

4th Sunday of Lent
March 10, 2023

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10
Pastor Priewe

Theme: The All-In-One Curing Miraculous Grace of God

- 1. The Antidote for Death**
- 2. And the Cure for Other Life-Threatening Cures**

Grace be yours in abundance from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. If I've learned anything lately from the medical field, it's that there is rarely, if not never, one single cure-all for the things that are ailing us. At best we get a convoluted combination of "maybe this will help some," and "this should relieve this part of it, but you'll need to wait six weeks to see the results," with no guarantees about anything and nothing that ever seems to cure it all.

Doesn't it even make you suspicious when somebody does promise something as a "be-all, end-all, cure-all"? For the most part, that's probably good. Anyone who says they've got the magical miraculous cure is probably a traveling con artist peddling a miraculous bottle of cure-all snake oil potion, like in the Western movies. Speaking of snakes, what do think some of the snake-bitten, dying Israelites thought when Moses said, "Here, look at this bronze snake and you'll live." "Well that seems dumb!" they probably thought. But here's out it turned out. The ones who did trust the cure lived and the ones who didn't died. No second opinion, no alternate treatment! It was either life through the cure God them gave or death!

Now as true as it is that we need to be suspicious of, and even reject some miraculous cures, do you realize that as today we rethink about our religion, and specifically the solution to sin, it's based on one single cure-all that must absolutely be taken and received or certain death is the result. The Apostle Paul tells us about this all-in-one cure in Ephesians 2, and so we'll take that premise as our theme today. The All-In-One Curing Miraculous Grace of God is 1) the antidote for death, 2) and the cure for other life-threatening cures.

Before we get to the cure, we've got to understand the ailment and the desperation of the situation. Paul says, "**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...**" (1) Let's

stop there already and notice a few things, first that the situation is beyond desperate. You weren't just dying with the clock running out to find the cure. No, you were already dead in sin, which means it's going have to be some kind a of cure to reverse death.

The second thing we need to notice is—who the “you” is that he was addressing. He goes on to describe them in a way that reveals who he was talking about. **“You were dead in your transgressions and sins 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.” (1,2)**

That gives us quite a few hints. The “you” plural or (“You’s Guys” as we say in the Midwest) that Paul was addressing were people who used to do what everybody was doing, who lived the way the sinful world lives and were under the control of the ruler of this world, that is, the devil, who is the spirit who is working in those who are disobedient.

If you put these hints all together, Paul is first addressing people who were once unbelievers. He’s talking to the Gentile (or non-Jew) part of the Ephesian congregation, which he’ll make clear in the section after our text, where he says, **“Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth...at that time were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”** More than desperate and dire, their situation was death, but not physical death, because they were physically living and walking about in the ways of the devil. Instead, it was spiritual death, bodies alive but souls dead, excluded from Christ, without hope and without God, not a pretty picture.

Now that we realize Paul was talking about the Gentiles, two things could happen. Either you could think, “Sheesh, Paul, aren’t you laying on them a little thick. Were they really that bad?”

Sure, they're probably some bad apples in there but I bet there's some good ones too." To that, we say, "No, Paul was speaking truthfully by the Holy Spirit's direction about the dead state of the Gentiles by nature." That description also applies to us by nature who have inherited sin from our parents. The other thing that could happen is the Jews or the all-their-life believers who are listening could jump on the bandwagon and say, "Good grief, Paul, you're exactly right about those dead pagan heathen Gentiles. They're so bad and they're so dead," and then everyone gets their pointer finger out and points at them.

Well if you've ever been sitting on your pedestal recliner watching some terrible crime news story and thought, "They're so bad," then you've fallen into Paul's trap, because this is what he says next. **"All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts."**(3) Sure, it's easy to point at the blatant acts of disobedience from the heathens of the world, but then Paul points the finger back at himself and all the Jews and all the life-longers with him and says, "Us too! We had all covenants and the laws and words of God and we still lived among them, gratifying our cravings and lusts and desires and thoughts." Maybe so that we suppressed some of the blatant outward actions, sure didn't go out and actually have the affair, but we lusted in our hearts just the same. Fine, we didn't go out and commit murder, but we hated our brother in our hearts. Like the parable of the Prodigal Son reveals, the older brother who stayed home was just as lost as his wild, rebellious brother. The inward sin is just as worthy of death as the outward. So Paul unites us together and brings the hammer of judgement down on us all **"Like the rest, (just like the Gentiles), we were by nature deserving of wrath."** (3)

The ailment we face is all encompassing. We are by nature spiritually dead, blind, enemies of God. Sometimes it's referred to as "Total Depravity." That's not a way we like to think or talk

about ourselves—depraved, blind and dead. Long ago, I had a prospect I was teaching in instruction class ask me after she attended worship, “What’s with that paragraph at the beginning? It’s such downer. I don’t like that.” She was talking about the confession where we acknowledge that we’re sinful by nature, that we’ve sinned in our thoughts, words, and actions, and that we deserve nothing but punishment now and forever. Truth is, I don’t like it either, but we have to say it or we’re still in denial, deceiving ourselves, and refusing the cure for the shape we’re in.

