

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
to
Guide your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "It's *Still* All About Jesus! The Reformation and the Church Today"

This Week's Theme and Scriptural Focus: "Grace Alone." Various Texts.

This Week's Mark of Discipleship: *Tenacious Serenity* (An increasing serenity that comes from our identity in Christ)

□ Day #1--Monday, October 2nd. Read: Jeremiah 31.1-4. Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound..." The words of the great hymn bear witness to the central affirmation of the Christian faith—that God saves us by grace through faith. God's grace is God's unmerited favor towards you and evidence of God's desire to forgive you, love you, lead you, and transform you. It is our response to God's grace that motivates us as Christians; to serve others, forgive others, and surrender our lives to Jesus' command to take up our crosses to follow Him.

In our text from Jeremiah today, we read of God's love and commitment to His people. Jeremiah was a Prophet during the cataclysmic years of Israel's exile in Babylon. God had judged the people of Judah because of their idolatry and sin. And yet, as Jeremiah and all of the Prophets reminded God's people, even in His judgment there is a purpose and an ultimate promise of restoration!

The opening verse of chapter 31 refers to "at that time," meaning, in the coming days God will redeem His people. Even though Judah (and you and me) are sinful, and break our commitments to God, God does not break His commitments to us! Our text reflects another time in Israel's history when God was faithful and led His people to the promised land: the Exodus. Jeremiah 31.1-4...

...serves as a remarkable reminder of God's love and forgiveness for Israel in spite of its history of faithlessness...Removal from God's land did not mean removal from his love. Verse 3 is a moving statement of God's unchangeable love for Israel, expressed as "everlasting love" (*ʾōlam'ahābîṭîk*) and "loving-kindness" (*hēṣēd*; "faithfulness"). In spite of Israel's history of rebellion, God still loved his people. The rebellious child was still the father's child...Israel's restoration is described in terms of idyllic pastoral beauty and innocence.¹

Consider/Reflect: "Our election to eternal life is founded not on our godliness or virtue, but on Christ's merit alone and His Father's gracious will...When His children depart from obedience and stumble, He has called them to repentance again through the Word, and the Holy Spirit wants by the Word to be effective in them for conversion. When they turn to Him...again in true repentance by a right faith, He will always show His old paternal heart to all who tremble at His Word and from their heart turn again to Him" (FC SD XI 75).²

¹*New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

² *Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

□ Day #2--Tuesday, October 3rd. Read: Ephesians 2.4-6. Examine: The Text and its Relationship to Other Passages.

In this passage, Paul makes clear what the human condition is apart from God: we are dead—spiritually and ultimately, physically, because of our sin and the consequent estrangement from God our sin creates. Because of this estrangement, we deserve God’s wrath. However, this divine-human estrangement is not the last word! Because of God’s grace, God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves---create life where there is death and a relationship with a holy God for people who are sinful and broken. Verse 4 begins with the English conjunction “but,” a very significant word!

The conjunction “but” introduces God’s actions toward sinners, in contrast with their plight in verses 1–3. In the Greek text God immediately follows “but,” thus placing it in an emphatic position. “God” is the subject of the whole passage. Great differences are suggested by the words “But God”! He is described rich in mercy...In the Septuagint “mercy” (*eleos*) translates the Hebrew *hesed* (“loyal love”). In the New Testament *eleos* means “undeserved kindness” toward sinners. Thus God, who is rich in exhibiting this undeserved kindness, acts on behalf of sinners because of His great love for us.³

In v.4 we read again about God’s great love for us, His “*agapē*.” Again, this Greek word comes from the verb *agapaō* and includes the idea of a love that seeks what is the best for the person. “Since sinners are spiritually dead toward God, they have nothing to commend them to God. This is why Paul described this love as being “great.”⁴

God’s grace is a manifestation of God’s love. The Bible tells us that love is one of God’s characteristics— intrinsic to His nature. God’s grace is intimately associated with God’s mercy; God is full of “mercy” (v.4) and grace (v.7). This is why—and only why—we can be saved. Again, God’s grace and mercy means that we get what we need, not what we deserve. Finally, all of this is possible because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ! “It was at Calvary that God displayed His hatred for sin and His love for sinners (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16).”⁵

Consider/Reflect: “Paul needed no encouragement to “tell it like it is.” But not only that, he “told it as it could be.” This section of chapter 2 is a graphic presentation of God’s power for redemption...That power was wrought in Christ Jesus, raising Him from the dead and seating Him at God’s right hand. That power also works in individual members of the body (church), raising us who are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (v. 1), and making us “*alive together with Christ*” (v. 5) and seating us “*together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (v. 6). The predicament and possibility of each one of us is drawn in graphic relief.”⁶

□ Day #3--Wednesday, October 4th. Read: Ephesians 2.7-10. Explore: The background to this text(s).

