

Putting Amazing Back into Grace
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John 8:44
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...and grace and I echo what Ted said about the excellence with which you guys have ministered and used your gifts, and honed your gifts. Praise God for that, and thank you, and keep up the good work. What a blessing it is. I do want to take this opportunity now to dismiss the children to your classes. May you, this morning, grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Now I invite you all to turn with me in your Bibles to John 8. I borrowed the title for this message from a book by Michael Scott Horton. He wrote it 10 or 15 years ago and I loved the title when I saw it, Putting Amazing Back into Grace. ‘Amazing Grace’, one of the most well-known hymns, even unbelievers know it. It’s such a common thing to see even in movies still today, but grace has become much less than amazing to so many. The title captures a sentiment that we all ought to have, those of us who have really come to know His grace. We ought always to seek to marvel at the amazing grace of God that saves us in Christ Jesus.

Now our text is going to be John 8:44. We’re going to read Verses 37-47 around it. I want to frame our observation of this passage with this question: How lost are the lost? How far is it from being lost to being saved in terms of spiritual distance? Is it a small step or a giant leap? I think biblically it’s neither. Those words borrowed from Neil Armstrong, “A small step for man, a giant leap for mankind,” when he stepped upon the moon. I don’t think salvation is a small step or a giant leap because in both of those phrases the emphasis is on what we do. The reality is that biblically the distance between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of God is a vast and unbridgeable gulf. One of the reasons that we tend to see grace as something less than amazing is because there is something woven into the wiring of man, sin itself causes us to have a low view of God and a high view of self. It’s almost a gravitational force that is exerted in this world’s system, and from within us as well, that we have too low a view of God and too high a view of ourselves. When you have too low a view of God, when God is too low, and when we’re too high, it’s not that far to get from where we are to where He is.

Our text this morning does what the Bible does in general, the Scriptures, when rightly understood—exalt God. We see His holiness. In fact, the essence of the word ‘*holy*’ means ‘*separate*’. It is God’s transcendence. It’s not just morally, it’s His transcendence of being. He is entirely other, entirely separate, and entirely

distinct from His creation. He governs His creation. In Him we live, and move, and have our being, but He is distinct from His creation. Theologians through the centuries have noted that holiness is the quintessential attribute of God. It's the only attribute in which it is pronounced three times. Remember the angels, the seraphim that Isaiah sees in the temple who are covering their eyes, and covering their feet, and with two wings they're flying. What do they say about the Lord? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." He is entirely separate. He is entirely transcendent, far above us.

So the text of Scripture, rightly understood, tends to exalt God and humble man. Certainly that's the focus of the words we're going to focus on in John 8:44, the words of Jesus in which He gives us a right view of ourselves apart from Christ. Look with me at Verses 37-47 to get the full context, and we're going to look at Verse 44 in particular. In John 8:37, Jesus is speaking in the temple courts to the Jews, who we learned earlier, had believed in Him. We saw in recent weeks that their belief wasn't saving faith because it's illustrated as they go along. They just had a shallow faith, not a saving faith, not a genuine faith. You see this in John's Gospel, this idea of kind of believing that He might be the Messiah, but on their own terms. Not a believing that submits to Him. So you see that in Verse 31-32, then Verse 37 now, we'll begin reading there. Jesus says:

John 8:

37 I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father."

*39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus *said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40 But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. 41 You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in*

him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, as we bow now before Your Word, we are reminded of our great need in this passage. Grace, Your unmerited favor to work in our hearts to accomplish what only You can accomplish. May Your Word grant to us life and light. We pray in Jesus' Name, amen.

Martin Luther, at the time of the Protestant reformation, for a number of years had an ongoing dialog with another quasi-reformer, a man who didn't really reform, who turned back to the Catholic church, Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus and Luther debated a number of things in writing as the Protestant reformation was taking shape. Luther was continually pointing to the authority of Scripture and Erasmus using his reason. In one stinging indictment, Luther wrote to Erasmus, “Your problem is that your thoughts of God are entirely too human.” He echoed what the Psalmist said in Psalm 50 when the Psalmist, voicing God's thoughts, God speaking through the Psalmist says: “You thought that I was altogether like you.” There is this tendency in fallen man to measure God by our own standards, to bring Him down, to speak of ‘The Man Upstairs’, to have a low view of God and a high view of self. The Bible magnifies God and humbles man. We see that here in this passage.

