

## Grace, Life & Glory 2

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 3:21  
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Well, we'll continue with what we started two weeks ago, "Grace, Life & Glory." Grace, life and glory. This is a message that I originally preached to you when we changed our name to Grace Life Church and this is such a foundational and important concept because sometimes people ask about, "Well, why did you change your name?" Because a lot of churches change their name to be relevant, to be contemporary. Well, that's not at all why we did it and not at all why we chose the name we chose. We chose the name we chose because it is according to the clear teachings of Scripture foundational, even essential concerning what a church is. Grace, the Gospel of grace, the spirit that comes in grace, brings new life and when the new life comes in a person's heart that is evidenced by a repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ which is the foundational truth upon which Christ builds his church and it's the foundational truth upon which early Baptists started the first Baptist churches beginning in 1525 in Switzerland. Now, I would not debate against that there were baptistic peoples existing before that here and there, here and yonder. Often as I've said before, sort of the out-scourings of the culture, very poor people just hiding out, if you will, away from the state churches trying to study a Bible if they could find copies or pieces of one and following the Scriptures. But in a formal way in 1525, a group got together and began baptizing one another against the state which controlled the church, it was the state church, of course, in Europe, and they formed what became our Baptist forefathers.

In Ephesians 3:21, the Scripture says,

21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

We begin, first of all, talking about grace, that grace just means favor. There is a common grace which means God has favored all of mankind with multitudes of blessings too numerous to number: the sunshine, the rain, the food to eat, and on and on we could go. That's common grace, the wicked and the good all get that grace. There is elect grace, if you will, or saving grace, I should say, and that is where God has chosen in his sovereignty to release, if you will, or express special favor on those whom he will save. It's called elect or saving grace. Provenience grace means that this grace comes to us, this favor toward us comes before any human activity or any response toward God from us ever happens. We talked about the fact that grace is this part of God so it is eternal, this

grace is free and this grace is sovereign. Being a component of the very character of God, grace – listen to me – grace is not subservient to man's action or activity. If it is, then it's not from God. He as God must be sovereign. He acts without regard to any other action or any other opinion or perspective.

Now, I. we said grace existed, eternally existed in the heart and the mind of God. In other words, it's a wonderful aspect of just who God is. And we talked about the counsel of grace in the Godhead that the Scriptures teach us that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit had a concept in their heart whereby he chose us and then he foreknew us and then he elected us and he predestined us and he called us and he justified us and he sanctified us and he glorified us. All are Bible terms. Those are not my terms, it came straight out of the word of God. All are biblical terms to show forth all that God did from his own heart and counsel toward those he would be saving. Now, again, all of these are in the past tense in the original text which means in the eternal mind of God, they were finished before they began. Powerful, wonderful truth. Grace existed eternally in the heart and mind of God.

Then we talked about grace being manifested by the Son, that's Jesus, and applied by the Spirit, and we see that grace was, of course, manifested in the fact that Jesus in obedience to his heavenly Father's will, comes to earth, lives a sinless life, at the appointed time set from the foundation of the world, sets his face like flint toward Jerusalem, goes to Jerusalem, is delivered over by the chief priests and the scribes and the elders into Roman authority, the Romans have him executed on a cross outside the gate on a hill called Golgotha, and there he became the guilt offering in our place. There he sustains the blow of wrath against his children and completely, that is, effectually exhausts all the demands of holy justice against the children, so because of his work in grace on the cross, the children can justly go free. Manifested through the work of the Son. Of course, he was raised for our justification, that is, to prove that God the Father was completely satisfied in the Son's effectual work to free the children from their guilt, their sin and their condemnation. Then he sits at the right hand of the Father where he ever cedes for those who are his. Then in time and space history, God calls men to preach the Gospel, preach the word we sometimes call it, in the power of the Spirit, and as the word is preached in the power of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit takes the Gospel message that informs the mind and then the Holy Spirit takes it from the mind to the heart and he regenerates the inner man and births newness in that heart. So he applies the work of Jesus to the heart and we call this, the Bible uses, the truth of regeneration, that new change within us. Then there is the sealing and the confirming work of the Spirit. Then there is the sanctifying work of the Spirit. And then the glorification comes finally. So the Son manifests the work of grace, the Spirit applies all this special favor to our lives.

