

REJOICE! GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Ephesians 2:4-7 | Fourth Sunday in Lent | March 15, 2015

It is by grace you have been saved.

Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Do you ever come down with a case of the blahs? You know, you just kind of look at everything and say, “Meh.” Same old, same old. You get up in the same old house. You trudge to the same old job. You come home and eat the same old food, watch the same old TV shows, and climb into the same old bed. Blah.

It’s amazing how much just a little change can help. Same old house? Change around the furniture, or slap on a coat of paint. Same old food? Try a new recipe. Add some hot sauce. Same old TV shows? Get an old movie from the library or – even better yet – a book. For months we’ve had the same old weather – cold and grey. Isn’t it amazing how a little sunshine and warm air can totally change your attitude?

I want to talk to you about change this morning. This change does a lot more than chase away the blahs. It chases away sin and death, Satan and hell. This morning we have reason to REJOICE! GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING. Because of grace we are alive in Christ. Because of grace we have heaven. Because of grace we are able to bring glory to God.

I. We are Alive in Christ

Paul certainly would have liked to change his surroundings. He was under house arrest in Rome, in chains for preaching the

gospel. But no prison could take away that freedom Christ brings. Paul writes:

Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

In the classic movie *The Princess Bride* (one of my personal favorites) the hero Westley is killed by the evil prince Humperdinck. But we find out that he’s not really dead. He’s just “mostly dead.” Miracle Max is able to bring him back to life with a chocolate coated pill, so that he can save the princess, and live happily ever after. Paul tells us that we were **dead in transgressions**. Not sort of dead. Not a little dead. Not even mostly dead. Dead. Dead as doornails. Spiritual corpses. Not a single spark of life in us.

One my professors worked at a funeral home to pay for his schooling. One of his jobs was to go out and pick up the bodies of those who had died. Doing that job taught him the true meaning of the term “dead weight.” A dead body can’t help you as you lift it off the bed and put it in the hearse. It lacks that ability. It lacks strength. It lacks life. It’s dead.

That is our natural spiritual condition. We were born with the sin we inherited from our parents and, therefore, we were born spiritually dead. Like every corpse we had

no ability to do anything, least of all to save ourselves. We lacked even the desire to be saved. Left on our own, our spiritual death could only lead to eternal death.

Miracle Max's chocolate coated pill can't fix this. It took the miracle of grace. Early on we learned that grace is God's undeserved love for sinners. In love that we can't earn God sent his one and only Son, Jesus. In love that we didn't merit, Jesus fulfilled the law that we couldn't fulfill. He obeyed perfectly in our place. In love that we didn't deserve, Jesus paid the debt that we couldn't pay. He was nailed to a cross and forsaken by his Father to atone for all of our sins. In love that is unlike any other, Jesus broke out of death's prison on the third day. The Father raised him to life and victory.

We have been raised too. Through the gospel, the good news, God has raised us poor dead people. He has raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life. In Baptism we were buried with Christ and raised to the new life of faith in him. Through Word and Supper the Spirit sustains and grows that faith in Jesus. Through that faith we receive every blessing that Jesus won for us. We are God's forgiven children, the heirs of eternal life. No wonder Paul describes God as "rich in mercy." In mercy, God brought us from death to life. We are alive in Christ! Rejoice! God's grace has changed everything!