We've been looking at this text in previous weeks as the larger context of unmasking spiritual hypocrisy. Jesus is exposing a kind of shallow faith that is not genuine, saving faith. If you read the context that's clearly what's going on.

John 8:31 ~ ...“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

The idea is that there are many who come around Jesus who are not truly His disciples. It's continuance in the Word that demonstrates the truth of their discipleship. So He's working graciously, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, is working to expose the hypocrisy so that those who are still lost might believe. We use the metaphor of a spiritual diagnosis. We talked about, a few weeks back, if you went to the doctor and you said, “I feel great, Doc. I'm here for my physical. My wife basically wanted me to come so I'm here. I know I'm fine, so just give me

the check and then she'll be happy." The doctor says, "You've got a problem. There are some things in your blood work." "I still feel great." "Well let's run this test," and you run this test and you come back for the results. You're still feeling great but he says, "There is a serious problem," and he offers to you a diagnosis of a severe issue. But you say, "I don't feel any different than I've ever felt. I feel better than I've ever felt in my life. What are you talking about?" "These tests do not lie. You can think you're okay, but there is a devastating disease that has attacked your body and we need to act immediately in the most radical way." That is essentially what is happening in this passage. We see it even here come to just a kind of fruition as the dialog with these would be disciples comes to a head and Jesus finally identifying for them the essence of their problem. He x-rays their heart, He does a spiritual CAT scan, and MRI, and He says, "The problem is: Who is your father?"

Now I want us to organize our thoughts around three points this morning. The first point is a devastating diagnosis. The second, we're going to see, is a deep-seated disease. When we understand the devastating diagnosis, and the deep-seated disease, then it helps us to understand more about an astounding deliverance. It helps us see how amazing grace is. When you see how lost you are, and you see how far God has brought you, it makes you glory in God.

1) The Devastating Diagnosis:

But first, the devastating diagnosis.

John 8:44 ~ You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.

Man, that is a devastating diagnosis. There is no one that heard Jesus that day that thought they were a child of Satan. If they thought they were probably children of Satan, they would have allowed for that. These are religious people that He's talking to. He's in the temple courts. He's talking to people who have come to Jerusalem to the temple to worship the one true God. He's not talking to the Pagans out in the farthest reaches of the world who are worshiping wood and stone. He's talking to those who profess to be true followers of God. These are people who would be the theological conservatives of the day. They were worshiping where God told them to worship. He looks at them and He says, ***...You are of your father the devil,...*** It's not the Satanist who is alone the child of Satan. It's not the Hindu, or the Buddhist who worships Satan, or who is of Satan. This tells us that everyone who has not been born again is a child of the devil. That is a

devastating diagnosis. No one who you witness to thinks that they are a child of Satan. Isn't it amazing? I mean you talk to people, haven't you had the experience of sharing with people and they talk about their relationship with God? "I pray all the time. I am constantly talking to God." They think they're fine. Not everyone thinks they're fine, but some people who are lost really think they're fine, don't they? No one who is lost think they are as bad as the text says they are because we have a high view of ourselves.

In fact, surveys show this again, and again, and again, Christian brothers who go out and ask people, "Do you believe you're a sinner." People say, "Yes." "Do you believe you are going to Heaven?" "Yes." "Why?" "Because I'm not as bad as everybody else." They have a high view of self and a low view of God. "God surely grades on the curve, doesn't He?" No, God doesn't grade on the curve. God's standard for entering His presence is you have to have clean hands and a pure heart. You have to have not lifted up your soul to falsehood. You have to be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

So He tells them they are children of the devil and the basis for Him telling them that they're children of the devil He goes on to explain. *...you want to do the desires of your father...* "The reason I know that you are children of the devil is because you are just like your father, the devil. You have the same desires." In fact, it's emphatic in the text. First of all, *You are of your father the devil...* the word 'you' really could be translated almost 'you yourselves are'. Remember the Greek verb has a pronoun already in it. It's not like English. You have to supply the pronoun in English, but in Greek it already says 'you are', and then He puts another pronoun 'you' beside it. You, plural. You plural are. So it has the force of saying 'you yourselves are' *...of your father the devil...* "And you yourselves want to do the desires of your father." Picture here 'wanting' as 'willing'. The word there means 'to will', that you're fully engaged in wanting to do the desires of your father, the devil.

