

## See Jesus in the gift of Grace

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**Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church**

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We are continuing our series called, *For This Very Purpose*, as we walk through the book of Ephesians. Last week it was Chapter 1, and this week chapter 2. What I want you to see in this chapter, by the time we are done here today, is I want you to see that Jesus brings you the gift of grace.

Chapter 2 is all about this. Grace is everywhere in this chapter. We are going to see it in two specific ways. But it brings us back to last week where in chapter 1, Paul revealed to us what God's purpose is, which is to bring us back to Himself.

God is doing lots of other things in the world, but at His core, out of great love for us, He simply wants to reconnect us with Himself. That is His goal. And the word "us". Some of you might have been thinking, as we talked about this in chapter 1, "How can I be part of that us? Am I really part of that us? Does it really apply to me? Pastor John, you say all these things, but do you really know me? Do you know what I have done? Do you know what I have experienced? Do you know all the things that have happened to me that make me question who God is, what He's all about, and how could I be included in that group of people that He wants to bring back to Himself?"

Many of us, if not all of us, struggle with that. We see other people doing so well outwardly, but we know inwardly the struggles that we have. Am I in this us? Am I part of the people that God wants to bring back to Himself? This was a struggle in Ephesus when Paul was there the very first time when he brought the good news of Jesus to the people in Ephesus as they first got to see the power of God made real.

Paul went to this city, this huge bustling Roman city, and he was able to show them that Jesus makes all things new—He would heal the sick; he would give sight to the blind; he would cast out demons—all the things

that Jesus did that show us that His kingdom is real. And these people in Ephesus wondered the same question as we do: Am I part of this group? Is this for me?

You see, the sons of the high priests there thought, well, this Jesus is pretty amazing. He does incredible things. So, they went out, and they tried to cast out demons in Jesus' name too, just like Paul was doing. And sure enough, it happened, and the demons came out.

There's this incredible part of the book of Acts where the demons talk back to these sons of the priests. And the demons say, I know Jesus, I know Paul, but who are you? I mean, if you ever thought that you were not known, I mean, even the demons did not know these people. They did not understand. What they are a part of.

You have got to imagine these sons of these priests went back and thought, is this really for me? Gentiles by their very nature, the name Gentiles, the designation means people who are not part of the children of God. By the distinction, they are not part of the us. Plenty of these people in Ephesus trying to figure out if is this Jesus was for them. These people worshipped the goddess Artemis, the main goddess in Ephesus at that time. There was a huge, huge economy built around all the things that you needed to worship Artemis. There were lots of different stores and merchants selling bracelets and whatever you can think of, they sold them. You are identified to everybody else as someone who worships Artemis. And yet, you too saw the power of God made real. You saw that Jesus really could do these things that you had prayed to Artemis so long for. Am I part of this people?

Magicians, too. In Acts, we hear about people that practiced magical arts realizing that what they were doing really had no power. But that in Jesus' name, every knee would bow. In Jesus' name, all things were under Him. And so they cast aside their books of magic and they wondered, could I be part of this people?

We wonder about this, too. Not for these reasons, usually. More for other reasons. We understand the kind of hypocrisy that goes on in the world

that we see, and we actually really understand what happens in our hearts. We do not want to tell anybody about it, but we understand it. We know in ways that we have been unfaithful to our God and to the people around us. We know ways that we have been angry, in which we have hurt other people. We have been selfish. We have been selfish since the day we have been born. We gossip, we talk about others in ways that are not flattering, in ways that do not increase their reputation above others like the Lord commands us to.

In all these ways, we know that we fall short of what God asks and demands. We fall short of being able to connect ourselves with God. When we are honest. Are we part of this us? I want to spoil the ending here. Yes, you are. You are. What Paul is setting out in this chapter is to show this to you through two incredible things that he promises that you can hold on to.

In the first section, verses 1 through 10, he wants you to understand this at your core. It is by grace that you have been saved. And in the second part, he wants you to see that you are part of this one new people that Jesus creates through what He has done. And He gives you incredible peace. These are the two things that we get out of Ephesians chapter 2.

So let's dig in just a little bit. Paul comes to us just like I did and reminds us that we are not perfect, that we do not do all the things that we are called to do in the way in which we are called to do them. We were dead in our sins. That's a hard thing to wrap our minds around, but it is true. It is hard to wrap our minds around because we want to think sometimes that if we admit to that, then we have got to figure out a way to get out of it.

We have got to figure out a way to do better. We have got to figure out a way to never get in, give in to those temptations anymore. Paul knows that we were dead in our sins, that there was no way of coming back. We had given in to the passions of our flesh. We were called children of wrath, just like everyone else. Every human born in this broken world is in this group, dead in our sins, apart from God. All of these things we know are

true. We know they push us away from God. We know that they are against what God will call us to be and to do.

But we know that something good is going to follow it. Paul says this is what God is going to do, knowing that that's who we are. But God who is rich in mercy because of His great love, even when we were dead—not when we tried really hard to not be dead anymore, not when we did a couple of good things and we showed promises that we were not going to be dead anymore—no, while we were dead.

Let that sink in for a minute. In the middle of your lowest point, God shows up for you. He is there with you. And what does he do for you at that moment? He takes what was dead and makes it alive. That's what Jesus does. He makes us alive in Christ. And he summarizes this. By grace, you have been saved. By grace in Jesus, by what Jesus has done, you have been reconnected with Him.

