



Love Incorruptible
“Grace, Faith, Poems”
May 14, 2017
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

Happy Mother’s Day!

For the last couple of years on Mother’s Day, we have detoured from the series that we have been on and have given a very Mother’s Day specific message... It didn’t help that last year we were studying the sermon on the mount, and the way that it all fell, had we actually

stuck to the order of the sermon we would have been talking about “lust” on Mother’s Day... so that made our decision pretty easy.

but as I was reading through Ephesians 2, which is where we are in our series going through Paul’s letter to the Ephesians... I can’t help but see so many ways in which this powerful passage has the power to speak something so divine... so clearly into the lives of the Mom’s in this place today, that I really felt like we should this year, continue on our journey.

So it is NOT a Mother’s Day message this year. But I do hope that Mom’s, as well as everyone, is blessed by this today.

We have called this series “Love Incorruptible” because the last thing that Paul writes in his letter is this:

“Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with **love incorruptible.**”

and when I think about Mom’s... when I think about my Mom...

when I think about my wife...

when I think about all the Mother's in this place who I have seen raising their children, I don't think that there is a better way to describe that type of love, from a Mother to a child, than a love that is incorruptible.

A love that NOTHING could ever come between. and when I was studying the passage that we are about to look at, which is the first section of Ephesians 2... I see the one thing that parents need more than anything.

The one thing that Children need more than anything... the one thing anybody in any sort of relationship with another person needs more than anything, and that is GRACE.

I just can't get away from it. This scripture is the gospel. It is the entire thing, all wrapped up beautifully in one of the most perfectly crafted few sentences we get in the entire bible that demonstrates exactly what the gospel is all about.

Ephesians 2:1-10 -

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you **once** walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the **immeasurable riches** of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And **this is not your own doing**; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰**For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

Let's Pray..

I want to dive right into this...

Notice the very first thing that Paul says here:

you were dead in the trespasses and sins. (in which you once walked)

Dead.

Most of us read this and we think “there is something that we can do to pull ourselves out of this.” - like medicine... as if it says that we were “sick in our sins”

But there are no medicines for the dead, only miracles.

It will not happen, without divine intervention.

When Lazarus died, there was nothing at all that He could do... he couldn't go see a doctor... he couldn't take his medicine...

there was nothing his sisters Martha or Mary could do for him. It was utterly and completely reliant on a miraculous intervention to give life where there is no life.

And this gets confusing to people, truthfully, because people want to think that there is something that they can do... a medicine they can take... a doctor they can see... some step that they are make toward God so that they can have some sense of justification in and of themselves.

but Here is something that we have to understand about humanity in general, specifically as it relates to the gospel. Because a lot of people use these early chapters of Ephesians to build a case *against* human free will...

like, in the sense that God is just going to do whatever he is going to do, and save whoever He wants to save, and He already decided who is in and who is out.

But all the way down to the way that God created us, He created us as creatures that have the ability to reason and the ability to make decisions.

Hearts that can fall in love... minds that can talk ourselves into and out of things...

but what is so significant in this is, that in all of those reasoning abilities... in following our hearts and listening to what our minds tell us, before we came to know Christ, WE WERE ALL DEAD to the life that God has for us.

Human instinct, though sometimes generous and sometimes we are inclined to do the right thing, ultimately is self preserving.

Take for example, when Jesus says in Matthew 25:

when Jesus separates the ones on his right and on his left... everyone is confused. Those who did the wrong thing... he said "I was sick and you didn't visit"

"I was hungry and you didn't feed me"

"I was a stranger and you didn't invite me in..."

but these people responded by saying "WHEN DID THAT EVEN HAPPEN?" Because they lived their whole lives for themselves, but they didn't even realize what they were doing... but the ones who did the right thing... they didn't know it either.

When did we feed you? When did we visit you?

The transformation had just been engrained into them, so much so that they just did it... something shifted in them, and the natural bend changed... but think about this... put yourself there, what do you do when someone who is hungry asks you for food? Or for money for food...

Or, an even bigger question would be, what if a stranger needs a place to stay...

When the stranger comes to our home, and they need a place to stay for a while... we in our hearts may know what is the right thing to do in that moment, but typically, in our minds, it goes like this:

WHAT WILL THIS COST ME?

