

what they were eating, he realized how sinful he had been. So he decided to go back to his father. He had no hope of being forgiven—how his father forgive him? He just wanted to see if he could be one of his servants.

The son trudged back home - starving, smelly, with tattered and torn clothes. He was hoping for the best, but fearing the worst. After what he had done, why would his dad want anything to do with him? But what did dad do? Did he give him a seven-step plan for turning his life around? "Take a shower. Apologize to your mother. Get a real job. And then we'll talk..." No! The father ran out to meet his son. He hugged him and kissed him. "Let's have a feast and celebrate," he said, "for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24). There are no conditions to your Father's love. No steps. It's undeserved love. By grace alone.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. God didn't ignore your sin. He took your sin. He put it on Jesus. And Jesus took your sin away, so you're forgiven. I don't know your past. I don't know what you've done or what you carry on your heart. But I know that God loves you. I know that Jesus died for you. I know that God forgives you. You can't be too sinful for God's love. Because we're saved by grace alone.

That's why in God's church there is no room for arrogance or pride or looking down on anyone else. What a grace-filled heart says is "If God saved me with all my sins, he saved you too!" I had a professor at our Seminary who had an interesting way to think about that. He would talk about seeing dead people. He would talk about going to the bar: "I saw dead people." He'd go to a baseball game: "I saw dead people." He saw anybody without Jesus as people in need of God's grace. He actually didn't last very long at the Seminary, because he realized he didn't want to spend his time around pastors or future pastors. There were too many dead people who needed Jesus. So he took a call out west to start a brand new church—"I see dead people." He wanted to reach people with God's grace. That's what life is about. It's about God's grace!

Martin Luther had another way to put it. When he died, they emptied out his pockets. In his pocket was a crumbled piece of paper that said, "We are all beggars, this is true." That's what he carried in his pocket. "We are all beggars, this is true." Why? "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to thy cross I cling." Life is just about one beggar telling another where to find bread. One sinner telling another where to find grace. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." We are all beggars, zombies—however you want to put it—whom Jesus loves. Whom Jesus saved. By grace alone.

Ephesians 2:1-10
Pastor Nathan Nass

Reformation #1
October 15, 2017

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 sinful nature^a and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects 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. 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 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 workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

By Grace Alone.

I had a classmate at our Seminary who knew a lot about zombies. Now, I should admit that I've never seen a zombie movie. I have no desire to see a zombie movie. I should also clarify that zombies aren't real. You don't ever have to worry about zombies. But do you know what a zombie is? In the movies, a zombie is a dead person walking around. Their bodies look alive, but inside they're really dead. Sound nice? No! It's a creepy idea. That's why they show up in horror movies! The thought makes you shudder! A dead person walking around. Who could possibly like zombies?

God does. God loves zombies. Did you know that? That's why my classmate liked to talk about zombies. He realized that God loves zombies. Confused? The Bible tells us the truth about ourselves. It doesn't always tell us what we want to hear. But the Bible always tells us the truth about ourselves. Here's what it says: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world..." According to the Bible, without Jesus, what are we? Dead. Sin is that bad! Sure, it might seem like we have physical life. We might not look dead. We can walk around and talk and work. But God says that without faith in Jesus, a person is dead. What do you call dead people walking around? Zombies! That was us!

Some of you can remember that. You can remember a time when you didn't believe in Jesus. The apostle Paul could. He wrote, "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts." He knew what it was like to live without God—dead. Some of us can't remember a time when we didn't believe in Jesus. But I bet you can still sense sin's power in your life. We are never far from falling, are we? The root of every sin is found in every human heart. If you know

yourself, it's scary to think of what you're capable of doing. Without God and his love, there is nothing good in us. We're dead! Are you willing to admit that?

So what can a dead person do? Last Sunday, Missionary Joel Sutton from Guanajuato, Mexico preached for our services. He failed to mention the most famous attraction in Guanajuato—the mummy museum. I once went to the mummy museum in Guanajuato. Don't go! They dug up the bodies of people who died in the '60s and '70s and put them on display in a museum. How many corpses do you think were walking around? None. If you handed one a sandwich, could he take it? No! Because what can a dead person do? Nothing! So what do you think a spiritually dead person can do? Nothing. We couldn't save ourselves. We couldn't decide to believe in Jesus. Dead! *"Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."* Dead people walking around. Who could possibly like zombies?

