace of God, his plan of redemption, we are saved from God’s wrath. That is one of the reasons it is so amazing. God’s grace results in our salvation.

Consider Romans 1:18.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”¹⁰

This passage explains that before we knew grace and salvation we knew the wrath of God. It was revealed. It was upon us. The wrath that God poured out on Jesus at the cross was upon you and me until this amazing grace came. We get that. That is why four chapters later Paul exclaims in Romans 5:9:

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”¹¹

⁷ Romans 5:20.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ephesians 2:8.

¹⁰ Romans 1:18.

God's grace is so awesome that it results in my salvation. Instead of spending eternity away from Christ in the torment of hell, we have the privilege of being rescued from God's wrath that we rightly deserve. Can we say it again? One, two three. Praise God. You guys got it. That is wonderful. And we are going to say it more.

A third reason in this passage to get really excited about God's amazing grace is that it is an awesome gift. It is a gift and it is amazing and it is awesome. It is something to be praise worthy. The text describes the grace as a gift. And I realize it is March, but, do you know what? It is snowing out. And when it think about gifts and it is snowing out, sugar plums just start dancing in my head, right? Titus wanted to sing Christmas music, so this is not that far fetched when you think about it. But isn't it cool when you get an awesome gift at Christmas? I mean, I know that we are older now. But isn't it still cool when somebody gets you are really nice gift at Christmas? Or think about when you were younger. I remember being so excited. I was shaking gifts and I was trying to figure out what they were and sometimes I would even like take the tape off a little bit to try to peak, you know. I am confessing here. But I was so fired up about gifts, that would happen.

Or what about the kid, me, who would want the aunts and uncles to eat their food faster so we could get to the... you know, eat that bread. Come on, grandpa, eat that bread. Let's go open the gifts.

We get excited about gifts and gifts are wonderful. And this girl on this video I want to show you is apparently she got just what she asked for because she is totally stoked about it. So let's watch this video.

[off mic voice]

An iPod. It is an iPod. Her sisters are like, ok, we got it.

Christmas morning excitement is a lot of fun and there is certainly a place for kids to have a blast with their presents, but I would like to consider whether the awesome gift that God provides occupies our mental state in our excitement, if his grace reached our dead condition and made salvation possible, then is it part of what occupies our thoughts, our dreams our excitement? Do we rejoice in the awesome gift? Do we think about that gift during the stresses of our day? Does it encourage us and cause us to rejoice even when something in our life is not very encouraging at all?

In other words, does God's gift of grace give us perspective that allows us to say, "Praise God," even when the moments of life are hard?

I think the testimony of Scripture is that God's grace is truly amazing. He paints a picture of his amazing grace so that the right response is to praise him, not simply on Sunday morning in the church house, but Monday morning in your work place or Thursday

¹¹ Romans 5:9.

afternoon in you meeting or Friday evening with your family. God's grace is amazing. Let's say it one more time. One, two three. Praise God. That is the response as we meditate on his amazing grace, what it has done.

Now there is this little phrase in verse eight. It is very important at this point in the argument that the text says through faith. And you see that God's grace is received by faith. If we didn't talk about the is part of the passage it would be possible for someone to leave here thinking that God's plan of redemption seen through the eyes of grace extends to just every person on the planet. But the reality is this. A gift still has to be received. The girl in this video is pretty fired up, right? And there is no question that she is going to receive this gift. She is not giving it back. She was offered a gift and she took it and received it and rejoiced. That is not necessarily true for everyone regarding God's grace. They hear about their sin. They hear about the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ. And they want nothing to do with it. Sometimes people don't want it. Sometimes they don't think they need it or they are not interested in accepting it. It might be that for some of you here today you have never actually received God's grace. And if I could speak to you for just as moment I would love to shed some light on that.

The Scripture taught back in Ephesians two verse one that you are dead in your sins. A sin is anything that you do to violate God's standard, anything. Some folks think that God is using some kind of scale and just kind of measure out the good and the bad. Others admit their sin, but they fail to understand the significance of that sin before a holy God who will deal with it justly. I am appealing to you this morning to see you sin as God does, an offense to his holy nature. Repent of your sins. Trust Christ, his finished work on the cross, his death, his burial, his resurrection for your salvation is your only hope. That is what the text points us to. Praise him. But if we don't know him to be honest with our spiritual condition and our need for a Savior, today could be that day for you. Let the text speak to your heart.

As we look about at God's plan of redemption through the eyes of grace, our first response is praise and rejoicing. But let me apply this specifically in a few ways. I think that as we are rejoicing and praising God for his grace, there is just a few implications to that. If we praise him shouldn't that have an impact on how we live? Here is a couple of examples. If you have received amazing grace, something you don't deserve, right? Isn't it true that you should be showing people in your life grace as well?

Parents. Would you say that by your understanding of grace the way that you freely give it to your children grace is personified and shown? The way you interact with your children, is it full of grace? When they don't do well in school as you would like them to, when you see a touch of laziness come out in their life, in their heart, in the midst of correcting them, are you seeking to deal just with their laziness and not look at maybe your laziness to focus on grace?