Now the reality is nobody thinks they are. These people don't and they get enraged at Him for saying this. In fact, the irony is in the text as we go along, they accuse Jesus of having a demon twice in the later part of this passage. "The problem is You are the One that is controlled by Satan." Can you believe that they say that about the sinless, eternal Son of God? They accuse Him of being what they are. But He says, *...you want to do the desires of your father...* and then He tells them what two major desires of their father are. *...He was a murderer from the beginning...* Satan is a killer. In fact, the word here translated 'murderer' is a particular word that is only used a couple times in the New Testament, and it

literally is *'man slayer'*. It's emphatic on the fact of killing man. Not just the word *'kill'* or *'murder'* that are also translated throughout the New Testament, but this one is *'man slayer'*. Here and in 1 John 3:15. "Satan wants to kill man, and you want to kill man. You want to kill Me." In fact, He kind of makes this emphatic when in Verse 40, look what He says in Verse 40 to them before He gets to this final, clear diagnosis. He tells them in Verse 40:

John 8:40 ~ But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God;

Here He is emphasizing His humanity. I think He's actually emphasizing that in one sense He is the new humanity. He is the second, or the Scripture says, 'the last Adam'. The first Adam and the last Adam. The first Adam failed to be what he was supposed to be, the second Adam, the last Adam comes and He lives a perfect life before God, a perfect righteousness so that He can then give us a perfect righteousness if we enter into the second Adam. So Satan wants to kill man and the word for man in the Old Testament is *'adam'*, Adam. Satan hates man and he wants to kill man. Why? Because man is in the image of God. He hates God and he hates the one who reminds him of God. He is a murderer from the beginning. What did he do in the beginning? He murdered Adam and Eve, he murdered the race with a lie.

He then goes on to the second thing. He not only wants to murder, he wants to lie, he wants to run from the truth, he does not stand in truth. These are the two characteristics of Satan, the two defining characteristics of Satan. He is a killer and he is a liar. Then He says, "You guys out here who don't know Me yet, have not been saved, do not have a new heart," which is true of all of us before we got saved. The diagnosis was that we were murderers and we were liars. That was the quintessential essence of who we were. These people did not like that diagnosis. But He says, "It's clear because you right now are deceiving yourselves. You're about to say that I have a demon. You say you are children of Abraham, you're children of God, but you don't love Me. If you were of God you would love me. If you were children of Abraham you would obey My Word, but you can't even abide My Word. You're like Satan." This phrase ***...does not stand in the truth...***, another translation says, ***...does not hold to the truth...***

The idea is when the truth comes, Satan runs from it. That's what these people do, they run from the truth. That's exactly what fallen men do, they run from the truth. In fact, it's the desire to run from the truth that makes them murderers. The reason

they want to kill Jesus is because they wanted to put an end to Him speaking the truth to them. They're offended at what He has to say.

So this devastating diagnosis, *You are of your father the devil...* Have you ever thought of yourself that way? That you were that? If you're a Christian today, if you've repented and believed the Gospel, do you realize how far God has brought you? You say, "I was born in a Christian home. I was taught the Bible from my mother and father's lap from the earliest time." Praise God for that, but the reality is the spiritual diagnosis for you was the same. Though God put you in a home and He used the means of grace, the Word of God, to give you a new heart, you were just as far from Him as the person born in deepest, darkest jungle with no witness to the Scriptures. That's what He's saying to the Jews and certainly that's what He says to us. So that's the devastating diagnosis.