II. We Have Heaven

Paul tells us about another change: **God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ**

Jesus. What's Paul talking about here? He almost seems to suggest that we are already in heaven. Look around you. This church is beautiful, but it's not perfect. In a little while you'll go home. You love your home. It's where you are most comfortable, but the dirty dishes, dusty shelves, dog hair and piles of laundry hardly make it feel heavenly. And look at our world: violence and hatred, death and destruction around every corner. Sure doesn't seem very heavenly. What does Paul mean that God has **seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus?**

Maybe this will help. A young boy snooped around and found his Christmas presents, hidden by his parents. Though they were already wrapped, one package was in a shape that he recognized, clearly the golf clubs that he had asked for. His parents were gone, so he walked around the house with that package, pretending to play the greatest round in the history of golf. Birdie after birdie. Even a hole in one. The point is this: Even though he couldn't enjoy them fully until Christmas morning, the boy knew that those clubs were for him. He was filled with joy in that knowledge.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, God sees us as already in heaven. That's why Paul speaks as if we had already gone there. Heaven is so certain for every believer in Jesus that we can enjoy it right now. It's hours. In Christ, it's a done deal. Heaven is your home. Right now.

Think of how that wonderful thought can

change your outlook on life. Having a bad day? Heaven is your home. Mourning the loss of someone dear? Heaven is your home. Dealing with chronic pain? Heaven is your home. Struggling with your sinful nature? Heaven is your home. Depressed by life's troubles? Heaven is your home. Disappointed with how your life is turning out? Heaven is your home. We deserve hell, but because of God's grace in Christ, heaven is our home. Rejoice! Grace changes everything.

III. We Bring Glory to God

And as if our heavenly inheritance in Christ wasn't enough reason to rejoice, listen to this: **And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.** Once again, God's riches are mentioned. Our God is the Bill Gates of grace and mercy. And he wants the world to know it. This is the God **who wants all people to be saved** (1 Timothy 2:4). How does God show the incomparable riches of his grace to the world he wants to save? The answer may surprise you. He does it through us.

In ancient times, kings who fought and won battles would set up a pillar for each victory. The story of the battle would be inscribed on that pillar. These pillars brought glory to the king. They showed his greatness to his subjects and struck fear in the hearts of his foes.

God has inscribed the story of his

victories, not on stone pillars, but on each one of us. We each carry the mark of victory in Christ. God has inscribed the story of his love on our lives. We are walking, talking, living, breathing billboards advertising the grace and mercy of a God, who is rich in both. God shows the world the incomparable riches of his grace in Christ through us.

Yup. Us. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that surprising? We have the privilege of showing God's grace to the world both in what we say and how we live. Jesus gave us our marching orders: **"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation"** (Mark 16:15). It is our job and our joy to share simple but life-saving message of the gospel: **"God so loved the world."** It is our privilege to invite friends and neighbors to hear more about this good news with us. Easter gives us a wonderful "excuse" to do this. This Easter once again we will be sending out over 3,000 invitations to our community to come and hear the good news of the risen Savior. That's good, but a personal invitation can make all the difference. For this reason we have made up some little business-card-sized Easter invitations (available on counter in lobby). Please use them. Hand one to a neighbor. Put one in a card and send it to a dear friend. Take a stack for your place of business. Do everything you can to get the word out about Jesus.

Our gospel words and Easter invitations aren't the only way that God shows the incomparable riches of his grace through us. You may remember something else

Jesus said: **“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”**

(Matthew 5:16). As I said, we are walking, talking billboards. We bear the name of Christ. The way we live says a lot to people about the Savior we serve. After all, **we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

God's grace has turned us into good works machines. In thanks for his love we are eager to serve him by doing what is good. And when we do, we show the incomparable riches of his grace. We show the impact of Jesus on our lives.

And what an impact our lives can have on the lives of those who don't know Jesus! When they see us enduring hardship, suffering and loss with prayer and confidence in the Lord's promises. When they watch us care for one another during difficult times. When they are on the receiving end of our acts of Christian kindness and generosity. When they see our joy in worship and Bible study and service. When they hear us talk positively about our church and our brothers and sisters in Christ. These things have an impact. They say: *These people are different, special. They're God must be pretty special too.*

Again, none of this happens because we're so great, but because our God is. My friends, rejoice! Much better than a coat of paint, far better than a new recipe, infinitely better than bright sunshine, God's Grace in Christ changes everything. To him alone be all the glory! Amen.