



## A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

But God...

Ephesians 2:1-10

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 50:15**...When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, **"It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."** <sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, **"Your father gave this command before he died, <sup>17</sup> 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father."** Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup> His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, **"Behold, we are your servants."** <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, **"Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."** Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:1**...And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This is the Word of God.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

One month ago today Beverly and I were in St. Andrews. Scotland and it was a beautiful day. The summer sun was bright, but the air blowing in from the blue-green sea to our left was cool to our skin. We walked north in the sunshine along the cobblestone street that followed the cliffs along the sea. And then the sun began to be filtered through the overhanging trees so that there were great patches of sunlight set off by greater patches of shadow. In the narrow strip to our left between the cobblestone street and the cliffs falling down to the sea, there were four or five older buildings almost all associated with St. Andrews University. There were a number of university students milling about, making their way to classes, or running errands, or simply out walking and enjoying the exquisite weather.

That was when I looked up and saw a tower looming through the overhanging trees to my right. I knew instantly what it was. I knew what it was although I had never actually seen it before. I knew it was the tower at St. Salvator College. I knew it because of the way it had been described in so many of the stories of the Reformation I have read along the way.

St. Salvator is just one of the many colleges that make up St. Andrews University. In Reformation days, it was the principal Catholic college at St. Andrews University.

And there it was just one street over.

To be precise, we were at the back of the college. The main entrance and the tower were facing the next street over and the college itself was between the street we were on and the tower to our right. The body of the campus between the two streets was marked off by a large, grassy quadrangle closed in by a rock wall some eight or nine feet high. There was a cross street that ran alongside the wall so we cut across to get to the front entrance and the tower. There were occasional iron gates in the wall that allowed us to look in on the manicured lawn inside the quadrangle. It looked like an enormous putting green. Before we reached the end of the crossover street we found one of the gates opened to the quadrangle and we walked through that gate and back out through the main gate of the college that opened up onto North Street.

And there it was.

There was the thing that drew me to Scotland...the thing that has captivated my thinking and my imagination for some fifteen or twenty years. It wasn't the tower itself. No, it was something much simpler than that. It was two letters spelled out in the cobblestone sidewalk right there some fifteen or twenty feet in front of the main entrance directly under the tower.

The two letters spelled out in stones in the pavement were, PH. The two letters stand for Patrick Hamilton.

Patrick Hamilton was the first martyr of the Reformation in Scotland. He was born into nobility. And through his mother, he was directly related to the King of Scotland. Hamilton was a brilliant student, and a marvelous musician. Because of his academic bent and ability, Hamilton was sent off as a teenager to study in Paris.

It was in Paris that he first became familiar with the teaching of Martin Luther. There he heard the gospel of free grace for the first time in his life. Hamilton was overwhelmed by the gospel. He was so enthralled that he travelled to Germany and met Martin Luther himself and Philip Melanchthon who shared the depths of the beauty of the gospel with Hamilton in such a compelling way that it set his heart on fire.

Hamilton decided to take the gospel of free grace back to Scotland. He had come to see that the Bible taught that sinners are saved not just by grace, but by grace alone. Now that might come as a bit of a shock to you. I suspect many of you thought that the medieval church taught salvation by works, but they would have never, ever put it quite that way.

Listen for a moment to how Hugh Palmer, rector at All Souls in London explains the situation.

Everyone believed you were saved by grace but the medieval church thought of the gospel in terms of grace plus. The church taught sinners are saved by grace, of course. It was ninety to ninety-five percent down to God but...but...surely we

have to do something. So they put it like this, "God won't deny his grace to those who do their best. God won't deny his grace to those who do their best."<sup>1</sup> Now when you put it like that you see what you've got.. *You've got grace plus doing your best. Or as the Americans like to say, "God helps those who help themselves."*

But biblical grace isn't like that at all. *It refers rather to God's kindness. So when we say we are saved by grace alone...we mean we are saved by God's kindness alone. You see God's grace speaks of love but not just any old love and certainly not love for the lovable.*

*Rather it speaks of a love that is unearned and undeserved.*

Grace speaks of a direction of travel if you like. And if we were going to picture it in a diagram it would be something as simple as this: you'd see a one way direction of travel from God to us. However unworthy, undeserving, unmerited...grace is the love that reaches down to rescue us in our sin and it provides what we cannot.