Now, let's go to new material. III. Grace produces spiritual life. Grace was and is a part of the eternal nature of our beautiful and perfect God. Grace being manifested by Christ, grace being administered to us individually by the Spirit and, again, calling us, regenerating us, justifying us, sanctifying us and then glorifying us. But there is one other key component that I think we leave out because churches either want to just focus on an act I sometimes derogatorily refer to it as a hoop jump, just a ritual you go through. If we

can get people to come to the front or pray a prayer, in the Catholic church, go see the priest, have the Mass performed with the priest onto you or various other churches have their own rites and rituals and they put great emphasis on, "Well, you did those motions. Well, you followed through the course you're supposed to go through and therefore we declare you now just before God. You're saved." And they leave out the reality that there must be evidence of the Spirit having wrought a work in your heart. The Spirit brings new life within the heart.

Some churches teach gloriously the great doctrines of Scripture all the way from the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the resurrection of Christ for our justification, the truth of the regenerating work of the Spirit of God, the truth of the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God, and the glorification. They can just articulate all of these doctrines so beautifully but they leave out the requirement that church members must show forth that they are partakers of new life; that there are evidences that ought to be evident before a person is received into membership in the church; that is, that the Spirit has applied the power of God, the truth of God, into their hearts. You see, while we are declared just in our relation to the law, the work of grace does far more than just cause us to be justified in our relation to law, it radically transforms us by the imparting of spiritual life.

You see, there are two sides to this coin. On the one side, you are in a cold legal way declared just before God. That's wonderful but you are also actually literally changed from within by the Spirit of God. We believe in the new birth. We believe in conversion of the soul. Not just you obtaining a new status of justification before God, we do teach that and hold to that and it's precious and wonderful, but also all of those who have become justified also have received the importation of the Spirit in their hearts. And if you study church history, that makes us quite unique. Not totally and radically unique but certainly in the minority because through these centuries of organized Christendom in the earth, the notion of just going through the motions and jumping through some hoops and performing a few rituals and saying, "Well, I'm okay with God now," has been the predominant theme and whereby the doctrine and the teaching that, no, we preach the Gospel and urge men to repent and believe and those who show forth that they have received new life, those are the ones who are proper candidates for church membership, that would be the minority position throughout church history.

John 5:21, the Lord Jesus reminded us, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life," now that's talking about physical resurrection, physical life, he says, "even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes." Well, wait a minute, who does what? Well, what he's saying is God resurrects people physically from the dead but he also resurrects people spiritually out of spiritual death. Jesus was teaching a new doctrine that these Pharisees and Sadducees could not grasp and understand. He was saying there is a spiritual power that must come into you and change you, it's called, Jesus said, being born again.

As a matter of fact, flip in your Bibles to Ephesians 2. You don't have to flip far, and we'll just run through this quickly. I preached on this just recently but Paul starting in verse 1 says, "And you were dead," I'm in Ephesians 2, "you were dead in your trespasses

and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." So reviewing, he says: you were spiritually dead, you were deviant, you were demonized, you were disobedient, you were deranged and you were damned. That's your status before a holy God. Doing all you can do, putting on all the religion you can, going through all the rites and rituals and motions in the church you possibly can put on, that's what you still were.

Verse 4, what a great conjunctive word, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us." We were most radically unlovely but he has this radical grace, favor, chosen love toward us so what did he do? Verse 5, "even when we were dead," and in the context you can elaborate: dead, deviant, demonized, disobedient, deranged and damned. Though we were all of that. "in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Made us alive. My question to you this morning: do you hold to the great Bible Baptist doctrine of the new birth? Have you been made alive spiritually speaking? Grace, preaching the doctrines of grace, the Gospel of grace, the Spirit takes that message and applies it to men's hearts and they have life and then they become candidates for church membership. That's a great Bible truth and that's a great Baptist doctrine and that's why we're called Grace Life Church. It's about as foundational and essential and biblical I think as you can get in a name without writing a whole paragraph.

Ezekiel 37:3, "He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord GOD, You know.'" Dry bones scattered on the ground representing spiritually dead, lifeless Israel who had become spiritual idolaters and adulterers against a holy God and spiritually they're dead. Can these bones live? God says, "You think we can make anything out of this? Who can do anything with these rotten, dead, drying bones right here? Who can do anything with that?" The prophet says, "O God, you know. If anything can happen, you have to do it. You can't make these bones do anything but just lay there and become dry, brittle and decompose in the arid sunshine but, God, you can infuse new life into dry bones."