WHAT WILL THIS COST US? WHAT WILL THIS COST OUR FAMILY?

Rather than: What does this person, or family, actually need in this moment?

and this is the difference between living in human instinct, and living a gospel centric life:

The gospel centered life is one that is always looking to do the thing that costs you, so that someone else can *experience grace*... but we are dead to that kind of life apart from Christ.

The human mind can't even comprehend that type of life without the example of Christ... it is like what we talked about last week, how in Paul's prayer for the church he says: "that the the eyes of your hearts be enlightened"

when we think of eyes, we think of something that sends a signal to our brain, or our mind... not our heart... but when we SEE A NEED, IF it only goes to our mind and not our heart, then we will limit our response to our ability to reason through the situation.

And human reason always asks self preserving questions.

But the human heart has the ability to be compassionate, and when Christ is living in your heart, and has opened the eyes of your heart, the Christ like thing to do becomes the **ONLY** thing to do.

But naturally, we are dead to that.

and unless God gets ahold of your life and opens your eyes to the fact that you are selfish even when you think you are generous... that even in the things that you have accomplished you will never work your way into salvation, and that you are poor in Spirit and lost without Christ... you will keep walking the way you always walked...

lets look briefly at verse 2 and 3, at how we once walked:

(you were dead in the trespasses and sins) in which you **once** walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

This is powerful for a couple of reasons...

One, it paints a picture of all humanity apart from Jesus living out their evil desires and following their flesh, not even knowing that they are doing the wrong thing... they are dead... nothing in them even is telling them it should be any different until their eyes lock on the cross.

but the thing that is most powerful about this, is the two words that follow this... after Paul shows how utterly lost and awful we are without Christ, he gives us two words that change everything...

but God...

How many times in your life have you been there? When just like Paul does for all of us, you do for yourself... and you begin to list out all of the ways that you don't measure up... the times that you let your kids down... the times that you tried and failed... the times that you lost your temper... the times that you just didn't care about who you hurt or what you did because there was a longing inside of you **THAT YOU HAD TO SATISFY**... but you know that every time it comes back on you...

and when you look at **YOUR LIST**... everything in your life so obviously can't measure up, and you so obviously could **NEVER STAND ON YOUR OWN TWO FEET** before your maker and face what you deserve... and you are drowning in the guilt of everything that haunts you...

but God. (verse 4, 5:)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive *together* with Christ—by grace you have been saved —

But God, who has more mercy than anyone who ever lived or anyone really could even imagine... Loved you so much, that *when you were dead*, in the same way that He raised Lazarus from the dead... He called out to those dead bones to come alive in Jesus Christ... and saved you by His amazing grace...

Grace literally means “unmerited favor” - its something that you did absolutely nothing for... and it is amazing that in this one section, we see how God is both merciful TOWARD YOU, and how He pours out His grace UPON you...

Mercy is not getting what you deserve... when your life is filled with all of the things that Paul lists that we all are... and then you add to it your personal list... you know what you deserve... and it is not good. But because God is so rich in mercy, He doesn't give you that... instead, He gives you grace...

He not only doesn't give you what you DO deserve...
He also GIVES YOU what you so clearly DON'T DESERVE.

and watch this... watch what happens when He did that:

verse 6:

(by grace you have been saved —) and raised us up with him and ***seated us with him*** in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

This is an incredibly powerful image.

In other places in the New Testament, especially in the book of Hebrews, you get all sorts of imagery of Jesus Christ being our high priest... The reason Hebrews is written that way, is because the Hebrew people are all about the law, and the significance of their symbols, and their anticipation of the Messiah who was going to fulfill all of the scriptures of the Old

Testament... but the problem was, when Jesus came... they missed Him! He was right in front of them, and they didn't even know it was Him. So the book of Hebrews takes us through a lot of the Old Testament, and the forefathers of the faith in an effort to show how Jesus is the fulfillment of all of it.

and one thing you get a few times there, is that Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews shows us, that by sitting down next to the Father, He is saying the same thing that He said on the cross: "it is Finished." - and I'll explain that more in a second...

But once again, what Paul does here in Ephesians, is He goes out of His way to show us everything THAT WE ARE, IN CHRIST.