Seems a wonderful idea, doesn't it? But actually our every instinct rebels against it. We can't imagine...we simply do not want to imagine ourselves contributing nothing. We just find it hard to believe that good could ever come without merit.<sup>2</sup>

There is a part of us that believes we must contribute something. So we wind up thinking in terms of that wonderful song Julie Andrews sings in the *Sound of Music* with Christopher Plummer when Captain Von Trapp professes his love for her. Do you remember the words? Here they are. Don't worry I'm not going to sing it.

*Nothing comes from nothing  
Nothing ever could  
So somewhere in my youth or childhood  
I must have done something good.  
For here you are, standing there loving me,  
Whether or not you should,  
So somewhere in my youth or childhood  
I must have done something good.*<sup>3</sup>

It's very sweet isn't it? It even rhymes. It's just not grace.<sup>4</sup> It's certainly not free grace.

It's not the free grace that drew Patrick Hamilton back to Scotland and to St. Andrews anxious to preach the gospel to all those that would listen.

It's not the free grace that scared Archbishop James Beaton so badly that he decided Hamilton not only had to die but that he needed to die such a dreadful death that every other sinner in Scotland would be to afraid to embrace his doctrine.

So Beaton lured Patrick Hamilton to St. Salvator's on the pretext of wanting to debate the doctrine of free grace. It was February 29, 1528. When Hamilton arrived, Beaton had him arrested immediately. Hamilton was arrested, tried, sentenced, and burned at the stake alive all on the same day. Beaton thought it important to act quickly before anyone knew what was happening or could muster any sort of armed resistance to rescue him.

Hamilton was tied to a stake and burned alive just fifteen or twenty feet in front of the main entrance to St. Salvator College. I suppose Beaton had him burned there as a warning to other students...a warning they could not help but walk by, and see or smell.

But the day was cold and overcast and damp and it took Hamilton's executioners a long time to get the fire going properly. One biographer says it took Hamilton six hours to die. Still, everyone that observed his death was moved by Hamilton's courage, and resolve.<sup>5</sup> Hamilton was only twenty-four years old.

All that marks the spot today are the letters PH spelled out in the cobblestones on the sidewalk outside St. Salvator College in St. Andrews, Scotland.

Now what was it that grabbed Patrick Hamilton by the soul in such a way that he was willing to give up the prospects of a long and comfortable life as a Scottish nobleman. It wasn't the prospect of worldly riches or success. It was the gospel of free grace. It was the fact that sinners are not just saved by grace, but rather are saved by grace alone.

Now where is that idea taught in the Bible? I would say it is taught all the way through the Bible but nowhere more clearly than in the passage we have before us this morning in Ephesians 2:1-10.

Now the best way to understand the book of Ephesians is to divide it into two parts. The first part of the book explains what God has done in redeeming a people to himself. In the first three chapters, Paul explains that God has redeemed both Jews and Gentiles and transformed them together into one new people, the church. In the second half of Ephesians, chapters four through six, Paul goes on to explain how these transformed believers how to interact with one another. That is, Paul explains how believers ought to live in light of what God has done in Christ.

Obviously, Ephesians 2:1-10 is part of the first half of the book explaining what God has accomplished for us in Christ. It is also remarkable in that it is really just one long sentence with the subject in the middle.

Now I think most of you know that the New Testament was originally written in Greek but you may not know that Greek is a bit different than English. In Greek you don't have to start the sentence off with a subject followed by a verb. You can move things around in Greek. That is you can put the subject at the end of the sentence if you like. In fact, the rule is in Greek that if you want to stress something you simply move it forward in the sentence. And what Paul stresses at the beginning of Ephesians 2 is that before we were saved by God we were a mess.

In fact, I think you could say that Ephesians 2:1-3 explains what kind of condition we were in before we were saved, while the second half of the sentence, Ephesians 2:4-10, explains both what God did for us while we were in such dreadful straits and why he did what he did.

Alright, let's look first at the dreadful condition we were in. Look at Ephesians 2:1-3.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:1**...And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Notice the way he starts the section.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:1**...And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...