Well, there's an inward evidence when this spiritual life comes in. First of all, repentance of sin and I like to remind you that there is – I've never seen this in any theological textbook. As far as I know, I'm the only one that uses this terminology. Now, I don't mean to sound like I'm special, I just never have found it and that is this concept: there is a primary repentance and a secondary repentance. Primary repentance is when you repent of your own righteousness. Here's what I mean by that: it's when you come to turn your back on and turn away from everything you formerly thought might make you right before a holy God. "Well, wait a minute, when I was 7 I prayed a prayer and I walked the aisle." That's fine. That's good. I'm not against walking the aisle but that's not enough to know were you truly saved. You turn your back on just looking at that hoop jump in order to know if you're saved. "Well, wait a minute, my mom and dad faithfully took me to the parish and the priest administered the Mass and I always was there and I did as

good as I could. I took all of that." Well, I don't agree with any of that but I'm telling you, you turn your back on all of that. "Well, wait a minute, I cleaned my life up. I'm more morally upright. I'm more ethical. I'm not taking the drugs I used to. I'm not cheating on my spouse anymore. I've given up the bottle. Pastor, I'm doing better." It doesn't matter. You turn your back on trusting all of that to make you right before a holy God. That's primary repentance. You turn your back on your former view of being right before God or righteousness. Secondary repentance is, that's a one-time-for-all thing. That's settled. Secondary repentance is after you turn, the Spirit now is in you, the word of God is teaching you, you're continually functioning in secondary repentance which is all in every sin, notion, attitude, behavior, whatever, that violates the standards of God. I am a repenter now. When I see it, I don't embrace it, I say, "O God, help me! God, I repent of that. God, don't let me walk in that."

So the Spirit comes in and he makes us fully aware – listen – only the Holy Spirit of God under the preaching of the truth can cause you to come to an utter disregard for every notion of righteousness other than simple faith in Jesus Christ, and only the Holy Spirit of God can humble you so that you walk through this life as now a repenter of any and every attitude, disposition, notion, action or behavior that violates the dictates of God's holy word. So when a person says, "I've been saved," the church and primarily the church elders have not only the right, that's secondary, but the responsibility to examine, lovingly always, compassionately, sure absolutely, but to examine the candidate to see do they show the evidence of the kind of repentance that the new life brings, to show us God did this, they're not just jumping through some hoops.

Secondly, not only is there that inward evidence of repentance, there's a new inward heart rejoicing in God. They begin to treasure God's Son. They begin to joy in the work of Jesus. I remember so vividly as a 19 year old college student after I was wonderfully converted in my car, how in the following months and years as I learned of Jesus, he became more and more wonderful to me. I'll be honest, I loved him at the beginning but not nearly like I love him today because you need the truth about him. That's why strong, clear, thorough study and exegesis and preaching from that study and exegesis is so essential to you as a church because you've got to know the Christ you're supposed to love. You are not allowed to have some fanciful, warm, human idea about Jesus, you need the truth he has revealed from his book about himself and you learn to love him for who he is, not some fanciful, modern, contemporary notion of what you'd like for him to be. I want to tell you, something in you when the Spirit of God comes in you say, "Please tell me the story of Jesus." There is a new rejoicing in God's Son. There's a new rejoicing in God's word. I remember so distinctly falling asleep at night reading my Bible and I never read the Bible before. I was just drawn to it. We're not saying throughout your Christian life you always maintain the disciplines you ought to have in Scripture reading but something changed when life came in, spiritual life.

A rejoicing in God's Son, a rejoicing in God's word, and also a rejoicing in God's people. I tried to stress in some length to the church I was preaching to in Holly Pond this last week about how it's important to look for that new change in your heart whereby you are drawn to true Christians. You want to be around them. You want to fellowship with them.

You want to serve them. You want to help them. You want to help God's church if it's a true church. That is one of the inward evidences, a rejoicing in God's Son, in God's word and in God's people.

Then the outward evidence, the spiritual fruit that you begin seeing in your life. The Holy Spirit begins, he puts the germ in your heart, the seed, if you will, of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and self-control. Now, they're not in full bloom yet but you start seeing some of that you didn't see before. Wives start seeing a husband get a little sweeter and get a little more patient. And parents begin to see a teenager with a new sweetness and peace and patience and kindness they didn't see before. I remember hugging my mom's neck and telling her I loved her after I was saved. I may have done that before but not like that. There's a difference. There's a difference.