Another person once made a different comment about that part, “That beginning part is such a roller coaster. One second, we’re way down here, dead and worthy of punishment, and the next second, we’re way back up here, forgiven and saved again.” That’s true too based on the model of the one second it takes the Apostle Paul to turn the corner from death to life here in Ephesians. In one sentence we’re all dead and deserving of wrath, and then bam! The tune changes, **“But 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.” (4,5)**

Finally, there it is—the *ALL-IN-ONE CURING MIRACULOUS GRACE OF GOD!* It’s the 1) antidote for death. It’s the cure for sin and guilt and total depravity that cause death. As with any miracle cure, it’s worth evaluating what’s in it and how it works and who is offering it. So what does Paul say, **“Because of God’s great love,”** he made the decision to act, he made us alive. Well, that would have to be true, because there wasn’t anything about us spiritually dead, blind enemies of God that was deserving of love, but God acted out of the store of his love and the riches of his grace.

Next we look at his mercy. **“God, who is rich in mercy,”** Well that checks out too because he’d have to be rich in mercy to put up with everything we’ve pulled and to not punish as us as

our sins deserve, and that's what he does because he's rich in mercy. And if there was anything about us that did move him to act in this way, it was not some spark of goodness or potential that he saw in us, but actually our deplorable state, our helplessness, that prompted God to say, "Their only chance is my mercy and so I will give it richly!"

So God's mercy and love grace make up the cure that he uses to "**[make] us alive even when we were dead in transgressions and sins.**" That part checks out too. The cure for spiritual death couldn't come from us anymore than I could give myself an Epi-pen after I had died of an allergic reaction. Dead is dead. There's no raising yourself from spiritual death. It takes God's power to make you alive and that same great power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead is the power he used to raise you from the dead and make you alive with Christ.

And he goes beyond just making us alive. On top of it, "**God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.**" Now this is one of those "it's true already, but you don't see it yet" truths. It's one that we don't necessarily feel but must believe with hearts of faith. I'll tell you that bouncing in and out of hospital rooms with Josie the last two months does not feel like I'm chilling up with Jesus in the heavenly realms, but faith clings to the fact that God says it's true, even when it doesn't look or feel that way. God gave us the full and final antidote to death, his ALL-IN-ONE CURING MIRACULOUS GRACE that makes us alive with Christ and seats us with Christ, even now before we experience it fully in heaven.

Right now, the way we experience all of that in this life is through faith. "**It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.**" Faith sees the gracious cure God gives and receives it, ingests it, and trusts that God says we shall not perish but have eternal life when we look to Jesus lifted up on the cross for the sins of the world. This salvation, initiated by God's grace and received

freely through faith **“is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast.” (8,9)**

Why would he do such a thing and just give it away the way he does? The cause behind it we stated before—his love, mercy, and grace. But God also gives us some purposes for doing so on the back end. He did all this **“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. (7)** God wanted the riches of his grace to be freely evident to others as his invitation to come and be saved. Secondly, he did it this way so that no one would think they could boast about saving themselves.

Another final purpose is that God brought us from death to life so that we might carry out the plans and works he created us to do. **“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (10)** It would be a terrible misunderstanding for someone to conclude, “Well, I don’t get saved by my good works, so I’m not going to do any good!” No quite the opposite! It’s like it gushes out us. “God made me alive, he saved me, he gave me heaven, and now I want to really live and do what is good for others and pleasing to him, the very thing I was created to do!” It’s a way to simply say “thank you” to God with our lives for his all-in-one curing miraculous grace.

Now, way back when we started, maybe you remember there was a part 2 to this sermon, and you’re wondering if I’m about to ramp up for ten more minutes. You’ll be relieved to know we actually already covered part two, 2) *a cure for other life-threatening cures*. We just need to name them and remember how they were cured already. My time among doctors recently has shown me that sometimes when flummoxed, a doctor will suggest a cure that will be either really

good for you or really bad for you. Basically, a cure you or kill you kind of deal. There's been a number of suggested cures like that over the years all cured by this one section.

First is the supposed cure of “synergism” or “work-righteousness”, the idea that we work together with God or have a spark of good in ourselves to earn forgiveness and salvation by what we do. It's basically the Roman Catholic way of thinking, but it's also what our hearts are most prone to, and if we rely on our works, it will kill us. Paul says, “No!” it was totally by his grace, not by our works, not from ourselves, it is the gift of God!”

Next, is a controversy that sprung up about the doctrine of election, called “intuit fidei” or “in view of faith.” It's the idea that God looked ahead from back in eternity and saw who would have faith and do good works, and so he chose or elected them based on that. Same as before! That still depends on us and our works, just from ahead of time. That doesn't make it better. We saw before how God's grace and love, not ours, initiated him to act. By grace, you are the saved ones!

And just one more, the concept of decision theology which says I make the choice myself to believe or not believe in Jesus. I come to him on my own terms. No you don't, not when you're spiritually dead by nature. You don't decide to do anything, much less, the most important thing of raising yourself from the dead. God made us alive. He raised us up. It was not from ourselves and thank goodness it wasn't because I see how unreliable everything else I do is. But this, God himself has done, and so I can rely on it completely. His miraculous grace is the all-in-one cure. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!