

God's Amazing Grace
Ephesians 1:1-2 (08/13/17)
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Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:1-2

Romans and Ephesians are colossal works of God-breathed literature. Romans is the king of the epistles, strong with righteousness. Ephesians is the queen, beautiful and rich with grace. We studied through Ephesians back in 1993 when we met at the Evansville Day School. I've wanted to preach through it again before this old soldier fades away.

So here we are, launching a year-long feast on the riches of God's amazing grace in this letter. Ephesians was John Calvin's favorite book of the Bible. He preached 48 sermons on it and they are available today. As John Knox lay dying, he had his young wife Margaret read to him from these sermons. Preachers and scholars have outdone themselves describing Ephesians: the crown and climax, the quintessence of Paul's theology. To me it is the cream of all biblical revelation. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Whoever would see Christianity in one treatise, let him 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' the Epistle to the Ephesians."

When my wife and I were saved, a man named Glenn Rosenberger taught Ephesians to a group of us young believers in his living room. He just talked us through this epistle and we sat in awe as we learned about the amazing grace of God. If you are a new believer, this is a wonderful place to feed. If you've walked with God for many years, you will still be amazed as you take in these words. Read through the entire book in one sitting, then jot down everything God has done for you in chapter one. You will be blessed.

WEALTH, WALK, AND WARFARE

First, let's get an aerial view of the six chapters in this letter. Back in the early days of my Christian faith, I read Watchman Nee's little book on Ephesians. He outlined Ephesians as "Sit, walk, and stand." I like that. But I like the old "Wealth, Walk, and Warfare" outline even better.

WEALTH - Ephesians 1 opens to us the wealth of God's glorious and sovereign grace coming out of eternity past, down to us from the Father, through His Son, and by His Spirit.

Chapter two takes us into our spiritual cemetery, makes us alive by God's gift of grace through faith alone, and makes us part of the church of Christ.

Chapter three ends with the most incredible life-changing assurance of the power and love of God for His people (vss 14-21). He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think! People, that's incredible! When you feel miserable, weak, depressed, or tempted, go there with your spiritual knife and fork and cut into those last verses! This is your wealth. There isn't one exhortation or command in all three chapters.

WALK - With all this wealth in your spiritual bank account, Ephesians 4-5 say, "Okay, now walk like a child of God!" Walk in these five ways: in unity, in truth, in love, in light, and in wisdom. And there is so much more.

WARFARE – In case you think this Christian life is a cake walk, Ephesians 6 lays out the fact that you face the greatest enemy this universe knows anything about. He is worse than Kim Jong-un, Hitler, or Timur the Lame. The devil and all his God-hating demons hate you with a hellish hatred. They can't touch your wealth in Christ, but they can mess up your walk by getting you all full of yourself and distracting you from how glorious your salvation is. They've got those fiery darts, or in today's language those missiles,

aimed to destroy you. That's why you need to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might. And the great thing is this; God's power is resurrection power that conquers all your foes!

Wealth, walk, and warfare!

GOD WROTE THIS LETTER FOR YOU!

Now put yourself in the introduction to this letter in verses 1-2. Paul wrote this to the Ephesians, but more importantly, God wrote this to you. This letter is God-breathed, living, and powerful! Open your heart to the words and sense its life-changing power as we take it in.

First, God used Paul to write this letter to you. Paul was a rabid anti-Christian rabbi who drug Christians out of their homes to persecute them. He was on his way to Damascus and hell-bent on stopping this Christian heresy when suddenly Christ stopped him in his tracks and turned this hell-bound sinner into a heaven-bound saint. Talk about what the power of the gospel can do in a life! The God who spoke the universe into existence out of nothing can totally and completely transform any life. That's the power of the gospel of Christ. Has that power penetrated into your heart? Are you a new creation? If you are, it is purely because of God's sovereign grace.

Notice Paul's title. He was something none of us can be – an apostle of Christ. He was called to be a personal representative to God's people in the churches and given special privileges and powers we don't have. There are no apostles today. If you meet one, I assure you he's a false apostle or very misguided.