Then, of course, a reforming lifestyle and I've already pretty much alluded to this. As a spouse, as a father, as a child, as a worker, your social life usually has some changes. Your dedication as a faithful citizen in your country, your culture that has some changes. You begin to identify with God's church. These are the kind of changes that ought to be evident. And I'll look at this in some detail in just a moment but these are the things in 1525 that Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel were looking for when they boldly and bravely, now you've got to understand, this is against their government and against the church that ruled the known world, baptized each other in Felix Manz's home and became formally speaking, the first Baptist church and everybody was against them. Everybody. But God had done something. God had caused the Scriptures to be written in their language and some of them had gotten a copy of it and they began to realize the church is very very very weakly holding to the Scriptures and very very strongly teaching church doctrine, not the Scriptures and they were a people who said, "Well, what saith the Scriptures?" So they rejected their infant baptism and based on the evidence that they had heard the Gospel of grace and saw the truth of new life in them, were then ready to baptize each other and become a member of a church. I don't even know if they realized they were starting it, but they were starting it that day in their home. Very very very cold January in 1525 in Switzerland.

IV. What does all this come to? This all comes to the glory of God. "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. Amen." The end of grace, this unique and special favor God has chosen to cast on his own, is there so that he might be made known and might be glorified in this world and literally in the universe. God does this so that he might show forth the wonder, the wisdom, the power and the beauty of his wholesome attractiveness and primarily this attractiveness of this love and grace component that he has. You see, the purpose of grace is not just that he might redeem for himself a people that love and enjoy him, but the purpose of his grace is that he might redeem for himself a people that love and enjoy him and in that love and enjoyment, he receives the glory due to his name. It magnifies what he can do. That's why he does it.

You see, all of time and all of eternity is about the glory of God. That's what it's about. It's not about your ball team, it's about the glory of God. It's not about your children doing good. We want our kids to do good but it's about the glory of God. So whatever else we are, we're doing 1,001 things that are fine I'm sure before God, but at the end of it all, we come together as a people who are primarily about God's grace imparting new life and the glory of God that's manifested through him doing that because when he shuts it all down one day and everything is discarded but those whom he has redeemed through grace and imparting new life, it will all be to the great wonder and wisdom and power of God to bring it to such a wonderful fruition.

All of time and eternity is about the glory of God and God is primarily glorified through the work of his Son, and the Son is primarily glorified along with the Father, by redeeming his church, securing her, and glorifying her forever. Now, back to where we are, back into time only, the Son performs this work of redeeming, securing and ultimately glorifying by his grace, whereby he's favored those who will be in his church, he calls them all to repentance and faith, he justifies them and he imparts new life into every single member of his church. Grace, the Gospel of grace, the doctrines of grace, the Spirit using that message to impart new life in individuals, they are added to the church, God works in their lives in the church to glorify himself in time and then one day perfects all of those into a glorious perfection where they will be under his glory for all eternity.

Now, V. what's in a name? What's in a name? We had some dear brothers and sisters whom, by the way, I respect very deeply and agree with them somewhat, who when we began the process of changing our name from First Baptist Church to Grace Life Church thought, "Well, are we sure we want to lose the Baptist name?" I agree with that. Historically, I especially agree with it because of the rich and, if you will, revered history of what early Baptists are and what they stood for, however, things have changed. This is not exactly apples-to-apples but there are words that have different meanings as time changes. The word "gay" has changed substantially. A very good word has been stolen, if you will, in some ways. So words change.

Today we're aware that there are approximately 25 distinct Baptist denominations of which Southern Baptists, the Southern Baptist Convention of Churches, is one of the 25 and we are members of that convention of churches. The reason we have remained a member, some ask us, "Why do we stay a member when there is so much we really don't agree with?" Well, there are some things we do agree with and there are some missionaries who serve under the authority of Southern Baptists that are out of our church and they're good folks so we don't want to completely divorce ourselves but here's the key to why we stay in this association of a convention of churches: because each Southern Baptist church is an independent autonomous church and only voluntarily cooperates with the convention as it deems is righteous and good. If there was a hierarchy called the Southern Baptist Convention Hierarchy and they mandated things to the church, we're gone immediately, but since it's a voluntary cooperation, then we can participate and cooperate with all that we feel is righteous and good. For example, they sponsored a big seminar recently and the keynote theme of the seminar was: New Techniques to Baptize More People. What nonsense. What vile, blasphemous, ridiculous

