

Riches for Wretches

Ephesians 2:1-10
Halifax: 18 November 2007

Introduction:

For several weeks now, we have been looking at the precious grace of God as it is revealed to us in the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians...

- In verses 1:1-14, we saw how God has actually chosen people out of this fallen world for the purpose of giving them every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.
- God is actually going to give all His elect an eternal inheritance with His own son...
 - For all eternity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have lived in perfect communion, delighting in each other's glory, giving and receiving in a free exchange of perfect love...
 - And now the Father, in His amazing kindness, has purposes that those sinners He has chosen out of this world should come to live in their glorious company.
 - To behold the glory that they have had from all eternity, to enter into this household of love as His own sons and daughters...
- To bring this about,
 - He has sent His only Son from heaven to redeem us so that our sins might be forgiven by the shedding of His blood...
 - And He has poured out the Holy Spirit to work in us so that we will be fit to live in this house—to transform us and renew us so that we will be holy and without blame.
- It is a most astounding thing that He would do such a thing for lowly creatures!
 - It is staggering!

In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul told the Ephesians that he was earnestly praying that they who had received this inheritance would begin to grasp what a marvellous thing it is!

- He seems to be saying, "Oh Christian, if only you could see what you have in Christ!"
 - How different we would be brothers and sisters, if we saw more clearly what God has done!
 - How full of joy!
 - How free of complaining!
 - How free of legalism and rebellion!
 - How eager for joyful obedience!
 - How full of gratitude!

Paul couldn't seem to stop talking about the grace of God in all of chapter 1.

- And now as we move on into chapter 2, we will find that he still cannot stop!
 - In chapter 1, he showed us how gracious our Father has been by showing us what a marvellous inheritance it is!
 - In chapter 2, he labours to highlight the grace of God all the more by showing the kind of persons He gives this inheritance to...
 - not only to mere creatures, but to desperately sinful creatures!
 - This helps us to realise all the more how astounding His grace is!
- 1. I mean, it would be astounding for Him to give such a glorious inheritance to the very best and most noble creatures!
 - If we had been those who perfectly served Him all our days and somehow went beyond our duty...
 - Like an employ at McDonalds that does more than he has been asked to do...
 - Who stays after hours to scrub the toilet just because he notices that it needs it...
 - It would be like the owner of McDonalds hearing about this employ and coming and rewarding that employ by making him his heir, taking him as his own son...
 - The inheritance would be far more than the merit.
- 2. But it would be even more astounding if God were to give such an inheritance to one who had done nothing more than his duty...
 - One who had simply met all the obligations given to him...
- 3. And His grace would be even more magnified if He gave His glorious inheritance to one who had not even fulfilled his duties...
 - Like the employ who comes in late, does substandard work, complains a lot...
 - and yet, the owner gives him his whole estate out of sheer grace.
- 4. But how much more gracious do we realise our God is when we see that He has poured out His grace on miserable wretches,
 - on wretched creatures who have, with wicked treason in their hearts, sought to cast Him from His throne and destroy Him...
 - On members of the human race whose nature it is to snarl at God's Son when He came to redeem them...

- to snarl at Him, to brutally beat Him, and to deliver Him to the cross to be crucified!
- I say, what kind of grace is it to send redemption to creatures like that at His own expense!
 - to send His Spirit to give them an new heart and a new life...
 - to actually reward those with admittance into His house who deserve to be cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever?
- This is extreme grace!
 - It is absurd grace!
 - It is God's grace!
- The more you see the depths of your depravity, the more you will see and appreciate the marvellous grace of God!
 - I urge you to listen with diligence this morning as we consider this topic.
 - If you believe, I hope it will make you glad to see what God has done for you when you were so undeserving...
 - And if you don't believe, I hope God will be pleased to open your eyes to see how great this grace is and how much you need it!

So first of all...