Paul wrote this letter when he was in trouble. Where was Paul? What luxurious resort was he hanging out in? What palace or mansion was his living quarters? He was writing this from Rome, in prison. He's in the will of God, but he's in prison, around AD 60. Ten years earlier he had spent about three years in Ephesus (you can read about it in Acts 19), but now he is a prisoner of Jesus Christ in Rome.

Do you think he is discouraged or feels like God has forgotten him? Isn't that how we feel when trouble comes our way? God had His reasons for locking up Paul in prison, including witnessing to many of Caesar's household. Every new shift of guards got an earful of gospel from this little Christ-loving Jew. He said his chains in the gospel encouraged other believers to be bold.

God put Paul in that prison to write four of the most encouraging letters in your Bible, known as the prison epistles. Ephesians is rich with glorious, sovereign grace. Philippians is all about rejoicing when trouble comes your way. Colossians is full of Jesus Christ as the head of the church. And Philemon is that little letter about reconciliation between two men in the church.

Paul was hurting but rejoicing and writes letters filled with the glory and grace of God. He knew God had not forsaken him in this prison. He knew God controlled his situation and would use him for His glory. You may have some trouble in your life. Know and remember that God is in it and will use it for His glory and your good, even if you don't understand how right now. It doesn't matter what your circumstances are or how deep your trouble, if you belong to God, you are super-blessed. Maybe your world is crumbling, your marriage isn't so hot, your husband is frankly not nearly what you thought he'd be, your kids are crazy, your bank account is drained, your investments evaporated overnight, or you're dealing with cancer. If you are God's child, you are right there with Paul in Christ, in the will of God. So keep your eyes open for how God is using your trouble to grow you or those around you to become more like His Son.

Paul is writing to people just like you and me. They may have been citizens of Ephesus. However, some of the older manuscripts don't include "in Ephesus," so some scholars think this was a circular letter to be passed and read from church to church. But we'll go with the recipients being the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was notorious for its wealth and indulgence. Its population was about 250,000 and was the home of the temple of Artemis, one of the ancient wonders of the world. It was also known as the temple of Diana which we read about in Acts 19. Maclaren called it "Satan's very headquarters." That's where they burned all those books on magic in Acts 19:19.

You are a saint and believer in Christ. Now, what's important is not what city these believers lived in, but that they were saints and believers in Jesus Christ. You may live in Evansville, Chandler, Boonville, Lynnville, Haubstadt, Newburgh, Mount Vernon, Folsomville, or Petersburg. The real issue is, are you in Jesus Christ? And if you are in Christ, you are a saint and faithful. "To the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus (vs. 1b).

What's a saint? "If anyone was, my grandmother was. If anyone deserved heaven, it was she!" Wrong! Again, are you a saint? "I'm not that holy!" Wrong! Paul wasn't writing to an elite class of believers here. A saint is not a special class of Christian. In the early days of the church some misguided zealots called pillar saints sat on poles to try to get holier and closer to heaven. Poles ranged from twenty to sixty feet high, and some of these poor fellows stayed up there for up to sixty years! Some died up there. Sitting on a pole does not make anyone a saint. Saints are not monks who try to escape the world behind the walls of a monastery. Guess what. Their sinful flesh followed them. Saints are not people like the Amish who try to avoid contact with the world in their clans and strange customs and ways. And saints are not those people whom the Roman Catholic church canonizes because they lived a virtuous life and performed a miracle or two.

What's a saint? It is a believer in Jesus Christ. The word saint means a "set apart" one. And the only way you are set apart in Christ is to believe in Christ. Faithful here doesn't mean reliable or trustworthy. It means someone who has believed in Christ. Verse 13 puts your believing in the past – "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation (you heard the gospel)--having also believed (you believed the message), you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." So if you are a believer in Christ, you've understood who Christ is, what He came to do for sinners, you've repented of going your own way and trusted in Jesus Christ to save you at some point in your life, you are a saint! I'm a saint. I'm Saint Ernie. When you came to Christ, the Holy Spirit took you out of your old identity in Adam and baptized or placed you into Christ. You are set apart in Christ. And that happened through your faith alone in Christ alone. So God is writing this book of Ephesians to you, to saint Paul, and saint Colton and saint Jesse.