Teachers, think about some of your students. I get that some kids abuse privileges and some kids need to learn hard lessons, but are you known for being gracious or are you known for being Attila the Hun incarnate? You know what I mean? What is the

perspective that you bring forth because of your understanding of God's amazing grace towards you?

We can illustrate this regarding our spouses. Does my acknowledgement of the amazing grace God extends to me extend to my spouse? Or are we like Jonah, really excited about God's grace towards us, but not excited about sharing with others?

Those who spend their mental energy thinking about God's grace in their life will also give grace to others. That is an implication of his amazing grace.

But the second response to the issue of God's grace is this. In addition to praising God, we need to rest in God, because his salvation cannot be earned. Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹²

The definition of grace is unmerited favor. So if God is getting grace, by definition we are not earning it, because he is giving it. But God's Word wants to make that point really clear because he knows us. He knows us. He wants to be very, very clear. He knows that there will be times that some of us would struggle wondering if we were worthy enough for God. And then stressing out about it. worrying about everything in life and God not being happy with us.

The phrase in the text includes that salvation is not of yourselves. I think it is really helpful to think about this phrase from an internal perspective. In other words, there is nothing about you that makes God like you. It doesn't matter whether you are smart, good looking, rich or poor. In other words, it doesn't matter. There is absolutely nothing about you, nothing that you bring to the table within yourselves that makes God obligated to do anything for you. It is not of yourselves. In fact, God tells us in his Word that he gives grace to the humble and opposes the proud.

So the more walls that we build, the more we compare ourselves and look at other people's problems, the more God lines up against us. That is why Jesus in his public ministry often looked for a child. You don't come 95 percent of the way in the kingdom with all these resources already.

When you had your first child or if you have observed someone who had a child, did they come with diapers, with clothes, with car seats? Did they bring their college investment portfolio with them saying, "I am ready for college"? No, they didn't. At least I didn't get that coupon. Did anyone else get that coupon? I didn't get that. They had nothing, nothing to offer, nothing to contribute. They were totally dependent. That is why salvation is not of yourselves. We are like children. We bring nothing to the table. Salvation is not of ourselves.

¹² Ephesians 2:8-9.

The text also says that salvation is not of works. I think it is also helpful to think about his phrase from an external perspective. In other words, that there is nothing that you could have done that obligates God to do something for you. Our world sometimes gives a lot of press, a lot of news, a lot of notoriety to people who do nice things and it is great. We will see in the next part of the passage that we are obligated to do such things, but it is almost as if people think that doing good things is enough. There is no possible way for you to work your way into heaven.

I grew up going to a Catholic school and I was actually an altar boy and there was always a focus on being a good person and about doing good works. If you have noticed, they have now elected a new pope. And as you listen, there is more discussion about the church and about works than there is about Jesus and a wholehearted return to a passionate and submissive relationship with Jesus.

My point is that many people believe that works are just good enough. I have just got to do enough good works. Friends, God wants to make this point crystal clear. You can never be good enough for God. You will never have a character within yourself that causes God to say to you and you will never be able to live in a way that produces enough good works externally for God to owe you anything ever. Isn't that freeing? Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that praiseworthy? Isn't that something to meditate on and delight in? It is freeing. There is nothing within me, nothing externally I have to do to possibly earn God's favor. It is freeing because as soon as I think of that I have the chance to earn it, I have now the chance to lose it. Instead, I can rest in God's security through salvation in Christ. I can rest.

The text continues that your salvation is from God so that our boast is in Jesus and not ourselves.

When Paul writes to the Church at Corinth he says that he will boast in only one thing. There is only one thing Paul says he wants to boast about and that is in the Lord. What this reminds us is that we are never good enough for God. We can never earn our salvation, nor can we ever lose it. There is no half in, half out. Everyone is either in the state of being in or being out. So if you have repented of your sins and trusted in the finished work of Jesus, then you can rest in him. You can rest, because you could not have earned it anyways.

Let's play out a few scenarios that I think this is particularly relevant. As you meditate on the gospel it has very real practical applications to our every day lives. Some Christians commit a series of very serious sins and they repent of them and they want to be close to the Lord. But they are afraid that the Lord does not want to be close to them. And they begin to doubt their salvation. This truth resonates in that moment. Salvation was not of me in the first place. I did not earn it. Therefore I could not lose it. I can rest in the promise that where sin abounds grace abounds all the more. In other words, my salvation is secure and I can live my life from a secure perspective of rest rather than uncertainty and worry and fear and distrust.

How about sometimes in life doesn't it feel like people are against you? Doesn't it just sometimes feel like people are against you? Everywhere you turn someone might be fussing at you for something. The temptation is just to be worried, stressed out about what everybody thinks about you. There might be some things that we might need to handle in our horizontal relationships. But there is rest available in our vertical relationship. God has resolved all the issues between him and us, between us, because of Christ. And God has done this work. And I can be secure in my relationship with Jesus and that allows me to rest even in the midst of chaos.