Paul starts off by telling the Ephesians that they are dead in trespasses and sin. The word “trespasses” refers to breaking the law. That is, it refers to doing what the law says they should not have done. The word “sins” is the Greek word that refers to not doing what the law commands. Paul tells the Ephesians they were “dead” to God both because they broke his law by doing the very things he commanded them not to do and by failing to do what it demanded. They were guilty of the sins of both commission and omission. And Paul uses the strongest term he can muster to explain to them the seriousness of their condition. He says they were dead...not physically but spiritually. He says they were as dead to God as they could be. But the Holy Spirit writing through Paul’s pen doesn’t stop there. He doesn’t just say they were dead. No, he says we were even worse than that. He says we were also rebels.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:2**...in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

Do you get his point? The Ephesians weren’t just dead they were also rebels. Their way of life was one given over to rebellion. That’s the meaning of the word “walked.” The idea is that they lived constantly in this dreadful state of rebellion against God’s law. They were enslaved to their master the prince of the power of the air, the devil. Before they were saved they followed as mind numbed robots the same Satan that now leads the sons of disobedience...that’s all those still given over to wickedness and rebellion.

So the Ephesians were not only dead to God, they were also in rebellious slaves against God. Still, it was worse than even that. They were also the objects of

God's holy righteous anger. That is, they were children of wrath. Look at verse three.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:3**...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

I love the way Hugh Palmer sums up this first part.

And if you think about it that is the thing about being dead and lifeless. You can't play comparison games, can you?

Dead in your sins.

I mean we talk about good, better, and best or bad, and worse, and worst. But we don't talk about dead, and deader, and deadest. Imagine someone saying, "I'm dead I know but you're deader, and she's deadest." No, we're just dead. Our lifeless hearts, you see, would have never have chosen to come to Christ. Dead people can't do anything. Dead people can't choose anything. They're dead.

If Julie Andrews is right and nothing ever comes from nothing because nothing ever could, we're lost. If there is rescue, it needs to be one-way from God. I mean dead people have nothing to offer. They, you, me, need grace.

Now in verse four, Paul switches gears, and the passage swings the other way. I think it's helpful to think of verse four as the great hinge of the passage. It is also the subject of the sentence but Paul has put it off until now for emphasis. Notice the first two words of verse 4.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:4**...But God...

Do you see how Paul has constructed the passage?

He starts off explain our dreadful state and then shifts to explain that God has done something about our plight. He has intervened. God has broken through to us in an act of great compassion and love.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:1**...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

Yes, we were dead in our sins.

Yes, we were slaves to sin.

Yes, we were objects of wrath.

But God has done something! What is it he has done? Look at verse five.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:5**...even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved—

Do you see how that answers our predicament in verse one? We were dead in sin but God has made us alive with Christ. It is by his kindness we have been saved.

Yes, we were slaves to sin. But God has done something! What is it he has done? Look at verse six.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:6**...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Can you see how that answers the problem of our plight in verse 2?

In verse two Paul's explained that we use to walk around as slaves to sins. We perpetually lived that way but now he says we have been made alive and God has raised us up and seated. He has changed our position from perpetual wanderers to those forever seated in Christ.

In verse 5, he explained that we were dead but God made us alive.

In verse six, he explained that we were slaves to sin but that now has seated us in the heavens in Christ.

Now in verse seven, Paul switches to explain why God has lavished this marvelous act of grace...free grace on us in Christ.

You will remember that this point should answer to the verse three that says in the past before God intervened, we were children of wrath. But verse seven says that God has intervened and saved us...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:7**...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Now there is some question as to exactly what the gift of God is. Is the gift of God the grace...the kindness that Paul speaks of? Is it the gift of God the faith that God gives us to believe? Or is the gift of God the whole of our salvation? Grammatically, it is better to understand it, I think, as the whole salvation package. The reason for that is that the pronoun "it" in verse eight is a neuter pronoun, while the two words "grace" and "faith" or both feminine<sup>6</sup>. If Paul had

been referring back to “grace” or “faith,” he should have used a feminine pronoun. Because the pronoun is neuter, and it seems intended to be as general as it can be...that is, it seems to refer to the whole of our salvation.

But don't let loose you in the grammar.

We were dead and God has made us alive.

We were slaves to sin and God has raised us up and seated us in heaven in Christ.

We were children of wrath but God has saved us in order to show us his tender kindness for all eternity.

And yet there is another voice, Julie Andrews voice, still singing in our heads...

*Nothing comes from nothing*

*Nothing ever could*

*So somewhere in my youth or childhood*

*I must have done something good.*

I mean deep inside there is a longing to bring something to the table for God. It's not exactly denying grace, it's just that I want there to be something about me that deserves God's kindness. But God says, "There's nothing you could have brought. You were dead."

