

Series: "Ephesians"

"Come Alive!"

Ephesians 2:8-10

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Pastor Corey Sateren

HAPPEY EASTER!

I love Easter Sunday! It is so easy to be a Pastor on Easter Sunday because there is one and only one message to preach, and that is the [Resurrection of Jesus Christ](#)! As well, I love the songs of Easter! They ring with triumph; victory; and hope!

Have you ever stopped to think about what it is that sets Christianity apart from all the other religions of the world? It is what THIS day represents! The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

Indulge with me for a moment...

SLIDE – G.B. Hardy (book cover)

G.B. Hardy stated it well in his book "[Countdown](#)" when he wrote: *"Listen to the record..."*

SLIDE –

- Confucius' tomb – [occupied](#)
- Buddha's tomb – [occupied](#)
- Mohammed's tomb – [occupied](#)
- Jesus' tomb – [EMPTY!](#)"

Then he says, *"The evidence speaks for itself!"*

Wilbur Smith states in his book "[Therefore Stand](#)"...

SLIDE – Wilbur Smith

"All the millions and millions of Confucius's, Buddhists', and Mohammedans' agree that their founders have never come up out of the dust in resurrection!"

"The original accounts of Buddha never ascribe to him any such thing as a resurrection."

"Mohammed died June 8, 632 at the age of 61 at Medina. People still return annually to visit his [occupied](#) tomb."

Yet of Jesus Christ, as hard as it has been tried to be proven otherwise, the evidence is replete...

- "Up From the Grave He Arose"
- "Christ The Lord Is Risen Today"

- "I Serve A Risen Savior"
- "He Lives! He Lives!"

And **we** are filled with hope; triumph; and victory!!!!

There was a Chinese man who was saved and he gave this testimony. He said, "I knocked at the door of the Buddha, and found that he was not home. I knocked at the door of Confucius, and there was no answer. I knocked at the door of Mohammad, and there was nothing but an empty sound. But when I knocked at the door of Jesus He opened the door; invited me in; took my sins away; and put a new song in my heart.

SLIDE – The Case for Christ (book cover)

Even Lee Strobel – who was a self-acclaimed atheist; a graduate of Yale Law School; an award-winning editor of the Chicago Tribune; a spiritual skeptic until 1981 when he researched the truths of Jesus Christ (one being the resurrection of Christ). As a result - he received Jesus Christ as his own Savior and became a teaching Pastor at two of America's largest churches.

In "[A Case for Christ](#)"...pg. 8 he wrote:

SLIDE –

"The resurrection was the linchpin of the Christian faith. After all, anyone can claim to be the Son of God. But if someone could substantiate that assertion by returning to life after being certifiably dead and buried – well, that would be a compelling confirmation that he was telling the truth."

Well what would Easter be without reading about the event of the resurrection from the Scriptures? The event actually occurs in all 4 of the Gospels in our Bibles but I think my most favorite occurrence of it is the one in John 20.

SLIDE – John 20:1-9

I put it up on the screen so we could see it but if you care to follow along in your Bibles you feel free to do so. I'll give you a moment to locate it. John 20. If you would like to locate in our church Bibles John 20 is on page1074.

ILL. - As you are locating that, I ran across an Easter joke:

Three blondes died in a car crash and arrived at the Pearly Gates of heaven. St. Peter told them that they could enter heaven only if they could answer one simple religious question.

The question posed by St. Peter was, "What is Easter"?

The first blonde replied, "Oh, that's easy! It's the holiday in **November** when everyone gets together, eats turkey, and is thankful."

"Wrong!" Said St. Peter. "You are not welcome here, I'm afraid. You must go to the other place!"

He turned to the second blonde and asked her the same question: "What is Easter?"

The second blonde replied, "Easter is the holiday in **December** when we put up a nice tree, exchange presents, and celebrate the birth of Jesus."

St. Peter looked at the second blonde, banged his head on the on the Pearly Gates in disgust, and told her that she was also wrong and would have to join her friend in the other place.

He then peered over his glasses at the third blonde and asked, "Do YOU know what Easter is"?

The third blonde smiled confidently and looks St. Peter in the eyes. "I know what Easter is. Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish celebration of Passover. Jesus and his disciples were eating at the last supper, and Jesus was later deceived and turned over to the Romans by one of his disciples. The Romans took him to be crucified, and he was stabbed in the side, made to wear a crown of thorns, and was hung on a cross with nails through his hands and feet. He was buried in a nearby cave that was sealed off by a large boulder." St. Peter smiled broadly with delight.

The third blonde continued, "And every year, the boulder is moved aside so that Jesus can come out and, if he sees his shadow, there will be 6 more weeks of winter."

We better read about the TRUE event of Easter...

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the

Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.

SLIDE –

Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

SLIDE –

Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

I like that last phrase! There are so many people today who “still do not understand from the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead to save us from our sin!”

And speaking of saving us from our sin there is probably no greater passage of scripture that speaks of HOW we are to be saved from our sin than the one in Ephesians 2:8-10. It is such a clear passage of Scripture that I want for us to look at this passage as well and tie the truth of Christ’s resurrection in with the truth of our salvation from sin. Ephesians 2...

SLIDE – Pg. 1157

Take your Bibles, please and find Ephesians 2. If you are using the church Bible it is on page 1157.

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

For our Easter message this year I’ve built an acrostic to help us talk about grace today – G.R.A.C.E. What is grace?

SLIDE –

G – GIFT TO THOSE WHO NEED IT

If you ask the average person how they will get to heaven, you will hear a variety of responses...

- Being a good person (keeping the golden rule)
- Doing enough good things (giving money; helping people)
- Keeping religious traditions (church, baptism, no lying)

I believe you could summarize what they have to say in one sentence: "You have to earn your way."