Sometimes we think too highly of ourselves like we have it all together. Any time someone wants to speak truth in our lives, boom, out comes the excuses or maybe being defensive. You are saved. Not so that you can think warm and fuzzy thoughts about yourself, but so that you can think awesome thoughts about the God who saved you.

Can we say it again? One, two, three. Praise God.

I have suggested that two of the right responses to God's plan of redemption as seen through the lens of grace is praising and rejoicing. We have something to celebrate. And, secondly, resting in God, because in the storms of life, our relationship with Jesus is fully secure. The final response we will consider this morning is to embrace the purpose of God's grace by doing good works.

Think about Ephesians 2:10. It says:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”¹³

The first word of verse 10 is really important. It says for. This indicates that God's plan of redemption has a purpose, even one that applies right now today. God has given us his grace that we would do good works. There is a purpose to all of this. It becomes our responsibility and our privilege to embrace this purpose. So the logic of the text is very important. It is not that my good works are the means by which I earn my salvation, rather it is God's grace is come to me. He has given it to me and now he has given me the purpose of doing good works.

For those of us who know Christ, the matter of our salvation has already been decided. That gives us freedom to serve, to love, to give. This same idea is communicated in 1 Peter which says in verse two or chapter two verse nine:

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”¹⁴

¹³ Ephesians 2:10.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 2:9.

But coming back to the language of the text we are saved because we are his workmanship. And we want to act accordingly. The language of this passage emphasizes that we are a new creation. God is redeeming his people to represent him and live for him the works he has laid out, because we are his workmanship. Something radical and powerful has happened. God has given us skills and abilities and talents to do good works. That is why Paul wrote to the Church of Rome, ultimately we have been designed to do them, but he wrote that:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.¹⁵

Ultimately God designed us to do good works.

One of the implications to point out is that we have a survey coming up. And God has gifted you in a number of ways to observe and use your gifts. And I want you to really encourage you to fill out that survey like everyone from the fifth grade on up. Everybody individually think about all the good work opportunities. It might be that you have some ideas that we have never thought before, that has never come up, never come on the table. Who knows? The best idea we have ever had as a church might have yet to be presented. So I want to challenge everybody to fill out that survey. What we are asking, ultimately, if you would take about a half an hour to prayerfully fill out the survey online. That will help us do all the results quickly. It will help us think about being a people who are ultimately the workmanship of God and how can we be used by God to fulfill our purpose of doing good works. Maybe you see a need inside the church. Maybe you see a need in our community that you can help us as a church plan to do good works.

So the survey is a golden opportunity consider what good works God wants us in the church family to accomplish. So please fill it out. Take the time even today, ultimately, to play to grow.

Matthew reminds us to let our light shine that they might see our good works and glorify God who is in heaven and, ultimately, because God designed us to do them. I mean, isn't it cool? We are designed to do good works as God's workmanship. We reflect him. We were created for a purpose. It sounds really good. It preaches really good on a Sunday. But it is not just a Sunday issue, is it? It is not just thinking about it here. As we vocalize in praising the Lord it is meaning your life might need to change in some areas. It means you are going to do certain things that may not necessarily be hard or difficult, but different. It means that your life revolves around what you are doing for the cause of Christ. Family time should move towards Jesus in thankfulness, in service, in stewardship and thought patterns. Work time has to change. It is not working for the weekend. It is not working for retirement. It is not working to pay the bills. It is working

¹⁵ Romans 6:12-13.

for Jesus so that I do good works to proclaim his excellencies. Even free time. How do we use that to worship rather than just doing me time?

I assume that your personal growth plan is one to evaluate ultimately how you are serving the Lord. And I want to challenge you to just consider doing good works and serving people in church. I mean doing good works often involves serving the weakest among us. Often times that is children. Pastor Viars has challenged us a number of times to consider serving in our children's ministries, a regular part of our weekly worship. In a couple of weeks we are going to be starting a campaign called serve their team. So I want you to be thinking about how you might use your gifts and abilities and the purpose God has saved you for in serving the church, possibly in our children's ministries, whether it be on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening or all the other ministry opportunities that are out there. That is coming up in a few weeks. I want you to be thinking about that.

So here is the point. We were designed to do good works. And God has saved us to do them. So we need to embrace the purpose of God's amazing grace.

So, friends, we have thought about God's plan of redemption through the lens of grace. I want you to take a few things away with you. So here is a few takeaways. One, praise God for his amazing grace. He reached down in our dead condition and brought about our salvation. Two, rest in God. Rest in God since the salvation is not dependent on you. You can't earn it. You can't keep it. You simply get to live in light of a secure relationship with Jesus. And, thirdly, embrace the purpose that you were created for, to do good works that he has laid out for you. Think about the passion play. Think about prayerfully evaluating our ministries in the survey. Think about serving in children's ministries. Think of all the skills that you have and the needs to build up the church in love.