He not only says that Christ is sitting...

Here, it says that not only are we raised up with him but we are also seated WITH HIM in the heavenly places... and here is what is so significant about that.

In the Old Testament, there is this place called the Tabernacle.

Exodus 25:8 records God giving Moses the reason for building the Tabernacle... it says this:

"let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst."

So they build this tabernacle, so that in *that* place, God could live with them... They could be in His presence, and Him in theirs. That is the Old Testament model... if you wanted to be near God, you went to the temple.

and this is incredibly significant, especially when in the New Testament we read that "our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19) - they used to have to go to the temple to have community with God... now, we can have it every day of our lives, everywhere that we go.

But one thing that is fascinating, is that in all of these furnishings,
there were no seats for people.

and here is why:

The work was never finished. There was always something still to do,
always something more that could be done.

especially for law-driven Hebrew people, the moment you atone for one sin,
you find yourself needing atonement for something else...

God wanted the tabernacle to be a place where he could LIVE with
people... but in that place, they never rested. They were always working to
do something that they thought would please him, or earn his forgiveness...
but the work was never finished.

and what is so significant about that is that in the book of Hebrews
describes Jesus, who is our high priest, now SEATED at the right hand of
the throne of God, signifying that HE is saying by doing so, that IT IS
FINISHED...

now look again at what Paul says about US....

“and raised us up with him and **seated us with him** in the heavenly places
in Christ Jesus”

we are seated right there with Him.

Because for the first time, there is no work left to be done, it has all already
been done for us, and for the first time, we too can sit.

Because the work is finished.

But it is not because of anything that you did. See, when we live our whole
lives working to try and earn whatever it is that we think we need, there is
no rest... because the eyes of man are never satisfied. That is part of the

reason that God gave us the 4th commandment saying “Remember the Sabbath and KEEP IT HOLY.”

Because when you take a day to rest from your work, you are not only recharging yourself for another six days, but you are acknowledging to God that you trust that His world will keep moving even when yours takes a break.

Its extremely significant, and worth saying every week like we are, that Paul wrote the first half of Ephesians to tell us all about who we are, in Christ, on account of nothing that we have done, before He ever even gets into the second half, where He describes some of the specifics of what that walk looks like...

Because our ability to do the second half of Ephesians... the things like overcoming anger and navigating relationships and having great marriages and raising great kids... all of those things will be determined by how well we are able to sit down and find peace and rest in knowing that the work has already been done FOR YOU, in Christ.

Because if the work hadn't been done for you, then when you get to the section about anger, you are going to keep working on this issue and before long you may even have a grasp on it, it will seem... but it will always come back on you as long as you are working out your anger by your own methods... and behavior modification can become a religion where you think you are earning your place back to God because you have learned how to control something... but its not about modifying your behavior, its about your total need for savior because in your own strength, somewhere deep down, you will always be angry if you can't learn to rest in the grace of God.

I just use anger as an example because it is an issue Paul addresses a few verses later when he actually begins to address how transformed lives should start to look.

But the things in chapters 4-6 ARE IMPOSSIBLE if you can't rest in grace of God, knowing that the work has been finished.

Today is Mother's Day... and if there ever was a job in which it feels like your work is NEVER FINISHED, it is the job of a Mother.

There is always laundry, there are always snacks to make... there are always conversations that have to be had... and in Motherhood its not even about justifying your position through work, as many other areas of our lives are. Mom's don't have a lot to prove... they already do more than anyone in the world...

In parenting, most of the time it really just has to do with LOVE.

We work, because we LOVE.

and we want our love to have action.

But sometimes what we need more than anything is health. and health never comes without rest. And resting never comes without coming to terms with the fact that you are enough... where you are, right now... That Jesus did something so amazing in your life, and it empowers you to do the impossible job of raising kids...

because at the end of the day, he is strong in our weakness. Another place in Hebrews it says that we do not have a high priest who is UNABLE to understand our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15)... He gets it. But He became everything that we fell short on... so that we can be lifted back up by what He did for us.

Health comes by resting in the finished work of the cross. Healthy choices are made when we are resting in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

I was talking to our neighbor... he came over and was helping Dawn and I with some yard stuff, and he, like most of our neighbors here in Southwest Detroit, is Catholic.

and He was asking all sorts of questions about our church, and He couldn't believe that we don't do "confession" here...