nonsense. And by the way, I've said this to many of them personally. I was nicer than that but I've said that basic thing to many of them personally to a man, starting with the President of the Southern Baptist Convention, not the last one but one that was President at the time. Starting with those guys, they have all personally agreed with us. All personally agreed but when they get in the public domain, they have to go with the flow of where the churches are going. Kind of a political thing, huh? It happens everywhere.

My point is: I can't go along with taking the sacred doctrines of God's word that are explicitly clear about how you win souls and make them candidates for baptism and rate the text and leave the text and manipulate the truth to come up with all of these contemporary clever gimmicks to get people manipulated through baptismal waters to make our numbers look better. We are not going to do that. I'd rather baptize 40 a year who look like Christians than 140 and can't find 98% of them two years later.

So we are thankful for the fact that we are autonomous and independent and have no authority over us to press us into any mold outside of Scripture but, then again, even within Southern Baptist churches you have a great variety of beliefs, doctrine and practice. There is a liberal wing of Southern Baptists. They are classic liberals. These people would deny the virgin birth. They would deny the complete inerrancy and authority of the Scripture. They would deny or dumb-down the substitutionary atonement of Christ. They would deny the historical accuracy of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. This is classic liberalism in Christianity. They've been around a long time, started in Germany in higher textual critical thought, floated over the ocean, came and started infecting our universities and our campuses and it walks hand-in-hand with this new progressive liberal agenda we see in our social and religious or rather social, political, media climate that we have in our world today.

Then there are moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention. They kind of feel like they're somewhere between, they're not quite as liberal in their views but they're really not where we are as conservatives. And then there is a conservative wing of the Southern Baptist Convention who hold on paper to Bible-based doctrine and practice but even a casual observation leads one to conclude they are overall weak in their preaching of Bible doctrine and weak in the practice of Bible truth in their church congregations. That's not debatable. It's just absolutely factually true.

Overall the Southern Baptist Convention is on what Spurgeon said in the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in London, the downgrade. We're on a downgrade and we've been on a downgrade for many decades. For example, 30 years ago the conservative leaders of the convention called Southern Baptist Churches would not have even come close to accepting what's going on in today's so-called conservative Bible-believing Baptist churches. The terms of the labels become almost meaningless because what was 30 or 40 years ago called modern and liberal today is called conservative, and that's what happens when you don't go to the Scriptures. When you have a liberal movement over here and you react to the movement and say, "Okay, we'll kind of keep you all in and we'll just kind of pull you all a little way," but they pull you a little way and you keep getting



further away from that. So this is the new, that definition of the new conservative Bible-believing Baptist and they look just like the folks I was told were liberals 30 years ago.

We're on the downgrade. There is a deep hollowness and shallowness to "Bible-believing Baptist churches." It's common, for example, to hear of an unrepentant homosexual actively involved in church life and even in ministry in "conservative Southern Baptist churches." He's joining the many unrepentant fornicators and the many unrepentant adulterers who found acceptance in the church decades ago. Sound doctrine is not embraced and proclaimed, moral purity is not maintained in today's "conservative Bible-believing churches." For example, when you go to the "average Bible-believing Baptist church," that's in quotes again, you do not even expect to find a confessional people. You do not even expect to find people actively committed to a sound, objective, Bible-based statement of faith. Look at their websites. You have to go all over the place to find what they believe and often it's about 10 little sentences. It's the most weak, anemic, milky, there's just no meat to it at all. When you go into the "average Bible-believing Baptist church," you do not expect to find a healthy practice of accountability and church discipline. When you go into the "average Bible-believing Baptist church," you do not even expect to find a high view of marriage and a rejection of unbiblical divorce. When you go into the "average Bible-believing Baptist church," you do not even expect to find godly elders who oversee the church and godly deacons who serve the church. Quite the contrary, you know, a church may not have a plurality of elders and you can have some wiggle room there, but too often they have deacons who form an authoritative board over everybody including the pastor which is radically unbiblical. If you go into the "average Bible-believing Baptist church" today, you do not even expect to find meaningful membership. Typically they're railroading anybody and everybody they can get to join the church to make themselves look better and their church rolls typically have 40 to 70% more people on the roll than even come to church which is a great great disservice to the church and a great dishonor to the reputation of Christ in the community. When you go into the "typical, average, Bible-believing church," you do not even expect to find a biblically sound view of evangelism and conversion.