God does! God loves zombies. Here's what I mean: God looked out at his world full of dead people walking around, living their lives against him and against his commands and against his Word, and what did God do? *"Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."* I don't know of anyone in their right mind who would fall in love with a corpse. But God did. He loved you and me even in our worst, most sinful moments. What's the word for God's "great love," for his "rich mercy" even for us who don't deserve it? Grace! By grace you have been saved.

God takes dead people—people dead in sin—and makes us alive. Listen to the past tenses in these verses: *"You were dead... "in which you used to live..." "We were by nature objects of wrath..."* But not anymore! That's all in the past. You're not dead anymore. You're not an object of wrath anymore. *"God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."* Whenever you feel dead or sinful or lonely or dead, this is what you need to hear. Jesus takes broken, dead people and gives them new life. He takes sinners and shows us his grace. *It is by grace you have been saved.* We are saved by grace alone.

By God's grace, you believe that. Do you think everybody does? Have you ever heard of Mother Teresa? Mother Teresa served others for decades as a nun in India. She died in 1997 and was quickly made a saint. After she died, some of her personal diaries were published. Want to know something surprising? Mother Teresa went through life terrified. She never felt any peace. No matter what she did, she always felt like God had abandoned her. She once wrote: "There is no God in me—when the pain of longing is so great—I just long & long for God..." What sad words! Her diary reveals a woman who never heard about God's grace. She knew that despite all her good works, she was dead inside. But her church had never taught her that God loves dead people and makes them alive in Jesus.

That reminds me of the story of Martin Luther. Luther spent years of his life as a monk, doing everything he could to prove himself worthy of God's love. He once said: "If anyone would have gained heaven as a monk, then I would indeed have been among

them." But he never had peace. No matter what he did, he never felt worthy. He was so close to God, yet so far away. Until he realized from God's Word that life's not about our works. It's about grace. *"Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."*

Here's the wonderful thing about grace: You can't ever be too sinful for grace. Here's a verse that I love, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). You can't ever be too sinful for grace, because it's a gift. God's grace doesn't depend on us. It depends on Jesus. It's undeserved love. There is, however, a way to miss out on grace. You can miss out on grace when you think you don't need it. You can't ever be too sinful for grace. You can, however, reject God's grace by thinking that you don't need it.

So do you need grace? Here's one of the dangers right now in America: Self-help religion. Do you know what I mean? How often don't you hear, "God helps those who help themselves"? Is that grace? No way! If you look up the best-selling Christian books on Amazon, you'll see titles like: "The Power of I AM." "Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living Your Full Potential" Emily and I once went to a service at a megachurch in Texas, and the pastor's message was: "If you have cancer, you look that cancer in the eye and say, "You are below me," and it won't hurt you. If your boss is troubling you, go into his office and say, "You are below me," and soon you'll be his boss." How does that sound?

It fits right in with our American ideal of "I can do it on my own!" We hate asking others for help—or directions. We pride ourselves on our hard work. "We can do it!" Can you see how that attitude leads us away from Jesus? What truth does all that deny? Without Jesus, I'm dead! The biggest problem isn't the cancer or the boss—it's me. It's my sin. I can't do it. In fact, the Bible warns, *"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace"* (Galatians 5:4). God doesn't help those who help themselves. We can't help ourselves. On our own, we're dead.

But remember whom God loves? Zombies. Dead people! *"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."* Can you say that with me? *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast."* Isn't grace great? Grace has no seven-step plan. Grace doesn't say, "Do!" It says, "Done!" It doesn't say, "Pay!" It says, "Paid!" *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."* By grace alone.

Jesus wants you to trust in God's grace. When he was criticized for loving sinners, he told a beautiful story about grace. A father had two sons. His younger son got tired of working for his father and asked to receive his inheritance early. He took the money, traveled to a far-off country, and quickly squandered it in wild living. Soon he found himself with nothing. It took a while, but finally one day as he was feeding pigs and longing to eat