I tried to explain to him as simply as possible, that where we believe in confessing our sins to one another, we believe very strongly that we don't have to live in the mistakes that we make every day until we can get to that booth, and that to us, the gospel is not about us doing something wrong... it is about Jesus doing something right... and about us becoming ALL THAT HE IS because He became all that we were when He died on the cross in our place.

He couldn't believe it... He loved the idea of being a part of a place where He didn't have to go to "confession" every time he made a mistake... but even though He loved the idea... you could tell that he didn't quite buy it.

Like it was just a little too easy.

That was a huge reason for the Protestant Reformation in the first place... the Protestant Split from the Catholic church.

and this next verse was crucial in that:

verse 8 - 9:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And **this is not your own doing**; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Notice this, this is the SECOND time in this short set of scriptures that Paul says "its by grace you have been saved."

I love the way that this says "this is not your own doing." -

He has to spell out what it means that it is by grace...

YOU DIDN'T EARN IT... THERE IS NO MERIT BY WHICH YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS!!!

people always ask me about this phrase: "born again." - what does it mean to be "born again" - and that is obviously a COMMON QUESTION...

because when Jesus was talking to a man named Nicodemus, and He said to him John 3:3) “you must be born again!” Nicodemus responded like any of us would respond, He said “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4)

Because it seems so backwards... really it seems so strange... how can a person be born again, but really, it is the absolute greatest image for what Jesus actually does to us....

Its just like how Paul talks about being dead, and the dead being made alive in Christ. Birth and death are really the *only* ways to describe it...

Think about when you were first born... you were in your Mother’s womb.

The truest statement that nobody can ever refute is this: You did nothing to earn your life.

The breath in your lungs, a heart that beats inside of your chest. You didn’t work for it, you were handed it. Two people came together, your mother carried you, giving up essentially her own body for 9 months and then many aspects of her life for the years that followed...

you had nothing to do with you being made.

There is NOTHING about a child being born that has ANYTHING to do with the child. Life is an amazing image of grace.

and that is what makes the idea of “being born” the perfect picture of what happens when Jesus comes into your life.

Jesus did everything... and we did nothing.

We contributed nothing to our first birth, and in the same way, we contribute nothing to be born again in Christ.

Otherwise it wouldn't be “being born”

and what Paul says here is so significant... it is not by your own doing...

but here is where it gets sticky...

A lot of people believe that IF grace really is that great... then why not keep living the way that we want to live, and clinging to grace.

But first of all, if you actually are thinking that way, it is proof that you have not comprehended the first 9 verses of Ephesians 2. It is clear that you are still dead in your sins.

Even Martin Luther, who championed the reformation and concept that we are saved by grace alone said this: "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

Otherwise it is just a mask... its an act... being poor in Spirit doesn't mean you stop sinning... it means that you realize you are sinning... it means you realize that you are destroying your eternity, and the lives of others around you... it means you make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life and in order to call Him Lord, you still need to do what He says...

Paul addresses this in Romans... (Romans 6)

He says what shall we do, just keep on sinning so that grace can keep abounding? but Paul says NO! BY NO MEANS! and in fact, in the same way that Paul says in Ephesians that we were dead in our sins... He says in Romans, that when we come to Christ... we become DEAD **TO** OUR SINS.

and I understand why this can be a lot to grasp... because you aren't saved by what you do... but only by what Jesus does... but the evidence of whether or not you are following Jesus is by the FRUIT OF YOUR LIFE.

So we are going to try and bring this home... and hopefully give you a new understanding about this... by answering this huge question:

If it's not by works, then why work?

why do anything at all?

Here is why... its found in verse 10, and it brings everything together.

and I think that this is just one of the most beautiful things we get in the entire bible:

For we are his **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

real quick, it says "which God prepared beforehand" - I want to direct you to the same passage we talked about a couple of weeks ago... because the framework is so similar to what so many people feel like... they think "How can GOD USE THIS?" This brokenness... this mistake... How can He call me AFTER THAT?

even Paul, as He is writing here... is chained to a guard, locked in a prison... and yet He writes with such hope!

but Jeremiah 29:11, its such a famous verse and it says "I KNOW the plans that I have declares the Lord..." and those plans are for GOOD.