I. Let me ask you to take a good hard look at what you are apart from Jesus Christ.

- A. Paul tells the Ephesians in verse 1 what they were when God's grace came to them,
- they were "dead in trespasses and sins!"
1. Most English Bibles say:
- "And you *He made alive* who were dead in trespasses and sins"
- a. But the words *He made alive* are in italics because they are not in the original.
- The translators have supplied these words for clarity because Paul is headed to this idea in verse 5...
 - But I could wish that the translators had left it alone!
- b. Do you see what Paul is doing here by leaving these words out?
- He is setting up a stark contrast...

- For three verses, he is going to talk about nothing else but their wretchedness in order to magnify the grace that delivered them...
- c. The Holy Spirit used Paul to write these words for us so that we might see the desperate condition that God delivers us from.
- It may not be the most pleasant thing to look at, but you need to do this...
 - One of our greatest problems today in the church and in the world is that we just don't realise the depths of our depravity...
 - Just compare the songs in almost any hymnal written in the last 200 years with the Psalms that God has given us to sing...
 - You will find that the hymnal very rarely speaks about God's hatred of sin and His judgment toward sinners...
 - It gives us a wrapped perspective about what we are...

TRANS> Paul is getting read to paint an ugly picture of what we are without Christ and to talk about nothing else for three verses...

- It is an ugly picture, but a true picture...
- It is a picture that you need to see if you are really going to appreciate the grace of God that He pours out on us.

2. So what does he mean when he says "you were dead"?

a. What is death?

- Death is separation...
- Death is when you are separated from the world of the living.
- It's when you are no longer responsive the world around you...
 - The beauty around you no longer attracts you...
 - Even though your beautiful and gracious wife comes to you and calls to you with the sweetest enticements,
 - you neither see her nor hear her.
 - You are dead...
- And the terrors around you no longer make you afraid...
 - If the building in which you lie is on fire, you just lie there—without any response at all.
 - You will let the flames turn you to ashes without any thought about it at all...
 - You are dead.
 - You are completely out of touch.

- b. Paul is talking here about spiritual death...death in trespasses and sins
- 1) The death he is talking about is not a death in which you are separated from this world...
 - a) It is rather a death in which you are separated from the God who created this world...
 - You are not connected to God as He is...
 - b) You are in trespasses and sins because you are not living before God as God is... you are not acknowledging Him in all your ways...
 - You are insensible of His reality...
 - You are disconnected with Him who is the most significant and weighty being in the universe...
 - It is like being at a concert and not being away of the performers.
 - Perhaps you hear music and you see some shapes before you,
 - but it is all a blur—you can't put any of it together.
 - 2) As dead, you are just like the corpse I spoke about before...
 - a) God lavishes you with the good things of this world...
 - He gives you food and clothing and friends...
 - but you don't even acknowledge Him—
 - You don't even acknowledge that He gave you your own life...
 - You just roam about in the world like the cattle who do not know their Maker and who do not give thanks to Him.
 - You are dead... lost in a world of trespasses and sins...
 - b) God sends out His gracious call, but the dead man does not hear it...
 - It's a beautiful call—a call to come to Jesus for the remission of your sins—a call to inherit eternal life...
 - But the dead man is neither drawn nor enticed...
 - He can sit through a thousand sermons and never be moved to embrace the Lord—He is dead...
 - He can even preach a thousand sermons himself and never be moved.
 - He is separated from the reality of God...

c) Likewise, the Lord of the whole universe can declare His will and command, but it is as if He has said nothing...

- The teenage girl knows all about what her friends like...
 - She knows what kind of clothes they approve of and what kind of clothes they do not approve of...
 - And their opinions hold far more weight with her than God's...
 - She is dead—she cannot hear His voice...
- Then there is the old woman who judges the teen girl... but not with righteous judgment...
 - She criticises her for her immodesty, but she herself does not hear the voice of God's command...
 - She thinks that she is righteous simply because she does things the old way...
 - God's law has not cut in to her heart to show her that she is full of sin before Him...
 - that God is not pleased with her complaining...
 - that her self-righteousness is worse than the teen's immodesty.

d) To illustrate again, God can thunder forth His judgment,

- He can shake the whole earth, but the dead man does not fear—he lies there as if nothing has been said.
- He walks around with the sword of the Lord drawn, ready to slay him,
 - but he cannot see it at all—he is dead.