2) A Deep-Seated Disease:

Secondly, a deep-seated disease. The diagnosis is based on this deep-seated disease, *You are of your father the devil...* and I want us to look a little more at the essence and makeup of this spiritual DNA that we've inherited from Satan. That's what He's basically saying, "You're spiritually descended from Satan." In the truest sense, every son of Adam, every daughter of Eve is spiritually descended from Satan.

Now I'm not going to take as much time as I would like to to go through this. I'm going to give you some Scripture, we're going to hit a couple of passages quickly, and I encourage you to look back at them this week and read through them. But I want you to turn with me first to Ezekiel 28. Now what you have here is a prophetic oracle pronounced by the prophet Ezekiel to the King of Tyre. Look with me at Verse 1. It says:

Ezekiel 28

1 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying,

2 "Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre,

'Thus says the Lord GOD,

"Because your heart is lifted up

And you have said, 'I am a god,

I sit in the seat of gods

In the heart of the seas';

*Yet you are a man and not God,
Although you make your heart like the heart of God—*

He's going to judge the King of Tyre. The King of Tyre is a wicked man and God sends Ezekiel to speak this message to him. You see in it already some of the spiritual DNA that we're going to be looking at. This guy wants to be God. What happens is, for the next ten verses, Verses 1-10, he is talking to the King of Tyre about his wickedness and what he's going to do. Look at Verse 11:

11 Again the word of the LORD came to me saying,

*12 “Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre
and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
“You had the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*

*13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:*

Now was the King of Tyre in Eden? Nobody has been in Eden since Adam and Eve were thrust out of Eden because the angel guarded the way. What is he talking about? Well I think in some sense he's talking about, figuratively, the King of Tyre had a wonderful place, but what's happening here is something that happens in the Scripture. From time to time, what you'll see happen is the Lord is speaking to a particular man, at a particular time, in a particular place—the King of Tyre, a wicked man, and as He looks at him, He's pronouncing judgment upon him, and then He begins to look at the spirit that is animating him that stands behind him. He's looking at Satan himself. This is the transition that's happening here. He's looking at the King of Tyre, saying, “You want to be God,” and now He's looking at Satan himself, Lucifer, the fallen angel, and He's saying:

Ezekiel 28

*12 “You had the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*

*13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:
The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;
The beryl, the onyx...*

Look at the glory of what Satan was originally. Look at Verse 14:

***14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.***

***15 “You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created
Until unrighteousness was found in you.***

***16 “By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned; ...***

Do you see? This is the fall of Satan. He was beautiful. He was one of the highest creatures of God, one of the covering cherubs, and yet unrighteousness was found in him. He was internally filled with violence.

***...Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the stones of fire.***

***17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.***

Do you see what happened? Satan’s essential problem was pride. His beauty and his greatness were his undoing. He fell. God had made him glorious and beautiful as one of the highest angels, and yet Satan leads this revolt. This is where evil came from. It came from this origination of this desire for pride. He says Satan was internally filled with violence. ***“Your heart was lifted up...”***

Now, turn with me to Isaiah 14, and let me mention, too, a passage to look at another time. We’re not going to take time right now. You see this principle where the prophet, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, can look at one man and look at the spiritual reality behind it. In Psalm 45, you have a positive example of this. Psalm 45 is a Psalm written by the psalmist talking about the Davidic King. It’s a coronation psalm. It’s a psalm when the king would be crowned in Israel, and he starts off with: ***My tongue is the pen of a ready writer...*** and he talks about

how noble the king is. He's asking for blessing upon the king, and what happens is he's looking at the king, and then the Spirit of God causes the psalmist to look from the king to the one the king typifies, Christ, and he says:

Psalm 45:6 ~ Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

Do you see that? He looks at him and then he looks at Christ. That's the same thing that's happening here in the reverse form. You have a man looking at an evil man, looking at the evil behind him, and you have it in Isaiah 14 as well. In Isaiah 14, you have a taunt in Verse 4 against the king of Babylon. This is the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar before he repented. This is the spirit of Belshazzar, his grandson. Look with me at Verse 12, though:

Isaiah 14

***12 "How you have fallen from heaven,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!"***

If you have the King James Bible, it says: "How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer!" The word translated *star of the morning* is a Hebrew verb which means *shining*, and so the translators of the Bible throughout time have wrestled with whether or not this is actually talking directly about that fallen archangel that became Satan. Again, you have this picture. Look what it says here. "***How you have fallen...***" I think it's talking about both. It's talking about Nebuchadnezzar and it's talking about Lucifer. He says:

Isaiah 14

***12 "How you have fallen from heaven,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the earth,
You who have weakened the nations!"***

***13 "But you said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of assembly
In the recesses of the north.***

***14 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.'***

That is the essential sin of Satan. Though he was created in such a high position, his problem was he was not content with his position. He wanted more. He wanted to be like the Most High. Think about, and you can look at this later, but remember what he did? How did he make us spiritually his descendents? When did we become his spiritual descendents? At the fall. He goes to Eve, and what does he say to her? First of all, he lies. He murders her by lying. Remember, God said, "Don't eat from the tree. In the day you eat of it, you will surely die." Satan says, "You shall surely not die." He contradicts the Word of God. Then he says, "In fact, in the day you eat of it, you will become like God, knowing good and evil," and so the woman, because the tree was good for food, and because it was desirable to make one wise like God, she took from the tree and she ate it, and Adam ate it. That's the essential lie that has destroyed the world. "You can be like God." And that is what makes us spiritual descendents of Satan before we come to Christ. We want to be like God.

A week or two ago on Wednesday night, we showed a video, a Biblical Counseling and Discipling video by Paul Tripp. He's written some wonderful books, and he shared in this message an illustration I thought was very profound. To illustrate how this is true, he said imagine you take your child, you take little Johnny to the store. You go to Toys R Us. That's always a potential problem. You go to Toys R Us and you have him in the cart. He's just three years old, and you're wheeling through the store, and you make it through all the big, wide aisles okay. But he said when it comes time to check out, you've picked up what you need, you're checking out, and now it's like the conspiracy gets even greater, because you go through these little, narrow aisles as you get ready to check out, and now the toys are right there.

Little Johnny looks and he says, "I want that. I want that Transformer," and you say, "No, Johnny, you can't have that. We're not going to get that. I've already got you a present today. I've got you a puzzle." Little Johnny says, "Wow, I don't want a puzzle. I want the Transformer." How does little Johnny respond? He asks again, and you insist again, "No," and finally little Johnny becomes enraged and starts screaming, "I want the Transformer!!" You have a scene and you wish that you could hit one of those buttons and disappear, a trap door where you could be out of the store. People are walking by and looking at you. "What? Are you abusing your child?" and all you did was say, "No."

Now, why is it that little Johnny has that reaction? Why is there such rage that can well up in the heart of a small, little child? Where does that come from? Tripp said that little child wants to be able to speak and it happen. That little child wants to be able to wish and it be realized. He wants nothing less than to be God. He wants the place of God, and that does not change. All that changes is that we learn how to work the system a little better as we get older. Screaming every time we don't get what we want doesn't work, especially when you're 15 or 35. We learn how to work the system so that we can have what we want. Because we want what we want, we will make our own reality. We want what we want, and we don't want God.

Now, we can think we want God to the point, and this is where the rub is, and this is the offense of the cross. When Jesus comes to you and says, "Follow Me," He doesn't say, "Just believe in Me to get your get-out-of-hell-free card." He says, "I must be your Lord.

Romans 10:9 ~ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

You don't just believe in your heart in the resurrection and the cross. You confess Him as Lord. You surrender. "I want You more than I want anything else. I let go of everything else so that I might have You." This profound, deep-seated disease, this desire to be God, is in the heart of every single fallen man and abring it. Now, we kill them in different ways. Most of the time, people don't really murder people, but there are a lot of different ways you commit the sin of murder. Remember, Jesus said if you hate someone in your heart, you've committed murder. We can hate those who tell us what we don't want to hear. We can hate those who keep us from getting what we want to get. "You're standing in my way and so I hate you. I may not tell you that outwardly, but I hate you." That's murder. That's in the heart.