Paige Patterson, who is not as sovereign of grace oriented as I am but he is a friend, he's a President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, what I'm saying to you, he's not as Reformed as we are but he just said recently, Southern Baptists who, in effect, died rather than to sprinkle their babies in state churches, died rather than practice, that's call pedobaptism, died rather than do that, he says now we've become the worst of infant baptizers. Paige Patterson said that. Why? He said because to get our numbers up and grow our churches, we're dunking 3, 4 and 5 year old kids and that's the biggest area of growth in our churches. No wonder the stats are in, it's fact, this is not a preacher throwing out just wild things. The stats are in, the survey has been done, the work has been done, the study is completed, 85% of our kids when they graduate from high school leave the church. Why? They've never been born again. They went through the hoops. They haven't been changed. That's too much work. That's too hard.

So we see that overall there's a doctrinal methodological and moral decline in our churches and our churches are a mess and you wonder why our country is on the

downgrade. Listen to your pastor this morning: the key is the church and the key to the church is the pulpit. If 42,000 Southern Baptist churches were white-hot preaching the word of God in the power of the Spirit and thankfully practiced these things I just articulated, we wouldn't even have the characters we've got running for office today. Our light and our salt would have affected the culture enough nobody would have dared even run for office with the kind of character these guys have. We don't have a Republican problem and a Democratic problem, we've got a church problem. God didn't ordain anybody else to be the salt and the light of the culture but the church. The church. That's why I keep telling you this is the primary thing we've got to be about. This is the key. The church should be the conscience of the community. The unchurched today look at the church and laugh. I mean, when Larry King has to rebuke Joel Osteen because he won't preach repentance, we're in trouble.

Now, if you study church history, you'll find records of a separatist Reformed minded group of people dating back about five centuries or so, about 5, the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, if you will. Let me just read this to you. Anabaptist history is sketchy but I think there is some trustworthy history there. In 1517, an obscure monk named Martin Luther was killing himself trying to do enough works in the Catholic Church that he might believe he could make it to heaven, and then he was slain with the truth of Romans, that the just shall live by faith, and Martin Luther was born again and he realized it's not in works, it's not in the church, it's faith in Jesus that makes you right before God and Martin Luther began studying his Bible and he came up with 95 issues the Roman Catholic Church had that were clearly violations of Scripture. So he takes those 95 theses and he puts them in a paper, a manuscript, and he nails them on the door in Wittenberg in 1517 on October the 31<sup>st</sup> and the Reformation was on and it started growing.

In 1523 in Switzerland, a priest named Ulrich Swingli was holding meetings to reform the Catholic Church in his city. He wanted to do things like remove the images and some other things in the church, and he was on a good track. In one of his meetings, two of Swingli's disciples, Conrad Grebel and I misspelled the name so I'll skip it, Simeon I think, Stumpf. I supposed that's the way you pronounce it. But Conrad Grebel and Stumpf demanded that Swingli lead the people to a complete reformation of all unbiblical practices. He said, "Let's just do away with the whole service of the Mass that somehow you get Christ's saving grace when the priest administers the sacraments." He said, "Let's get rid of all of that," to which Swingli said, "No, I'm not really ready to do that. I'm not going to give up infant baptism, for example, and we must only have reforms if the city council agrees to it." Well, Grebel and his associates advocated that, "No, only believers should be added to the church; those who have walked a newness of life." So Grebel and the others refused to submit their babies to baptism and therefore Swingli who was on a good Reformation track but didn't go very far, had them declared unfit and exiled from the church and had them forbidden to hold Bible studies and so they had to start meeting in secret.

Someone tells the story that when Conrad Grebel and his associates came to Swingli and other early Reformers, now remember, Catholicism rules the known earth basically and so these guys, Swingli and Martin Luther and others, originally started out to fix

Catholicism but the very early Baptists said, "We don't see anything fixable here." That's basically what they said. So when they met with the early Reformers who said, "We've got to get back to the Bible in the Catholic Church," basically Conrad Grebel and his associates said, "Are you going to come all the way? Are you going to come all the way to the Bible or just part of the way?" To which Swingli and others said, "Well, right now, part of the way." And so Conrad Grebel and his associates said, "Well, we can't do that."

