

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES TITLE: JOHN 11:14-27 | SERMON TITLE: EASTER ANASTASIS****DAVE WAGNER**

What do you suppose grace is? Do you think it's a liquid? Or maybe a paste? Maybe it's a bag of powder with the words "Just add water" on the packaging? Do you think grace is a substance? When we ask God to give us grace, do you envision God actually handing you an object?

If I asked you for grace, what would I be asking for? Suppose I borrowed your car and crashed it. Then I said, "Come on man, give me grace." Would I be asking for a package with grace inside? No, I'd be asking for your favor and mercy on my bad behavior. So also is it with God.

Grace is not a substance. When God gives us grace he isn't handing us a substance, he is acting on our behalf in mercy and favor which we don't deserve. Or turn it around another way: In the end, God has no special substance to give us when he blesses us. In the end, all God really has to give us is himself.

Now this is actually a very practical consideration. Think for a moment: Aren't we in danger when we envision God's gifts ultimately as separable from himself? Wouldn't this make it possible to ultimately take the gifts while forgetting the giver?

You can be sure God won't allow that in the end. In the end, everyone who loves God's gifts but cares little for God will lose both God and his gifts. But everyone who loves God more than his gifts will finally receive both God's gifts and God himself. It certainly pays to live as a lover of God.

Well, let's get more specific. Happy Easter, by the way ☺ Did Jesus rise from the dead? Yes. And it turns out that Jesus' resurrection is a magnificent divine gift for his people. This is because in his resurrection, believers also rise to new life and are saved. Jesus' resurrection saves us, and so it is a wonderful gift from God.

But recall what I've just been saying about God's gifts. Ultimately, you really can't separate God from his gifts. More specifically, we can go further than just saying Jesus rose and raises believers from the dead. Jesus doesn't just *give* resurrection; Jesus is resurrection. And life.

He says, "I am the resurrection and the life." Martha says, "I know my brother will rise at the last day in the resurrection." Jesus says, "Martha, *I* am the resurrection." This is as if to say, "Martha, I'm glad your hope is in God's gift of resurrection which is coming on the last day, but I need to redirect your hope to the most proper object: Me."

Strictly speaking, Martha shouldn't hope in the resurrection for her brother's restoration to life; she should hope in Jesus himself, since the believer's resurrection is in Jesus, and even more, the believer's resurrection *is* Jesus! The reason any believer will rise on the last day is because Jesus rose, and because Jesus is resurrection.

And he's the life. So why is this? Why is it we will rise and how is it that our connection to Jesus ensures we will rise?

I suggest it's because he is the life. Do this for me: Imagine the principle we know as life. Think of a dead body. Something's missing. Now think of a living body. That missing thing is no longer missing. What is it? It's life. It is the animating, empowering principle which makes the difference between a dead You and a living You.

But what is it? What is life? Is it simply the beating of a heart and the firing of brain synapses? Genesis says God formed the man and then breathed into him, thus giving him life. According to Genesis the life in man is the breath of God.

But now we have Jesus telling us that *he* is life. Notice carefully: Jesus isn't just saying he gives life; he's saying he is life. What are we to make of it all?

I don't claim to understand it because the Bible doesn't tell me, and I'm a man who knows nothing but what the book says. But let me suggest at least this much: Life, whether physical or spiritual, is something God is upholding in the man at all times. Should God remove his hand the man must die. Should God withdraw far enough then the man must die. Life is not something man can have apart from God, physical or spiritual. I'm tempted to say life is nothing other than the operation of the presence of God upon a being, whether that being is purely physical, like an animal, purely spiritual, like an angel, or both spiritual and physical, like a man.

If this were so, then for God to be "near" is for the creature to live. For him to withdraw is for the creature to die. In this way the presence and nearness of God, in all possible ways, would be the creature's highest possible life and happiness, while the distance and absence of God would be the creature's lowest death and misery. In fact, if God withdrew far enough, I suppose the creature could not continue to exist, since his being is only upheld by God's own continual action.

Which brings us to another way to state the point: "Life" is the direct action of the Creator upon the creature, and for life to continue that action must be continual. "Life" is God's continual, direct action upon the creature. "Life" is something God does to a man.

And all of this requires us to affirm the idea we started with: Life is not something man can have apart from God. God is life. If you have God, you have life; if you don't have God, you don't have life; that is, you're dead. And Jesus is God, so Jesus also is life.