A proof of this is we see it all the time in the news. I mean, why is it that the Christian message is so radically and hatefully opposed? I mean, let's just think for a minute. Why is it that the pro-abortion or the homosexual lobby hates the Christian message so much with such antipathy? Think about that for a minute. We all like to be liked, right? But does it really bother you that there are people out there that think you're crazy? We know they all think we're crazy, don't we? You watch TV and they think we're crazy. Do you just brood about that? Does it bother you so much? Why does it bother them so much that we think they're sinning?

Why? If they think we're crazy, you would think it wouldn't bother them at all. "Those crazy loons think we're nuts. They think we're sinning."

Why is it they want so badly for us to say that those sins are not sins? It's because in our voices when we speak the truth, they hear an echo of the voice of the Most High God, saying, "Thou shalt not..." and man does not want to hear that. Man wants to do what he wills, not submit to the will of God. This deep-seated disease is so profound that we can even deceive ourselves as these first century Jews were doing. They were religious people. They were there close to the throne of God. They even had heard Jesus teach, and then we saw in Verse 30 that Jesus said of those who believed in Him, "If you continue in My word, then truly are you My disciples." They had been around Jesus Himself. They had seen Him do miracles. They heard Him preach, and they were this close to the Kingdom, we would think, but how close is that close to the Kingdom? It's an infinite distance. It's not a small step. It's not a giant leap. It's only a bridge that can be bridged by God.

They were there in religious garb, and yet they had not submitted themselves to Christ. They were children of the devil, and Jesus lovingly gives them this diagnosis. I mean, this is a devastating diagnosis. It's a deep-seated disease, but if you're at the doctor, don't you want the doctor to be honest with you and tell you the truth? You don't want him to send you home and let you die of the disease that you don't think you have. Jesus tells with striking clarity the nature of the disease, the depth of the disease. Why? So that He can offer the deliverance. That's the third point:

3) The Astounding Deliverance:

When we know how lost we are, when we know how lost we were, it makes us celebrate the glory of God's grace. There are two applications here. If you're here today and you've yet not repented and believed in Jesus Christ, then you are in this predicament. You are controlled by the enemy. The Scripture makes this clear in a number of places.

Ephesians 2:1-3 ~ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 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. 3 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.

At that time you were dead in trespasses and sins. You were giving yourself to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, all those things, and you were subject to the spirit who is now at work in the sons of disobedience. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, you see that.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says that the God of this age has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving. Satan is ruling, as it were, over his kingdom. That's why we need a Strong Man to come. Remember, Jesus' teaching when He said as He's binding demons, as He's going about, and He's preaching the Gospel, and people are being saved, He says, "When the strong man has his goods safe in his house, how can you get them out unless Someone stronger than the strong man comes?" He's saying, "Satan had all of his goods safe in his house, but One stronger than the strong man came to plunder his house." Jesus Christ is that strong One, stronger than the strong man. So salvation is not a small step.

I heard someone recently, a well known pastor in America, who said that if he had fifteen minutes with someone, he could get them to pray to receive Christ and become a Christian. With anyone. He would use their felt needs, he said. I thought to myself this is a sad thing that you are preaching the Gospel, because you don't understand the incredible work that's required to bring someone from darkness to light. It's not a matter of just laying it out before their reason and then they're going to embrace it. If that were the case, I hate to say it, but Jesus should have been the most successful evangelist. He had fifteen minutes with these guys right here and they didn't get saved.