Finally, you are rich with grace and peace. Let's conclude with the amazing grace that comes from God through Jesus Christ, redeeming us and bringing peace to our hearts: "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grasp this amazing grace of God and let your hearts melt down with its glory and greatness and sweetness and awesomeness! God pours His sovereign grace into your lives. You may ask, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this grace from God?" That's just the thing, you did absolutely nothing. In fact, you and I are the last people on earth to deserve God's blessing. Grace means God is giving you the very opposite of what you deserve. If there is one truth I want you to take with you today, it is this. You are saved by grace alone, grace alone, grace alone! And it is an amazing, sovereign, glorious grace from God the Father. He is the source of grace, and like the fountain of His love, that grace flows to sinner through His Son Jesus Christ. These words of a hymn capture it perfectly, "O the love that drew salvation's plan, oh the grace that brought it down to man!" And everyone knows John Newton's great hymn Amazing Grace, which came from his own amazing conversion as a profane slave trader about to drown in a storm on the ship Greyhound. Even for such a wretch as he was, God reached down and scooped him up by that amazing grace.

Why is grace not as amazing as it should be to our souls? Sadly, we think so highly of ourselves, we've no reason to be amazed by God's grace. We wear T-Shirts saying "Am I Not Amazing?" If only we would look at God in all his glory and holiness and then see the reality of our sinful, rebellious hearts, our self-worship, our spitting in the face of God with our ugly thoughts, words, and actions. If we saw that holy God loving us and how by grace alone He planned to save us and then accomplished that salvation, we'd be amazed.

Grace is not amazing to us because we are so full of this world. We are greedy for stuff and pleasure and we just don't think much about God. We push truth out of our minds and therefore don't see that we deserve His wrath. We don't acknowledge that God would be perfectly just to pass us by and leave us in our sin. If we only could drop down into that hell for a little while where the rich man was "in his torment," knowing that is what we deserve. And if not for God's amazing grace, we would be there not just for a day

or decade or century or millennium, but forever and ever. As Thomas Watson said, "That word 'ever' breaks the heart!"

And yet, here we are, saints and believers in Jesus, super-blessed by this super-rich grace of God that brought us to Christ, brought us salvation, made us new creations. "Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus, deeper than the mighty rolling sea, higher than the mountain, sparkling like a fountain, all-sufficient grace for even me. Broader than the scope of my transgressions, greater far than all my sin and shame; O magnify the precious name of Jesus praise His name!"

All God does for His people in Christ He does by grace alone. Let's preview three verses coming up: verse 6 – "To the praise of the glory of His grace;" verse 7 – "according to the riches of His grace;" and chapter 2, verse 7, "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus!" The glory, the riches, the surpassing riches of His grace to us! Grace, grace, grace! This is amazing grace.

Next Monday God is going to treat our part of the world to a total solar eclipse. One person described it as "a quirk of cosmic geometry, that the moon would hide the sun." Many folks are planning to run to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, or wherever the path is, to see this amazing phenomenon. One member of an astronomical society described its effect on people like this, "It brings people to tears. It makes people's jaw drop open." And well it should.

But let me tell you, if we grasped the reality of God's infinite, matchless, measureless, amazing grace to us sinners in Jesus, our hearts would melt into tears of love and we would "stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder why He should love us, sinners, condemned, unclean." O how wonderful, oh how marvelous is God's sovereign grace to every one of His children!

SO WHAT? This week, read through Ephesians in one sitting. Then go through chapter one and jot down everything it says that God has done for you. Then thank God for His amazing grace. You'll be amazed.