3) Now I imagine that some of you are thinking,

- Yes, but an unconverted man is not always that dead...
 - Sometimes he has notions of God that put terror in Him, or he has a conscience toward God about his conduct...
 - Many people have such things before they are converted...and even those who are never converted have them.
- Yes, that is true—I am not prepared to quarrel with you about that...
 - but I would say again that it is all a blur to him...
 - It's all a confusion that he is unable to put together—like the fellow at the symphony...
 - He is aware of certain things perhaps, but he never comes to a settled view of who God is as long as he remains unconverted.

- That is why Paul describes him as dead....

B. Without Christ, you were just roaming around in this state of spiritual death!

- In verse 2, Paul says it is where you once walked...
- 1. You walked in trespasses and sins...it was your way of life...
 - you walked as if there is no God who has spoken—
 - no God to thank for all that you have—
 - no God of glory who made that heaven and earth to worship—
 - no God who will judge—
 - no God to be ashamed before—
 - no God to see the sinful motives.
- 2. When you walk in trespasses and sins, you walk according to the course this world and according to the prince of the power of the air...
 - a. “According the course of this world” means that you are guided by the world around you instead of by God’s word...
 - 1) Your primary reference point is this present world...
 - You follow the vain opinions and conduct of the present world.
 - You do not hear the transcendent voice of God above the world, but only respond to what is around you.
 - If you live in a society of cannibals, you live according to their principles...
 - you eat your enemies, but you would never think of committing adultery or aborting his own offspring...
 - If you live in our society,
 - you find sexual immorality attractive and abortion as an option...
 - but you would never think of eating people...
 - And even if you are against abortion,
 - until the LORD gives you new life,
 - your perspective is still shaped by the world—
 - While you may even see that God’s commandments oppose abortion,
 - you don’t see that He is a God whose commandments you have transgressed to so great a degree that you deserve to go to Hell!
 - You are dead in trespasses and sins...

- 2) One of the greatest things about being a Christian is that you have God speaking the truth into your life...
 - a) You have a basis by which to judge...
 - You are able to critique your own age with far greater clarity—to stand outside of it instead of being swallowed up by it.
 - As you spend time in the word,
 - you begin to see how confused our society is about the way they look at relationships, marriage, parenting, work, almost everything!
 - b) Sure, there are those within every society that rise up to critique certain things,
 - but they have no sure word from God...
 - They are still just drifting along with the way of the world...
 - There is no symmetry about them.
 - c) When you come alive, you not only judge the world,
 - but you also judge yourself—even more than you judge the world...
 - You begin to see what you are as a fallen creature before God...
 - the very thing that the dead man cannot see.

TRANS> Besides walking according to the course of this world,

- b. When you walk in trespasses and sins you also walk “according to the prince of the power of the air...”
 - 1) This is a reference to the devil...
 - The devil is the one who set up the rival kingdom of rebellion when he tempted our first parents.
 - He tempted Adam and Eve to cast off what God had said and set themselves up as the ones who decided good and evil...
 - “You decide what is best for you!
 - You be like God, knowing good and evil!
 - It’s your life, why should He decide what you can and cannot do?”
 - His goal was to detach us from God as the Lord and only lawgiver,

- as the one who alone can bless and curse...
- All he wanted was to get them to reject God's authority at one point...
 - because he knew that to do that would be to get them to reject God's authority completely...
 - As soon as you set your judgment up over God's judgement,
 - you are no longer dealing with Him as Lord.
 - You are in league with Satan... the prince of the power of the air...

2) Jesus told the Jewish leaders who rejected Him that they were in bondage to the Devil...

a) In John 8:42-45, it says:

- Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me."

b) You can see from this that it is not just the person who wears Satanic symbols on his clothes and sacrifices cats and goes to séances.

(i) It is upstanding religious leaders who are in league with Satan.