Being lost is much deeper and darker than we tend to imagine, and it is so profound that God must take out our heart and put in a new one. Everything that the Bible talks about, Colossians 1:13, He has delivered you from the domain of darkness and translated you into the Kingdom of His Son. You were delivered from a domain, a dominion. God broke that power and translated you to be a part of His Kingdom and to be His children. This is what makes grace amazing. I was that. I was formerly darkness, but now I've become light in the Lord. It's not a small thing. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:6, likens our conversion to creation ex nihilo. He says:

2 Corinthians 4:6 ~ "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

So when someone gets saved, what happens is God looks into the dark chaos that was our heart, and says, “Let there be light.” That’s salvation. That’s not something that you reason someone into. Now, you’re supposed to share the Gospel. You’re supposed to talk with them and reason, but what it says is that the only way that someone’s going to get saved is when God Himself accompanies our words with His spirit-transforming power and wrestles someone away from the prince of darkness. Every conversion is nothing less amazing than when Jesus walked to that tomb and He met Mary, and He met Martha, and they were weeping, and they were lamenting the fact that their brother had been dead for four days. They are despairing, and Jesus says, “Roll the stone away,” and He said, “Lazarus, come forth.” The power of His Word calls that man who had been dead four days to get up. Life came back into him. He walked out of the tomb. There he is wrapped up. He can’t see. He’s got all the burial stuff on him, and Jesus says, “Loose him and let him go. Take off those dead man’s clothes, because he’s alive.”

That is conversion and that’s not something that should be just relegated into something that can happen just because we have some skill in knowing how to talk to somebody. We should work at having skill. Yes, we should make sure we listen to people and we reason with them, but when someone comes to salvation, all the glory belongs to God. We’ve done nothing except be faithful to sow His Word, and we have to keep sowing His Word. His Word is offensive. We have to be careful to try to be wise about that. Don’t give any offense other than the Gospel. We have to lift up Jesus, and you can see the antipathy to Jesus Christ today, this week at work, at school, or at the water cooler. Debate on politics is happening. Let’s say it’s talk about the Braves or the Falcons, something less controversial than politics, and so they’re having a discussion. You chime in, and you begin talking about things, and you’re able to transition. They say, “We went to the basketball game this week,” or something, and you say, “You know, this week I heard a sermon on Sunday about the glory of Jesus Christ and what He does,” and you mention Jesus Christ. That’s all it takes, and the water cooler will empty. Not the water cooler itself, but the environs of the water cooler. That would be kind of a nice miracle, though.

Isn’t it amazing how bringing up the Name of Jesus is a lightening rod? That is because He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and His Name is the Name that is above every other name. People know somehow deep in their souls that one day they will bow to that Name. If they won’t bow in this life, and our message is bow in this life while there is time so that you can become His child, but if they won’t bow in this life, they will bow in hell before Him forever, because He is the One that will be worshiped. He is the only One that is worthy. May God help us to

glory in our salvation and to go and to take the message of Jesus Christ, realizing that when we mention it, it's possible people are going to turn away, but we have to keep talking about Him, graciously, sensitively, but looking for opportunities to lift up Christ, because there are those moments when we say, "Listen, I want to tell you what Jesus has done for me," and they walk away. Other times we say, "Let me tell you about what Jesus has done for me," and they sit, and they listen, and they listen, and they think, and then later, "Let me tell you what Jesus has done for me," and then we find out that that person has come that incredible distance from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light, and God used your word to do that. All glory be to God for our salvation. Grace is amazing.

Let's pray to Him right now...

Father, we thank You for the glory of our salvation. We thank You that You have done what only You could do. Lord, we acknowledge Your Word tells us that apart from Christ, we're under the wrath of God, and as we saw today, it's worthy to be under the wrath of God when we have the same desires that Satan has, when we would, if we were able, depose You from Your throne and reign in Your place, and we seek to do that every day of our lives until Your grace awakens us.

Father, we pray that You would open the eyes and hearts of some in this room who need to today stop living for themselves, stop living their lives as they will for what they want. Help them to see the delusion that they're under, and help them to know that the sweetest freedom in the world is submission to Jesus Christ, that to be Your servant is to be Your child, and to become a part of Your precious family, and to know joy that we were created to know, the joy of standing before a Holy God, robed in a righteousness that has come from Jesus on the basis of His cross, the shedding of His blood, and the gift of His righteousness.

Father, for those of us who have trusted Christ, may we see continually how precious it is, and may we see how great the enemy that still battles within us, our old nature, may we hate it more. May we hate sin and may we lean upon Christ to walk in holiness. We pray this so that You might be exalted and glorified in every way, and we pray it in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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