Now I asked above how our connection to Jesus ensures we will rise from the dead. If you've paid attention so far you understand how I answer this question. Jesus is life and Christians are people united to Jesus. Our union with Jesus begins before death and is not changed by death. So we're united to Jesus who is life, prior to death and straight through death. So, we possess life before death and straight through death. But this just means that though we die we continue experiencing life of some sort. We're talking about a life which physical death cannot affect.

Recall, Life is something God does to our body and our spirit. In physical death I suggest God stops doing that thing to our body, and so our body dies and disintegrates. But he doesn't stop doing that thing we call "Life" to our spirit. Thus our spirit continues to live though our body dies. We have eternal life and physical death can't touch it.

But there's more. God is not content for us all to be disembodied spirits floating in the clouds; that's not his original creational plan; disembodied spirits can't possess the Garden for which we were made, at least not the way God desires. And so at some point in the future God will again act upon our bodies to bring them to life; God is going to resurrect us. Here's how Jesus puts it again:

John 11:25-26 ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me ^awill never die.

Now here's a question for you: Is Jesus talking there about life after death or resurrection? V26 must be life after death because he speaks of "never dying," but of course almost all Christians will die physically. In v25 life seems at first to speak also of life after death since it is a life which occurs despite death, i.e. physical death. But maybe v25 is actually referring to physical resurrection; it's hard to say.

Either way we know that we will experience both life after death, and physical resurrection on the last day. Jesus said so earlier in chapter 5:

John 5:28-29 ²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for ^aan hour is coming, in which ^ball who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; ^athose who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.

Believers: You are all going to the grave. You will all die, everyone. And the Lord Jesus declares he will raise everyone of you out of the grave and into a resurrection of life. That life is eternal life, a life of blessedness in the presence of God, in a renewed heaven and earth. The Son of God will summon you, and like Lazarus, you will come forth.

But you notice there's a flipside in the text. Up to this point I've only been talking about believers living forever because they are connected to Christ. Actually, everyone is going to live forever, whether believer or not. Non-Christians also experience physical resurrection at the end of history, but it's nothing to write home about. Frankly, for non-Christians, it would be better for them if they'd stayed dead.

It would be better still if at death they had ceased to exist. Best of all would be if they had never been born.

Now sad to say, very few people see themselves in this category, as people on their way to damnation. Almost no one believes they are going to hell. But I assure you almost certainly at least some of the people in this room will rise unto judgment. So how do you know if that's you?

Just look at the description Jesus gives in the text. Those who did good rise to life, those who did evil rise to judgment. Period.

Now someone will object and say, "But Dave! No one ever does good!" Tell it to Jesus. According to Jesus, whom we all *claim* is our Lord and Teacher, some people are characterized as "those who do good." Not all are characterized as "those who do evil."

So, do you want to know which group you are in? It's easy enough: Are you characterized by good deeds or bad ones? Those who do good go to heaven; those who do evil go to hell.

Well, more specifically, what is good and bad? "Good" means believing Christ and obeying his teaching; "bad" means the reverse. Jesus is the standard which determines good and bad, and the Scriptures reveal that standard on every page from Genesis to Revelation.

So, we all live forever. For some of us that's a good thing.

Well, let's raise another objection. Perhaps some thoughtful person here is listening to all of this but they see a problem with what I've said. I've been trying to comfort God's people by showing them that Jesus has fixed the great problem we know as death. He's fixed it by giving us life after death, and resurrection on the last day.

But suppose someone responded this way: "I see that Jesus fixed the problem, and that seems great at first. But when we consider Jesus was in control of death entering the world in the first place, shouldn't we feel a little underwhelmed? After all, it kind of looks like the problem Jesus fixed is a problem which Jesus created."

So imagine your house is burning down and I rush in to save you from it; later on I happen to mention I'm the one who started the fire. Do you see me as a hero?

So let me say two things in response to this idea:

First, have you read Genesis 3? Do you know how the story goes? Death enters the world because of the choices and actions of man, not God. God doesn't introduce death. God doesn't sin. God doesn't *tempt* anyone to sin.

Not only this but God made necessary provision to protect Man against death. You know what that provision was? His word. God provided a word of instruction and warning to Adam to keep him safe from death, and if Adam had obeyed I wouldn't be preaching this sermon today. And you never would have been to a funeral.

