

Transformed

Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

In a song by the Irish singer, Robin Mark, he contemplates the very different pathways that two otherwise similar lives can take. The lyrics tell about him and another man who, as children, used to run and play together in the schoolyard, their futures yet ahead of them and both very promising.

But then, later in life, while at a train station, he caught sight of his childhood friend. And though he regretted it later, he did not go and speak to him. He couldn't think what he might say because by his friend's appearance, he had obviously led a very difficult life.

Then, he pondered the pathway that his own life had taken, saying . . . "Grace flows like a mighty river, and one day I just dipped my finger in, Your love caught me dragged me to deeper place."

In the song, he went on to lament that he should have sat his friend down and asked him where it all went wrong for him. But He didn't. He said, "Perhaps I was a little scared", so I didn't say anything."

Each of us can probably identify with his dilemma. We see old friends and classmates and we are able to see from their appearance and their behavior that their lives have not been easy for them.

At my recent 50th high school reunion, I became reacquainted with some of my old classmates. And like the words of Robin Mark's song, in those younger days, our futures were still ahead of us and very promising. But now, fifty years later, it seems obvious that some, perhaps many, of them have not done as well as I had thought back then that they would.

Yes, some were obviously successful in their vocations. But I confess that I observed very few of them who seemed to have much relationship at all with the Lord. Most of them seemed generally indifferent to the things of God and had all the obvious marks of being caught up in what verse 2 calls, "the course of this world".

As I pondered these things for this message, I wondered if I was being judgmental of my old classmates, if perhaps the wrong kind of “pride” had seeped into my observations, the kind of pride that thinks that I am doing better than someone else. Am I being like the Pharisee who stood before the Lord and thanked Him that he was not like the tax collector standing next to him?

I sincerely hope that that is not the case. But folks, I must tell you, looking back on that crowd and their behavior and lifestyles, I am, truly glad to be walking the path and living the lifestyle that God has provided to me and my family. I have an adorable and trustworthy wife of 43 years. I have a family that loves each other. And the life experiences that I have enjoyed since receiving Christ as my Savior surely have been far better than anything that I could have ever imagined or hoped for.

Because of all of the sweet loving “grace” that God has poured out upon me and my family all these many years, I find myself often humbly crying out the words of the song by Kris Kristofferson, “Why me Lord?” “What have I ever done to deserve even one to the treasures I’ve known”? I don’t know if Kris Kristofferson knew much about the Lord when he wrote those words, but he was sure talking about “grace”, the very “grace” that God is telling us about here in Ephesians 2.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Folks, I know without hesitation that “grace” is the only possible reason for me being where I am today. It had to be as the words of Robin Mark’s song refrained, “Grace flows like a mighty river, and one day I just dipped my finger in, Your love caught me dragged me to deeper place.” That “deeper place” is a heart, soul and mind that have been transformed in a way that only God can transform a person . . . a transformed life that has been, and is now daily, so very, very precious and peaceful and full of divine promise for me and my loved ones.

And the more I keep my fingers dipped within the flow of God’s mighty river of grace, the deeper He carries my soul into it and the more delightful my life becomes.

And the miracle of God’s “gift of grace” is that He will generously give it to anyone who will humble their heart, and come to Him, and just “dip their fingers in”.

But may I also at this point quickly add a kind of warning? Should you decide to “dip your fingers into God’s flow of grace” you must be prepared to live a very different kind of life; because His grace will surely take you to places and into experiences where you would not have otherwise gone.

A life surrendered to God's grace is a very mystical experience, filled with mystery and surprises. Its pathways are unpredictable and sometimes very painful. But to be sure, it is always "good".

In C.S. Lewis' books "The Chronicles of Narnia", when Susan learned about "Aslan", she asked if Aslan was "safe". And Mr. Beaver said to her, "Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good."

And that is the "special truth" that we must hang onto as God's great flowing river of grace carries us down some of the uncharted and difficult paths that He wants us to follow.

And again, sometimes those paths will have within them severe pain and suffering, especially as we look back and consider the place from whence we are coming . . . those words in verses 1-3 . . . we are coming from a condition of being . . .

1 . . . dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

(Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV))

You and I can't begin from this kind of wretched condition and expect to not have some suffering to follow us. But again, one thing always remains certain! As God brings His transformation to our soul, we can be confident to trust that He is always "good" and everything that He does is "good".

