

20240707SRCF

**God's saving grace and Judgement.
Heaven and hell.**

Ephesians 2: 1-10

Slide 1 Title

So the country has made its choice. And its about choice that we about this morning. God has made a choice to make a way of grace for us. You have or have made a choice about God's grace and judgement. The question is, is your choice the right one.

That is not to say that God's grace and judgement are open to negotiation. God has spoken and his word is true and unchangeable. What matters is whether you receive God's grace or reject it.

So I am going to spend this short time on the nature of God's grace. But parallel to it, I must discuss his judgement.

Slide 2 Eph21-5

We will concentrate on one passage of scripture this morning Ephesians 2: 1-10 Page 1174 in the church Bibles. If you have a Bible it would be good to keep it open at that page. The passage, from a letter of Paul to the church in Ephesus, assumes you have made a choice to follow Jesus.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following

its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Slide 3 Eph2 6-10

⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ 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.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

I want to pick out 5 things from this passage.

Slide 4 Eph2 with highlights

1. You were dead
2. You deserve hell – God’s wrath
3. God made you alive
4. Grace is amazing
5. Grace is the great motivator.

Slide 5 main points

Slide 6 You were dead

You were dead

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

You were born without a connection with God. It shaped your life in every way. We are born selfish and without God's grace we remain self-centred. We are, most importantly cut off from God. We can try to make it work. The World's plethora of religions are all attempts by man to reach out to God. But that presupposes that God is open to negotiation. "If I do this, will you do that". Unless God reveals his way, there is no way. All religion is pointless.

But God has made a way. The way of grace.

Slide 7 add rom.3 23

Romans 3:23 puts it simply
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
your ethnicity, your religion, your wealth or health all fall short of what God has revealed in Jesus.

Slide 8 you deserve hell

You deserve hell – God’s wrath

v3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Cue a hell-fire and damnation rant! We may joke about it, but we are actually deadly serious. The nation is not about to enter a new age of peace and prosperity, however good the Labour government is, and it is peopled by humans like us who need our prayers for them and our nation. No without God’s grace we are doomed to follow our cravings, measure our lives and our relationships by what I get out of it. We get what we deserve, our cravings lead us to greed, our greed leads us to self destruction. Paul writing in Romans describes God’s wrath in terms of the inevitable consequence of sin. Jesus went further, he spoke much about hell.

Slide 9 add once to die

The writer to the Hebrews put it bluntly
Hebrews 9:27

Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

But the Bible does not stop there! Let me read on

²⁸*so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

I can't talk about judgement without grace bounding into the picture!

However, continuing about hell. Much of our modern thinking of hell is based on Greek mythology. So we need to be careful not to mix that with what God says.

Slide 10 Gehenna

Hell in Jewish thinking is Gehenna. Gehenna comes from the Hebrew phrase “gey' hinnom,” which means the “valley of wailing.” Gehenna originally was a valley west and south of Jerusalem where children were burned as sacrifices to the Ammonite god Moloch. And it continued to be the city rubbish tip.

It was not like the Hillingdon tip! It was a place of decay and death. Fires burnt constantly. It presumably stank something awful. And Jesus uses it as a description of Hell. He spoke about it more than anyone else. Just to sample some of his statements, here are a few.

Luke 13:26-28, speaking to the Religious leaders of his day:

Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.

On the subject of ‘Do not Murder’:

Matthew 5:22

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

On the subject of lack of compassion as evidence of sin:
Matthew 25:46

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

So more than the consequences of sin in our lives there is the prospect of eternal punishment that is horrific in every way. Hell is worse than anything you have seen on TV and experienced yourself. But our gospel is simply you don’t need to go there. There is a way that leads to life. Not a religious order etc but the way of Jesus, the way of grace.

Slide 11 God made you alive

God made you alive

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

God, being a God of justice and righteousness condemns unrepentant sinners to hell but that is not even half of the story. He is a God of love and before sin entered into the

world, God had a plan to save fallen people like you and I from his own wrath. He loves us and because of his great love for us he did not leave us to suffer the consequences of our sin but made a way to save us, grace. He makes us alive even when we were dead. The dead are unable to help themselves but God is able to resurrect the dead and give them new life. Not more of the same but an eternal spiritual life with him in heaven. But there is nothing you can do about it except accept his grace thankfully. As it says in verse 8

Slide 12 add not by works

⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Slide 13 Grace is amazing

Grace is amazing

⁶ *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ 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.*

The process of our resurrection is described here. You are raised up with Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, he died for our sins, he took the punishment for us.

When he rose again, we experience through him new, eternal life. What a salvation! You are seated with him in heaven. Think about it. You don't sit down if there is work to do. You don't sit down if you are not welcome. But Jesus has done all that is required and there is no more work in salvation to do. It is all done. And more than that you are welcome! My favourite description of God the Father is in the parable of the Prodigal Son. When the Son comes home, the father runs down the road to meet him. There is no check-in at the gates of heaven, only a Father longing to welcome you home. To have you seated with Jesus. Heaven's greatest joy is over your turning from sin and turning to Jesus and receiving salvation by grace through faith. And God will spend eternity enjoying you there , *showing the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

Slide 14 Heaven

What is heaven like? Its where those who have trusted in Jesus for salvation by grace and through faith will be welcomed. But most of all, it is where God is and where Jesus is. Most descriptions of heaven, based on visions given through the Holy Spirit describe a place of infinite wealth, eternal welcome and where everyone who has faith has a place you can call home.

How good is it?

Paul, writing to the Corinthians says

*“What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—
¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his
Spirit.*

(1Corinthians 2:9-10)

Slide 15 motivator

Grace is the great motivator.

Finally, we need to understand that grace is a great motivator. Human logic says, if salvation is given freely by grace and we don't need to work for it, there is no motivation to respond beyond accepting the gift by faith. In fact grace works the other way. Having been given salvation by grace, our response to this overwhelming love is to want to love God in return .

⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are
God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good
works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

We are created for good works. It is the most deeply fulfilling experience to follow the Jesus way. To imitate him in thought and word and action. Not only are we designed to do good works but we want to because we want to respond the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is your destiny. God's plan for your life has always been

for you to be complete in Christ. To fulfil a specific role only you can do.

So this morning as we marvel at God's love and grace, we are spurred on to action, not in our own strength but in the power of the Holy Spirit. We also are concerned to share the Good News with everyone, because we know there is a heaven to be gained by grace through faith and a hell to be avoided. We want the world to make the right choice, to choose Jesus.