But what people don't realize is that when He gives that prophecy, He is giving to the the Israelites who are at that moment IN EXILE in Babylon...

and what God is saying to them is this: I am going to use all of this... this mess that you guys have found yourself in... and I am going to write a better story that you will get the chance to live out... because you are my children... and my plans for my children ARE GOOD.

God demonstrated His love for us in that WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, Christ died for us. Even when we were DEAD IN SIN, God was able to see through that, and see a people redeemed as they stood side by side with His son.

and understanding that no distance is too far to escape the love of God is crucial... in Romans Paul says it this way: The calling on your life is

IRREVOCABLE. Even when you change... the calling doesn't. The plan doesn't. God has amazing plans for you.

but Watch what Paul does here...

The word workmanship is the Greek word: "*poiēma*" and *this* is where we get the English word "poem" from.

Today is Mother's Day.

and a lot of you probably went to Walgreens or Target and got a little Hallmark card with some little poem on it for your Mom... and even if you didn't, most of us understand this type of language.

Fancy words that tug at hearts and stir emotions...

and if we can't write it ourselves, we pay for it, because we understand its power.

When I proposed to my wife, I wrote her a song... and even though I enjoy singing, I struggle to do it well, or even hold a tune... but I personally sang that song to her, from my heart... and every word encapsulated the hope that I had for our future together.

Listen closely to this...

Poems... Songs... Art... they are expressions of the things that are inside of us, and when we create them, **they then become tools.**

They don't become anything, until you create it. It doesn't show anyone anything, until you create it.

When you create art, you are paving a street that someone else can walk.

Because art speaks to people's heart, all the way down into their soul. That is why so many people resonate with songs about someone getting their heart broken... because most people know how it feels to have a broken heart...

and when people are in those vulnerable states of mind, hearing the resounding sounds of someone somewhere going through something that you can relate to, empowers us to know that WE ARE NOT ALONE.

that is why people can look at a painting and be drawn into it for hours...
and even to see themselves in the painting...

to see their story in it even when it is not their story...

because all of our stories are connected. They all tie together.

and when you create an expression of what you are feeling, it instantly has the power to resonate with how someone ELSE is feeling.

You have to understand the power of art, to understand the power of what Ephesians 2:10 says...

God says that YOU ARE HIS EXPRESSION. His ARTISTIC EXPRESSION.

This is a really big thought.

Everything in life that you have ever been a part of...

every victory.
every tragedy.

Every time you screwed up so badly that you just wish that you could go and hide out somewhere, far, far away... every time your heart was broken, and you felt alone... and you WANTED TO BE ALONE...

Every time you burnt a bridge that you knew you should have built...

every time you have cheated someone out of what you owe them...
and every time that you have been CHEATED ON...

He wants to use the high moment... when a God sized dream came to pass for you, and you are on top of the world!!!

God wants to use THOSE MOMENTS... those short films of our lives... and use them in the lives of others, as this loud speaker broadcasted announcement that says "it is by grace you are saved, THROUGH FAITH."

It is NOT through your successes...

you aren't saved by your successes, But you aren't lost by your failures either.

and God works in them both!

And in the expression that is your life, you don't deserve GRACE!!! but if the God of all grace can meet you in the broken places of your life and He can breath to life something that literally HAD NO LIFE... when others see that... what does it scream?

It screams hope!

"There is HOPE for me too!"

your life is an expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are Christ's love letter to a world who has had its heart broken into a million pieces, who hurts just like you hurt... who is dead just like you were dead...

but in your case, Jesus reached down and by His grace alone said "this is someone who I can work with" - that makes you an expression!

and the way to know if Ephesians 2:10 is taking shape in your life has everything to do with whether or not you believe that... Because the gospel IS FOR EVERYONE...

But not everybody expresses God with their lives.

and I am not talking about living a sinless life... or a life free of screw ups... I am talking about grace.

Are you an expression of the grace of God?

Does your life point to the cross, that met you where you are, and gave you life when you were dead?

Because you are God's *poiema* - His poem to the broken... and you very well may be the ONLY Jesus someone ever sees.