(a) In Jesus' day, it was Jews who were not really Jews...it was those who outwardly kept the law and said their prayers and attended worship...

(b) In our day, it is Christians who are not really Christians...

- It all has to do with who they are listening too and whom they are serving!

(c) These religious leaders to whom Jesus spoke were even deader than the prostitutes and wicked tax collectors!

- They were so blind that even though they were very familiar with scriptures and knew all the right things to say...

- When the Son of God stood before them and spoke to them and performed wonders among them,

- they did not know who He was!

- (ii) The Devil doesn't really care what form your sin takes...
 - You can be very religious or not religious at all,
 - in the gutter or in a mansion,
 - respected in this world or an outcast,
 - nice or nasty...
 - To be league with him, the only requirement is that you remain detached from God in some way or another—
 - dead in trespasses and sins—
 - joined to those trespasses and sins and separated from the living God.
 - c) The Devil is here said to work in “all the sons of disobedience.”
 - His only goal is to keep them alienated from God as God.
 - They can worship perverted version of God...
 - They can be very religious...
 - But never let them come to terms with the fact that they are such wretched sinners that they need God's Son to redeem them...
 - Let them say that, perhaps, but don't let them ever believe it.
 - Make sure that God is not real to them.
3. In verse 3, Paul says that as sons of disobedience, we just did whatever we wanted—whatever seemed best to us...
- a. He says,
 - “We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.”
 - b. That means that you just did whatever you wanted and believed whatever you wanted...whatever seemed good in your eyes.
 - That is precisely the Devil's work in us right from the beginning!
 - You were not directed by God, but only by your feelings and your desires.
 - You lived as if the living God were not there to direct you...
 - Oh yes, you might very well make up a God according to your own liking...
 - You know how people will say,
 - “I think God is...” and then fill in the blank?

- That is a God of the flesh—a god you make up that it is very different than the true God.
- c. I want you to notice that Paul includes himself as also having been a son of disobedience...
- 1) Though he had been an earnest Jew before his conversion, striving to keep the law, he was not really a Jew...
 - He too was fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of his mind...
 - In fact, his perspective of God was so distorted that he actually thought he could please God by his own works!
 - Only in his dreams!
 - Paul was severed from God when he lived like that!
 - 2) Paul is showing that everyone outside of Christ is dead in trespasses and sins and that the Devil is there prince.
 - Until Christ gives us life, we are all live as sons of disobedience...
 - “among whom we also once conducted ourselves...”
- C. But now I want to show you the most terrifying thing Paul has to say about the unbeliever’s condition!
- It is at the end of verse 3...
 - “we were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”
1. He is saying that every person, apart from Christ, is a natural enemy of God...
 - a. Natural enmity is the worst kind of all...
 - It is one thing to have an enemy who is your enemy because he has offended you...
 - there is always a possibility of reconciliation...
 - But to have a natural enemy is to have an enemy with whom you can never get along...
 - You did not just cross each other, you are antagonists to the core.
 - You cannot be reconciled until one of you is completely changed...
 - A scorpion is just something that you are not going to curl up and go to sleep with!
 - b. And verse 3 is saying every one is by nature a child of wrath...
 - This means that as long as we remain in our natural condition,
 - we remain that which highly offends God...

- we remain that upon which His wrath naturally settles...
 - Just as water by nature soaks into paper,
 - so the wrath of God soaks into us...
 - Just as it is the nature of fire to burn paper when the two come together,
 - so it is the nature of God to consume us—as a consuming fire.
 - That is why the day of judgement is so terrifying—
 - On that day, sinners are brought before God and his wrath will be manifested upon them.
2. This is a dreadful thing!
- a. To have the One who alone has the power at last to either bless or curse completely against you is an unspeakably wretched condition.
 - b. When you realise that His judgement about us is perfectly just,
 - It shows just how great our sin is...
 - You are all guilty of treason against the Most High God!
 - You are by nature a child of wrath, ready to be consumed on the Day of Judgment.

TRANS> You see then the dark picture that Paul paints of everyone outside of Christ...