On January 21, 1525 a dozen or so men met in the home of Felix Manz in Switzerland and they agreed that the New Testament taught only believers' baptism. All of them had been sprinkled as babies under the state church and so there they baptized each other. A cold cold January 21<sup>st</sup> night in the Swiss mountains and these guys are meeting with fear and trembling thinking, "What's going to happen when we do this?" But said, "Thus saith the Scriptures." And as they baptized one another in believers' baptism, the Baptist denomination, as such, was formally born and a complete revolutionary break with the Roman Catholic Church had begun. Here a group formed that dared to start a church after the New Testament pattern.

Now, two foundational issues separated these early Baptists and led them to this conclusion. 1. No authority but Scripture. 2. The baptism of disciples alone. So they begin to practice this and thus the name Anabaptist because they rejected the infant baptism that they had had and wouldn't allow their children to be baptized into the state church. You understand something, for centuries that's all the world had known. There was no other concept of baptism but sprinkling babies so this was radical so their enemies derogatorily said, "You're anabaptists, you're against baptism," which they would have replied, "We're not against baptism, we're for true baptism. You just never tried it."

So holding to the doctrine or the conviction of no authority but Scripture alone, church dogma and all man-made doctrines must be rejected. That led to the number 2 conclusion, that we are to preach this Gospel of grace, God's Spirit regenerates the heart, giving new life evidenced by repentance and faith, then people are considered true disciples and proper candidates for church membership by believers' baptism. It's also sometimes they called it voluntary believers because when you're sprinkled as a baby and you became a member of the church, you were not voluntarily involved in that. It's interesting too that church history notes that one of the issues the early Baptists had with the Catholic Church was the absence of church discipline, that immoralities were just running amok in church life.

So historically speaking, you could sum up the early Baptists as a people who held to the authority of the Scriptures alone for all faith and practice, and from the Scriptures they found the doctrines of grace, not salvation through the church and works but salvation through this Gospel of grace by faith alone and that they believed that the Spirit of God would birth new life under the Gospel of grace and therefore they should be added to the church and God would be glorified.

Now, moving forward, in May, 1977, if I miss that, guys, the three or four of you who were here can correct me, this church was constituted. There was a good and godly group

of folks who established this church but a few in the group that were not so good or godly. There was a strong personality in the group that led to the adoption of the name First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals but we were not the First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals. There were many many other Baptist churches and there was a First Baptist Church. From time immemorial, only one church ever gets the blessing, if you will, to call themselves the First Baptist Church of any community if they were indeed the first constituted Baptist church in that community and this group was not. A strong personality kind of pushed that through and that's what happened. In June, 2008, we voted to give that name, First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals, back to its rightful owner, the church out on River Road which had the name First Southern Baptist Church in its marquee out front, and we took a name that according to what the Bible teaches is foundational and even essential to the nature of a true local church, grace and life, and then if you've experienced those two, you're a candidate for membership in Christ's church and that is thoroughly biblical and wonderfully in line with what the very early Baptists in the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century believed when they immersed each other and formed that probably first Baptist church in Europe that had ever existed. That's where we got our name.

Much more important this morning is have you received new life? Now, no, no, don't get restless about going home. Have you received new life? Jesus said it to Nicodemus so it must be a very valid question: you must be born again. Have you come to see your sin and your offensiveness and your weighty lacking and emptiness before a holy God? And have you cast from your heart your total faith and hope in Jesus Christ and him alone? If you've done that, then you're a candidate for church membership. Being on 1,001 membership rolls without having the new birth doesn't make you a child of God. You can sprinkle babies, you can do 1,001 other things, but until you have experienced the new birth, you're not a child of God. But we have a wonderful promise: whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. If you become one who sees your sin and need and you become one who casts your call for forgiveness and security on Christ, that didn't just happen one time, there is a point that it started but you live your life saying, "He's my hope. He's my Savior. He's my Lord. He's the one I'm looking to to save me." It's a lifetime of casting and calling on the Lord. It does begin at a point but it's a lifetime thing. Have you been born again? Have you received new life? Our Baptist forefathers died for that doctrine, surely we can live for it.

Let's stand in prayer.