But any response other than GRACE goes against what the Bible says is needed to get to heaven.

ILL. -

In 2001, Reader's Digest asked Muhammad Ali what his faith meant to him. Ali replied, "[It] means [a] ticket to heaven. One day we're all going to die, and God's going to judge us, [our] good and bad deeds. [If the] bad outweighs the good, you go to hell; if the good outweighs the bad, you go to heaven."

But the Bible teaches something different. It says we are saved by grace!

ILL. -

A man asked a pastor one time, "What can I do to be saved?" The pastor replied, "You're too late!" That kind of shocked him. Then the pastor continued, "You're about 2000 years too late! What needed to be done for your salvation has already been done and you can't do anything about it."

That's the fundamental difference between Christianity and every other religion. Christianity is the only religion built on grace – on what God does. We don't have to earn God's approval. In fact, we couldn't even if we tried. In other religions, there's always something you have to do to earn God's pleasure. In Christianity, there's nothing that you can do. God does it for you.

SLIDE –

That is why we spell religion = DO

That is why we spell Christianity = DONE

We're not getting to heaven based on what we do. We can't earn salvation. We're going to go to heaven because of what Jesus did for us. If we're going to go to heaven, it's because we realize that grace is a free gift to those who need it.

The second thing about grace is this:

SLIDE –

R – ROOTED IN GOD'S CHARACTER

READ v.4

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy."

If God had chosen to destroy every human being, He would have been justified. If God had decided in His justice to send every single one of us to hell, it would have been no problem. God would have been within His rights. He wouldn't have been doing anything wrong. But there's an aspect of God's character that is so rooted in who He is, that God didn't do that.

Why did God spare us?

- He spared us because of His *great love*.
- He spared us because He's *rich in mercy*.
- He acted because of his *grace*.
- He acted so that in coming ages, he might *show the incomparable riches of his grace*.
- He acted because that's his character.

Grace is rooted in God's character. It's a reflection of who He is.

Not only is grace a gift to those who need it and rooted in God's character...

SLIDE –

A – ACCEPTED BY FAITH

Grace is accepted by faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

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

What is faith? Faith involves five things:

SLIDE –

- It involves **FACTS** -
 - Facts about grace.
 - Facts about Jesus offering Himself to forgive our sins.
 - Facts about Jesus being God.
 - Facts about His death on the cross is what God asked for.
 - Facts about eternal life.
 - Facts about Jesus coming to remove our sin.

SLIDE –

- It involves **AGREEMENT**

Satan knows the facts, but he's not a follower of Christ. Faith means taking the next step: of agreeing that you're a sinner in need of salvation and that Jesus has paid the penalty for sin, and that he offers salvation to you. You need to make your understanding personal and agree with the facts.

SLIDE –

- It involves "I"

I need to personally agree with the facts. I can't just depend on someone else to do it for me.

SLIDE –

- It involves **TRUSTING**

Faith isn't just about beliefs. It's about a person. Once we get to know a person, and the more we see in that person a pattern that is trustworthy, the more we find ourselves trusting that person to be and do what they say. Faith involves trusting Jesus in the same way. It's a matter of entering into a relationship with him.

SLIDE –

- It involves "HIM"

Scripture tells us in John 6:44 that it is "Him" - God - who draws us to salvation!

Have you come to trust in Christ personally, or are you still at the point of intellectual knowledge and even agreement with the facts of salvation, without ever having put your trust in Christ? It's not enough. You're saved by grace through faith. What's holding you back?

Grace is a gift to those who need it; it's rooted in God's character; it's accepted by faith. It...

SLIDE –

C – COMES THROUGH CHRIST

Ephesians 2:7 says, "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."

And this is where God's Grace and the Easter story collide! You see, it is Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead that display God's grace by providing us with forgiveness of sins and the miraculous ability to rise from the dead! Scriptures remind us that 'because He was resurrected and lives I shall be resurrected and live too!'

Grace is a gift to those who need it; it is rooted in God's character; it is accepted by faith; it comes through Christ. And finally, it...

SLIDE – E - EXTENDS THROUGHOUT ETERNITY

We'll never outlive God's grace. God's plan is to continue to give us grace throughout eternity. That's partially hidden in verse 8, where it says, "God saved you." In the original language it is written in what is called a 'perfect' tense. Paul points to an event that took place in the past & also has continuing results today & also will have continuing results forever! We'll never outlive the effects of God's gift of saving grace. This means - ETERNALLY with God!

If you're a follower of Jesus Christ this morning, you can't take any credit for it. Your salvation is not a result of anything you've done. It's simply by God's grace. You won't get to heaven and hear people outdo each other with stories of how they got to heaven. It's all of grace. All we can do is be thankful for it.

Isaiah 30:18 says, "The LORD longs to be gracious to you." That's his desire. It is his nature to bless undeserving people. He's waiting for you to accept his grace. He enjoys being gracious. He's not mad at you. His heart's broken for you but he wants you to come home.

God's amazing grace is available right here and right now, today. That's why He brought you here. You're not here by accident. He brought you here. If you have never received that saving grace gift, what are you waiting for?

Prayer:

"Dear God, I realize that I can never be perfect enough to earn a place in your perfect heaven. I realize that the only way I'll get in is by your grace. Forgive me for thinking that I could be good enough. Forgive me for my pride that thinks I can earn my way into heaven. Thank you that you give me what I need, not what I deserve. Thank you for Your forgiveness and I ask for it today. Jesus Christ, thank you for paying for my salvation on the cross. By faith, I accept your grace today. I want you to guide my life from this day forward. In Your name I pray. Amen."