- Dead in sin...
- walking aimlessly in sin according to the world, the flesh, and the devil...
- the very objects of God's wrath.
- That is what you all are outside of Christ!
 - It is impossible for you to deliver yourself...
 - In yourself, you have neither the inclination nor the ability nor the opportunity...
 - How could such a wretched creature ever be saved?

II. Now I want you to take a good look at how God saves us.

- A. After laying out our miserable condition, the words “but God” that start of verse 5 are the most wonderful words in the world!
 1. Here we were, utterly ruined and undone, condemned to a crisis eternity...
 - Paul has laid out our desperate condition with great clarity...
 - and then he breaks in with the words:

- “But God!”
 - These two words change everything!
2. Oh that all of you can say these words... “but God” in the way that Paul says them here...
- a. That all of you would have this testimony—
- “I was utterly undone—But God!”
 - You might say it in different ways, but I pray that you can all say it...
- 1) Some of you might say...
- “I was conceived in sin—
 - **But God** turned my heart to Him so that I have trusted in Jesus alone for as far back as I can remember.
- 2) Others of you might say...
- “I was a moral person, trusting in my own righteousness and feeling good about myself—
 - **But God** made me alive and I saw my sin and trusted in Christ alone to save me.”
- 3) Yet others might say...
- “I was swallowed up by life of corruption, giving myself over to all sorts of vices...
 - **but God** brought me to Jesus Christ and now I live in Him.”
- b. Every believer has a different story, but every believer must have “but God” in his story or he is not a believer...
- In the finally account of salvation, it is not what you did, but what God did that saves you.
 - By nature you were completely undone as Paul described—but God...
 - He is the One who can change everything!
 - He is the one who can change your nature.
3. Paul tells us what it is about God that makes it possible for wretched ruined offending sinners like us to say “But God.”
- a. He describes Him here in verse 4 as:
- God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses.
 - You who know Him, He loved you even when you were dead in sin!

- Even when you walked according to the course of this world and the devil...
 - Even when you were by nature a child of wrath!
 - He did not come to you because you were something other than a child of wrath,
 - He came to you because He had set His love on you.
- b. It is because He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, that we can now say, “But God” when we speak about our ruined condition.
- 1) We love Him because He first loved us.
 - He drew us to Himself because He loved us before the foundation of the world and chose us to be His own...
 - Jacob was saved out of his miserable condition and Esau was not because God’s testimony was
 - “Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated.”
 - He dealt with Esau as Esau deserved—as one dead in trespasses and sins...
 - but He loves His elect even though they are dead in trespasses and sins—
 - 2) Paul further says that God turned us around because He is rich in mercy...
 - a) Mercy is not what is given to those who deserve something, but to those who have no claim on it.
 - b) And because God is rich in mercy, it means that even though He has already given it to myriads and myriads,
 - He still has an abundant supply!
 - 3) The change in our condition comes because God who is rich in mercy loved us...
 - He is the One who rescues you from death if you are to be rescued.
- B. What did God do when we were dead in trespasses and sins to turn around our condition?
- Paul presents three things.
1. First, He made us alive with Christ
 - a. We saw before that we were so dead, that we did not respond to the true God,
 - even though He is the most dominant, most powerful, most significant being in the entire universe!

- But God awakened us by His mighty power so that we could see who He is, so that we could hear His voice and respond to Him!
 - He made the truth about His holiness come alive!
 - He made His commandments come alive so that we saw our sin ever so clearly!
 - He made us see where all our blessings come from
 - He made His judgments come alive so that we realised our danger...
 - He made His promises of salvation come alive so that we turned to Jesus Christ for new life and for the forgiveness of sin.

b. And He did all this (gave us this life) together with Christ...