God’s love has done three things: (a) made us alive with Christ, (b) “raised us up with Christ” (2:6), and (c) “seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (v. 6). An unbeliever, spiritually dead, is “made ... alive” by God “with (in association with) Christ” (cf. Col. 2:13). The “us” includes both Jews and Gentiles (cf. “us” in Eph. 2:3–4). The only way a spiritually dead person can communicate with God is to be made alive, and that must be done by the One who is Himself alive. He is the living God, “who gives life to the dead” (Rom. 4:17).⁷

Notice that Paul elaborates on his assurance that we are saved by grace—even though we are dead in our sin and ungodly in our behavior. In v.8, the Greek verb translated “have been saved” is in the perfect tense which

³J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ W.W. Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1996).

⁶L.J. Dunnam and L.J. Ogilvie. *Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians / Philemon* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982).

⁷Walvoord, et al. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

expresses a present permanent state, resulting from a past event. Verses 8-10 are a summary statement of our condition before God because of what Jesus has accomplished for us. God's reconciling grace for us gives us everything we need as human beings created in the image of God. We are not only forgiven from our past sins (and future sins as well), but God also creates a new life within us and secures our future! Finally, because of this new life and eternal security is in Christ, based on God's grace, now the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts so that we can live lives that bless others (good works) and glorifies God.

The basic truth is repeated: *For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith.* The verbal phrase in Greek has the auxiliary verb "to be" plus the perfect passive participle of the verb "to save," a construction that emphasizes the completed aspect of the action: "you were saved and you continue saved." *Grace* is the divine source of salvation, and human *faith* is the means whereby salvation takes place.⁸

Consider/Reflect: "God had mercy on the corrupt, captive, helpless human race. Alongside God's wrath is God's love. He has power to save. He raised Jesus from death and seated him in glory—and now he has done the same for those who trust in Christ. What a difference grace makes! God has done all this for us because of his great mercy, love and kindness. He has saved us from sin and death and given us victory over the powers of evil. We didn't achieve this by ourselves, and we certainly didn't deserve it. But God has done it for us. We are prize examples of what God can do!"⁹

□ Day #4--Thursday, October 5th. Read: Matthew 7.7-14. Explore: The Background to this Text.

God is ready to give us what we ask and need because He loves us and, because of His grace through Christ, died the death that we deserve and lived the life we do not live. And, as we have explored this week, our standing before God and the source of our power to live comes from Jesus alone—His divine life (life, death, resurrection), our "righteousness," is imputed to us as a gift, received through faith in Jesus. However, while faith seems so simple, our need to justify ourselves, to do "stuff" that we believe puts God in our debt and validates our self-image, is really much easier! This is what Jesus points out here in our text today.

Jesus presented the clear way of access into righteousness. The righteousness He demanded (Matt. 5:20) does not come through the wide ... gate and the broad ... road. Rather it comes through the small ... gate and the narrow ... road. In light of the whole sermon, it was obvious Jesus was comparing the wide gate and the broad road to the outward righteousness of the Pharisees. If those listening to Jesus followed the Pharisees' teachings, their path would lead to destruction (*apōleian*, "ruin"). The narrow gate and road referred to Jesus' teaching, which emphasized not external requirements but internal transformation. Even the Lord Jesus acknowledged that few would find the true way, the way that leads to life (i.e., to heaven, in contrast with ruin in hell).¹⁰

The life of a disciple will always be the "narrow road" of faith in and obedience to, Jesus, and what He has achieved for us!

Consider/Reflect: "Many people quote the so-called 'golden rule' of verse 12 without considering the choice explicit in verses 13–14. We can only do good to others as we are committed to Christ. That means entering through the narrow gate and walking the narrow way."¹¹

⁸ R.G. Bratcher and E.A. Nida. *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993).

⁹ A. Knowles. *The Bible Guide* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 2001).

¹⁰ Walvoord, et al. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

¹¹ I.D. Campbell. *Opening up Matthew* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008).

□ Day #5-Friday, October 6th. Read: Psalm 139.11-12. Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.

Today and tomorrow, use this order of prayer, and the suggested texts, as your guide. Today and tomorrow, we use an adapted form of “Daily Prayer” found in Luther’s *Small Catechism*.¹² Read the above Psalm and then:

“... [M]ake the sign of the Holy Cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

(Depending on the time of day, pray the prayers below):

(Morning) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

(Afternoon/Evening) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

□ Day #6--Saturday, October 7th. Read: Psalm 28. Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.

Repeat the litany from yesterday.

¹² Martin Luther. “Luther’s Small Catechism.” Taken from, *The Lutheran Study Bible*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, xii.