Remember how the story goes? Who eats the fruit? God? Nope. Man all the way. Man, Man, Man. Man is the sinner. Man is the death-bringer. Man is the perpetrator. Man is the culprit. That's how the story goes.

So don't tell me God is responsible for death based on his sovereignty. In order for that to be true the Bible would have to teach "God is responsible for death based on his sovereignty". And it doesn't teach that. It teaches God is sovereign; it teaches man is responsible and heaven and hell are hanging on his actions. So stop making anti-biblical deductions. To hell with your deductions. Give me the pure word of God. I'll trust no man's deductions! The first part to my answer is that Genesis 3 says man is responsible for death, not God; and I believe Genesis 3.

And here's the second part:

John 11:11-15 ¹¹ This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our ^afriend Lazarus ^bhas fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." ¹² The disciples then said to Him, "Lord,

if he has fallen asleep, he will ¹recover." ¹³ Now ^aJesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of ¹literal sleep. ¹⁴ So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe;

I wonder if you caught it. This text has something extremely interesting in it. Jesus delayed so long going to Lazarus that Lazarus died and Jesus says he's glad about that!

Why is he glad? So that the disciples may believe.

Recall our question: Isn't Jesus just fixing a problem which he created? He fixes death but he is responsible for bringing in death. I already said he is not responsible, but notice we may have another piece of the answer here in v15.

Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death by setting out to Bethany earlier than he did; but Jesus purposely delayed two days. Folks, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Jesus wanted Lazarus to die!

But why would he want that? Does Jesus like death? Not at all; the text goes on to describe Jesus weeping over Lazarus' death and even being deeply angered by it all. Jesus hates death with a passion we will never understand. So why did he want Lazarus to die?

He tells us: So that the disciples may believe.

Here's what I think he's saying: If Jesus had set out as soon as he heard Lazarus was seriously ill, he could have healed his sickness and prevented the death. But of course that would be a lesser demonstration of power than if Jesus actually raised him from the dead. The greater demonstration of power would result in the disciples having greater insight into the person of Christ, and thus greater faith. He was glad Lazarus had died so that, once Jesus raised him, the disciples would believe in Jesus.

But we're asking why Jesus ever let death enter in the first place. We saw Adam brought death, not God. Now I suggest we are seeing that Jesus has let things get so bad, in terms of our world of death, to afford opportunity to display greater power. And his reason for doing this is to maximize his people's faith in him. God wants you to know who he is. And now that death has entered the world, the best way to do that is to let death, and sin and evil, grow to hideous proportions, so that when he slays the dragon we will marvel all the more. The deeper and more disastrous the death, the greater and more glorious the resurrection.

The next time you feel perplexed about why God lets the world get so bad, I want you to meditate on John 11.15 and see whether this answer might not persuade you.

I've said all I want to say, save one thing. I just want to finish by asking you the question Jesus asked Martha: Do you believe this?

Jesus tells you plainly that death is coming for you to wreck your body and brain and organs and life. Death is going to steal your family from you. It's going to interrupt all your plans for good. It doesn't care about your five year plan. It's going to pulverize your five year plan. But Jesus says if you believe in him you will live even if you die; and everyone who believes in him will never die. Do you believe this?

Here's a test for how well you are believing this: How worldly are you? How settled are you in this life? Having a good time, are you? When Jesus promises resurrection do you secretly wish you could go on in this world forever? The people of God believe Jesus; we are looking for the heavenly country, for the city which has foundations. I want this bad, old world to end in a hurry. I'm ready for The Promised Land.

Here's another test: Does the thought of death drown you in sorrow? Does it horrify you? Are you frightened whether maybe after all death will be the end for you? You lay in the hospital bed and begin to lose consciousness. Everything goes black and you remember no more forever. There is no more You.

Let's call that the Atheistic Nightmare. Jesus smashed that nightmare! He put a knife in it. He dropped it off a cliff. He showed it no mercy. "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die!" Do you believe this?! People of God: Believe it and have perfect peace. Stand still on the shore of the Red Sea and be silent. Watch as Jehovah fights for you. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again, forever. Your enemy death, which you feel coming for you, one day you'll never see again. Jesus is going to baptize death the way they used to baptize baptists in the sixteenth century; they drowned them. Jesus is going to hold death under until he stops moving, and we'll see him no more. Jesus will kill death. In fact, he already has.