I am reminded of another place in the "Chronicles of Narnia", where Cousin Eustace who is often arrogant and self-centered awakens one morning to find himself deep inside a cave. And not knowing what had taken place, he began to try to move toward the entrance of the cave, only to discover that a dragon was in the cave with him. But curiously, as he made efforts to sneak around the dragon, each move that he made was matched by movements of the dragon. After, a long while of moving and squirming, Eustace began to realize a frightening truth. The dragon was not just with him. The dragon was him.

He eventually mustered the nerve to crawl outside and down to a small stream. And there, in the reflection of the water his horror was confirmed. He found himself staring

into the face of a dragon. Scared and confused, Eustace began to try to claw the dragon skin from his body. But try as he may, after several very painful attempts, he realized that he could do nothing to help himself.

C. S. Lewis was so very gifted in conveying the gospel message within his fanciful stories. Eustace's condition was exactly as we read about here in the Book of Ephesians. In his rebellion, Eustace had taken on a sinful nature represented by the skin of the dragon.

And being overtaken by that nature, his pathway to goodness would, of necessity, be a painful one. But Aslan, the Great Lion, would help Eustace.

And folks, does not Eustace's plight sound familiar to each one of us? Before God's grace grabbed hold of us and carried us to that deeper place with Him, we were dead in our sins and trespasses, caught up in all of these awful things spoken about here in these words of Ephesians 2. And to be sure, try as we may, we cannot "fix" our sinful condition any more than Eustace could. We can "claw" all we may, sometimes for an entire lifetime, but no amount of self-effort or good works will ever be able to remove the sinful "dragon skin" from our flesh. No one is able to remove even the "first scale" from that awful nature. Relief and transformation comes only through the shed blood of Christ as it is poured out upon us through the blessed grace of God.

May I ask you a very personal question? Have you lately crawled down to one of God's mysterious streams and looked into the mirror of His word to see what you might look like? I do warn you! The face that you might see staring back at you, just as with Eustace, may horrify and confuse you.

Grace has the mysterious ability to reveal everything that resides within us, right down to the core of our being. And unfortunately, most of what we are able to see is not good. But praise be to God, the Lord Jesus, the "Great and Mighty Lion of Judah", can make all things "good" for us. He is the One, the only One, who is truly "good", and He alone can make you and me "good".

All we have to do is "dip our fingers into His sweet flowing grace", and surrender ourselves into His care and He will transform us. That special kind of surrender is expressed for us in the words of Romans 12. Listen!

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

Salvation is our “entrance” into the “kingdom of God”. And it begins with the first part of the transformation spoken about here in Ephesians 2,

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

This is the all-important “first step” and it assures us of eternal life with Christ. But again, we must fully understand and accept that salvation is only the first step, because God really does have so much, much more planned for us. And that “much more” is expressed here in verse 10 in the words “created in Christ Jesus for good works”.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

But again, I must caution us that these “good works” cannot be done well by us without this transformation spoken about in Romans 12 first taking place. Those words again . .

1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

We must fully surrender ourselves into His loving hand and allow Him to do His transforming work.

And here also, another caution is in order. Transformation is never an easy process. If our surrender is not an “all-out” surrender, our “good works” will be severely limited and ineffective.

May I repeat myself and say that just as with Eustace, we are not able to claw the “dragon skin” off our selves. Christ has to do that. But even under His gentle and loving hands, the removal of that skin will still be painful. And yes, we must stand there willingly and bear up to whatever that transformation demands. As these words tell us, we must be a “willing sacrifice”.

Thankfully, as with all good appropriate surgery, the end results will be far better than the condition from whence we have come. God describes His transforming surgery for us in Ezekiel 36 where He tells us . . .

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

Folks, God wants to do His transforming work in you and me. And it begins first with His “grace” as He saves us and gives us eternal life. And then, it continues on with His transforming work, a new heart, a new spirit, then His Spirit within us, molding and transforming us into the “new creature” that He desires for us to be.

It is only as a completely “new creature” that we are able to do really “good works”. Just as God is “good”, His promise to us is that He will also make us “good”. Then and only then will we be able to do truly “good works”.

I hope to continue to talk about these “good works” next week, but may we close for now with these words . . .

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Romans 12

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)