You have been saved. This is all going back to this big old question. Am I included in this us? Does God really want to bring me back to Himself? And Paul keeps coming back, keeps saying, yes He does. Yes, He does. He wants you to be connected back with Him.

He continues, which is my favorite verse in all of the Bible: For grace, you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing. It is a gift of God, not a result of what you can do or what you have done so we do not get to boast in it. In Jesus, there is salvation. In Jesus, we have the gift of reconnection with God. At baptism, like we saw today, through this promise in water and word, God gives us through His grace the salvation.

It is not something, no, no, your kids are awesome. Your kids are wonderful. They are fantastic kids. But God gifted them this incredible gift. My kids are pretty great, too. But I remember when they were baptized. My first-ever baptism was my oldest son. I remember it like it was yesterday. Great kid. Screamed his head off at the baptism.

The gift of grace was for him. Just as it is for you. Once we see ourselves that way, as people who were dead, but who are now made alive in Christ,

we realize that God has incredible plans for us and that He has made us as masterpieces. We are His people, His creation. And then He makes us new in Jesus, to do what? For good works. This is the place of doing incredible things in this world, that because we have been saved, Jesus calls us to be His, and calls us to see the world as He does, so that we can do the things that God has already laid out before us. Now this, this is incredible. We are called to simply walk in the way of Jesus as His masterpieces.

If you are still questioning, are you part of this us, are you part of these people who are called to be back to God? I hope that this seals it for you. This is you. You are a masterpiece that God creates new in Jesus every single day, and He gives you incredible things to do. Sometimes it is hard to see, but they are there.

They are there. By grace, you have been saved. That's the first part of this section. Let's go quickly through the second. I want you to see how when we see ourselves differently, through Jesus, it changes how we see the world. Are you still questioning? I bet many of us still are. Let's, let's keep seeing what Paul has to say.

Remember, you were Gentiles. You were separated from Christ. You were alienated. You were strangers. You were without God. You did have no hope. Guess what's going to happen next. What does Paul do? Well, but now, in Christ Jesus, you who were far off, are brought near. You are now reconnected to God through the blood of Jesus.

In Jesus Christ, you are made new. You are reconnected, no matter how far off you feel that you are, no matter how far off you feel that God is, He comes to you. And through what Jesus has done, brings you back to Him. You are part of this family. He gives us peace in this. Once we see this and start to understand this, it brings us such peace.

He gives us peace with God the Father. But He also, through His cross, does away with the dividing walls that we build up. Not just between us and God, but between the people around us. Remember all the sections

about how we were dead in our sins and we used to be called those other things?

Who did that apply to? What does it apply to? Are there only some people who were dead in their sins, or was it everybody? It was all of us. Everybody was in that camp. But now in Jesus, we are all brought back To the Lord. So what kind of dividing walls do we need any more?

What do we need? According to Jesus, I do not think we need any of them. Many we build up on our own. Now on this day, after such a nice football weekend, I'll tend to pick on football teams and people who identify with different football teams to make this point, but I'm not going to do that today. You have many dividing walls in your life, many ways that you divide people in your mind and your heart.

Those are the things that Jesus calls you to set aside. He has brought peace across those. He has come to preach to people who were far off and people who were near, and He gives them both access to God the Father. He gives them both access to this incredible truth and promise that He makes us one. And that in so doing, he brings peace.

By grace, we have been saved. Jesus creates in himself one new people and makes peace. So are you still questioning? Are you in the us? I have good news for you. You are. Not just you. The people that you see outside of these walls. The people you see every day. In Jesus, we are all connected. Paul finishes with a couple key points.

He comes back and says you are no longer strangers and aliens. Do not treat yourself that way anymore. You are, he declares this to be so, just as God declares us to be his. You are fellow citizens. You are members of the household. You are part of the family. Are you in the us? Yes, you were in the us. How are you in the family?

By the grace of Jesus, through the blood of Jesus, through the cross, and the new life that He's been given, that He gifts to you. That is grace. So together we do a couple of things. We remember that we are not alone in

this, that we are together. Paul finishes by reminding them that it is not just about you and God.

It is not just this personal thing. It is about the community. It is about the us. You are built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, and Jesus is the cornerstone, and in all of this, you grow into the temple of God. Does anybody remember what the purpose of the temple was? What did God do in the temple?

God was present with his people, physically present on earth, through the temple, with his people. What has Jesus done? He has now made you the place where people will experience God. Through you, they will see who God is; they will see the hope that He brings to you, and they will see the grace that He gives to you.

They will see that in all the ways that you mess up, in all the ways that you recognize that whole list of things that could push us away from God, He'll see that your trust in the forgiveness of God changes your life, just like it can change theirs. This is our calling, to be built together into this place.

Where people see the goodness of God. God's power, His hope, is made real through us. That's chapter 2. That's chapter 2. By grace, you have been saved. He makes us one people, and He gives us peace. Are you in the us? Yes. Yes. Yes, you are. Have great peace in that. And remember that those dividing walls are gone, and now you are called to bring who God is to the people around you.

Bring his hope. Bring his peace. Bring Jesus to them. Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving us your word, for allowing us time to sit, to dwell on, and to really think about what it means that you have called us to be yours. You have brought us back to yourselves, and for all the ways that we question whether we are included, speak your word of grace to us, so that we will be confident that we would have great faith that your promises are true for us and for the people around us.

Give us great words of hope. Let us show up for people in the midst of their trials, just like you show up for us. Let us be peace bringers in our

relationships. All this we pray, Lord, as you call us to follow you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.