It is the difference between grace plus, and grace alone.

I can't tell you how many times I've asked someone "Are you sure you are going to heaven?" only to have them come back and say, "I don't know for sure. I'd like to think so."

I love what Hugh Palmer says here:

People says things like that not realizing that saying "I hope I'll get to heaven is actually more arrogant than to say I know I'll be there. It is when "I hope" means 'I'd like to think that I'll be found good enough.'"

I'll never be good enough for God, and it is so arrogant to think that we might compared with saying I know I'll get there...I know I'm not good enough but Jesus has done all that is needed. It's the difference between grace plus and grace alone. So let me ask you, when it comes to your eternal future how do you feel hopeful or certain.

I'd like to think I'll...or I know God has done all.<sup>7</sup>

Still there is that nagging biblical realization that doing good is meant to be part of the Christian faith somewhere isn't it. And so it is.

Look at verse 10.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 2:10**...For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

You see good works have their place. They are the fruit of our salvation not the cause or the source of it. Good works must flow forth out of our lives...but they have to flow out of gratitude and not fear. We must recognize that our salvation is God's work and that it is based not just on grace, but on grace alone.

Let me close with this. You know after Archbishop Beaton had Patrick Hamilton burned at the stake alive he used to complain that the reek of Patrick Hamilton, his smell, not only lingered around St. Salvator College but that it also lingered in the back alleys of St. Andrews, in the libraries at Edinburgh, and in the pubs at Glasgow. I think he right. It was smell that lingers everywhere men read their Bibles and come to understand something of God's genuine free grace.<sup>8</sup>

Reading that again reminded me again of Paul's remark in 2 Corinthians 2 where he says:

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 2:14**...But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. <sup>15</sup> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

Think of that, the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved...take a moment, take a deep breath...do you smell that? It smells like free grace.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> *Facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam.*

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Palmer, "Grace Alone" a sermon preached by Reverend Palmer at All Souls London, Langham Place as a part of the series *Truths Worth Dying For*. Preached August 8, 2010. Slightly edited for an American audience. (Italicized sections inserted by me.)

<sup>3</sup> Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Peter Lorimer, *The Scottish Reformation: an Historical Sketch* (London: Richard Griffin and Company, 1860), 16. Lorimer writes writes: "The executioners then stepped forward to do their

office. Fire was laid to the pile, and exploded some powder which was placed among the faggots, but though thrice kindled, the flames took no steady hold of the pile. Dry wood and more powder had to be brought from the castle. The sufferings of the martyr were thus painfully protracted. Alesius, who was a witness of the whole scene, tells us that the execution lasted for nearly six hours; and during all that time, he assures us, the martyr never gave one sign of impatience or anger. When surrounded and devoured by fierce flames, he remembered, in his torment, his widowed mother, and commended her to the care of his friends with his dying breath. His last audible words were, "How long, Lord, shall darkness overwhelm this kingdom? How long wilt thou suffer this tyranny of men Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians in the Bible Speaks Today Series*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 83.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> James I. Good, *Famous Reformers of the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches: A Mission Study Manual on the Reformation*, (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1916), 146. Good writes, "His death made a profound impression. In distant Germany, his friend, Lambert of Avignon, speaking of his life and death, said to his prince, "Such is the flower of surpassing sweetness, yea, the ripe fruit which your university produced at its beginning. You founded this school that from it might go forth intrepid confessors of Christ. See you have one such already." But it was in Scotland that the most profound impression was made. "The reek of Hamilton infected as many as it blew upon," was the saying in Scotland. His high rank as a noble, the beauty of his character, his youthfulness (he was only twenty-four when he died), all combined to impress his native land. His death startled the minds of men into attention, so that they asked the question why a young nobleman so gifted and good had been put to death. The Catholics hoped to strangle the Reformation in its cradle by burning him, but, says Lorimer, "it proved an infant Hercules, and strangled the serpents that sought to destroy it." His pyre lighted a light in Scotland that never went out until Knox in 1560 completed the Reformation. His father had died as a hero of chivalry; the son died as a hero for Christ. If Ireland had its St. Patrick to save it from heathenism, Scotland had its St. Patrick in Hamilton the saint to save it from Romanism."