- Christ, when He came to earth in human flesh, was the one man that was different from all the rest...
 - He became one of us, and He was alive—He was not dead in trespasses and sins.
- But He took the penalty of death upon Himself and allowed Himself to be cursed of God in our place...
 - And after He had finished bearing the curse, He had authority to give life to us, though we are dead in trespasses and sins...
 - And so He does—
 - He goes through the world by His Holy Spirit through the ministry of the word and calls sinners to live...
 - And all those the Father has chosen are given the Holy Spirit who opens their hearts to believe...
 - They see what they are before God in their sins...
 - And they see what Christ did to take away their sins...
 - And they believe...
 - They are made alive to God with Jesus Christ!
 - His life is poured into them so that they who were dead are now alive to God.

2. Second, He raised us up together with Christ

- a. We just saw that He makes us alive, but now we see that we are also raised.
- You will say, but isn't that the same thing?
 - Well, not exactly...

- Theoretically, at least, a person could be given life and not be raised up.
- Consciousness could be restored, but he could still be lying motionless in the grave.
 - unable to get up...
 - Spiritually, He could know God—see who God is and what He has done and trust Him...
 - but not be empowered to walk about serving Him.

TRANS> But God does not do that...

- b. When He makes us alive with Christ, He also raises us up to live a new life!
 - 1) Not only were we awakened to the reality of God, but we were raised up to walk before God, in the truth of God.
 - We were raised up with Christ to follow Christ!
 - To live under His Lordship by the power of His Spirit.
 - 2) If I might jump ahead for moment,
 - verse 10 explains that we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
 - A Christian is a new creation of God that was made to do good works...
 - works that are truly good...
 - works that are in obedience to God’s commandments...
 - works that are done with a view to pleasing God...
 - works that are done in faith, looking to Jesus Christ as the basis of their acceptance.
 - Being raised up with Christ means that you now walk with Him instead of according to your own lusts, according to the world, the flesh and the Devil!
 - He raised you up, brothers and sisters, to live beautifully as His children...
 - To love each other as Jesus has loved us!
 - We are His workmanship—
 - created to do good works...

- This is what God has appointed for all who are chosen to obtain life in Christ...
- 3) If you see someone who says he has faith (that he has been given eternal life) but he has no works...
- you can tell him on the basis of Ephesians 2:6 that he is still dead...
 - because the God who gives eternal life in Christ also raises us up in Christ to live a new life.
 - There is no such thing as life without resurrection.
3. Third, He caused us to sit together with Christ
- a. After Jesus Christ finished His work of redemption,
- He ascended into heaven to sit at God's right hand!
 - That is where He is now and where He will remain!
- What does it mean to sit at God's right hand?
- It means that all authority is given to Him (He reigns over all)
 - It means that He is at rest, having sat down after completing the work of redemption forever—His sacrifice was accepted.
 - It means that He is in the place of happiness—at God's right hand are pleasures forevermore.
- Oh brothers and sisters, this is the place of full communion with God!
- He comforts us and blesses us and tells us he loves us as his children...
 - and give back to Him praise, trust, thanksgiving, adoration!
 - More and more, we are able to see His glory!
 - More and more, we are able to receive His blessing!
- b. That we are raised with Jesus to sit in the heavenly places means that we enter
- into His reign (He has made us kings—with Him we have authority over sin, death, and Satan).
 - into His rest (we rest securely in His finished work—there is no condemnation, no more sacrifice for sin, He has paid it all)
 - Into His joy (we are brought into fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Spirit and are able to behold the glory and beauty of God).
 - This is the place of intimacy—of love—of full acceptance as God's sons!

Conclusion:

What a turn around brothers and sisters!

- From dead in trespasses and sins to alive in Jesus Christ...
- From walking according to this world and according to the Devil, to walking in God's will, becoming beautiful in good works...
- From under the wrath of God to having full communion with Him at His right hand!

There is so much packed into these words of Paul—I feel like I have barely scratched the surface...

- But if you are a believer this morning, I trust that you can see how low God's grace reached to bring you to such glorious heights!
- If you are not a believer, I pray that God's word will break into your death and make you live...
 - Can't you see how ruined you are without Christ?

And next week, I want to show that all the glory for your salvation belongs to Him!

- We are going to look at this same passage, but we are going to focus on how you are to see to it that you give Him all the glory for what He has done...