

PROOF: PLANNED GRACE

Ephesians 2:8-9

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

Grace...we've all heard about it, especially if we've grown up in church. We talk about it; we sing about it; we "say grace" before we eat; we name our kids after it; we get tattoos on our extremities; we preach about it quite a bit...

But what if we don't fully understand the scandal, the audacity, the extravagance, the glory, the unbelievably good news of God's grace?

And here's why I say this...because we have been conditioned to think and believe otherwise.

The world that you have grown up in has explicitly taught you that you will be judged based on your performance!

You will be judged on how good you are in every arena of your life.

You go to school as a young child, you learn, you work, you take a test, and at the end you receive a grade.

If you performed well you get a passing grade, if not you fail.

Music, sports...

You get a job and every year you have a performance evaluation. Your boss tells you how well you've done and gives you a raise based on your performance.

After you've worked for a long time you get to enjoy retirement if you've performed well during your career. You get to reap the benefits of your labor.

Almost everything we do is judged by someone. Am I a good worker, mother, husband, lover, businessman, pastor, Christian?

This is the world we live in, so should we be surprised when we walk into the church and assume that our standing with God is based on our performance?!

If we work hard and try our best to be holy, God will be pleased with us. If we don't, then he won't be pleased with us.

But here is the fundamental truth about grace.

Grace says that what matters most in this life is not anything you have done or could ever do, but what Christ has done on your behalf!

Grace means that God does not judge Christians based on their performance...He judges them based on the performance of Jesus, and that is really good news!!!

Grace means that getting saved and staying saved is not your work, it's a work that the triune God accomplishes for you.

This is what Scripture clearly teaches, and yet we have a hard time believing it. So many of us adamantly claim that we are saved by grace and then turn to doing good works as if our right-standing with God depended on us.

One of the most popular television preachers in the U.S. has this to say about grace. "God is waiting on you. You don't get the grace unless you step out. You have to make the first move."

That would be like Jesus telling Lazarus he needs to make the first move.

This kind of teaching on grace is not helpful, not hopeful, not good news, it's not Biblical, and it's not grace!

This kind of theology is what is at the root and heart of every religion. You need to do something so that God can save you.

We believe that deep inside of us there is some ounce, some shred of goodness that can kick-start God's work in our lives. But that's not grace. That's religion.

Religion is the human attempt to do what God has already done in Christ. And that's absurd!

Christianity is not a religion; it is the proclamation of the end of religion.

- Robert Farrar Capon

Grace is the announcement that despite your best efforts to resist him, God has saved you fully and accepts you fully, not through anything you've done, but through what Christ has done!

So we're going to spend the next 5 weeks talking about this marvelous grace. We'll be using the acronym PROOF to summarize 5 key facets of God's grace. And we're basing this on the book PROOF, written by Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones. You can get a copy out in the foyer.

P: Planned Grace: From before time, God has mapped out the plan of salvation, for specific people (the elect), from beginning to end.

R: Resurrecting Grace: We are dead in sin and cannot come to God until he makes us alive through his Son.

O: Outrageous Grace: God chooses who He will save based on his pleasure and sovereign will, not based on anything we've done or can do.

O: Overcoming Grace: God overcomes our rebellion and turns it into surrender so that we can repent and believe the gospel.

F: Forever Grace: God seals His people with the Holy Spirit so that we will persevere to the end.

So this morning, we will begin by looking at the good news of God's planned grace.

Did you know that your salvation was God's idea? And not just his idea, but his plan and purpose.

Before the beginning of time, before anything was created, God the Father chose specific people to love, who Jesus would save and the Holy Spirit would seal.

That was God's plan, and his plans never fail!

Proverbs 19:21

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Now, you and I make plans that fail all the time, right?

Story about Mom and Dad

So often our plans fall apart, and it can become easy to assume that the same things happen to God...that his plans are frustrated by us, by sin, by the devil...

This is the teaching of what is called 'open theism'. God doesn't know what's coming so he has to adjust on the fly.

So God makes a plan, but based on what you and I do, God may have to go to a plan B.

Hey, Jesus, you're not going to believe what Adam and Eve just did. Yeah, they ate the apple so we're going to have to think of something.

This kind of theology puts God at our mercy, and that is not the God of the Bible!

Scripture tells us that God's plans are never frustrated, and that he always does exactly what he plans to do, without fail.

**I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
(Job 42:2)**

I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isaiah 46:9-11)

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. (Psalm 115:3)

Paul Brooks, it was God's gracious plan for you to have cancer. You would not be where you are today without it.

God's plans never fail, and are never frustrated, and that includes his plan to save to the uttermost a chosen people for himself.

Ephesians 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...

5 years ago yesterday, our son Jude was born. And Jude is adopted. Caty and I had wanted to adopt for a while so we went to UMC, and looked at all the baby's there that needed a home. I stood up in front of all the babies and announced that I was willing to adopt any of them that wanted to be adopted, and that they should just raise their hands and let me know if they wanted to be adopted and come home with me.

Actually, that's not what happened. Caty and I chose Jude, because we wanted to...because we loved him. He wasn't more special or more deserving than all the other orphan babies in Lubbock. We simply chose him. In fact God chose him for us.

Paul tells us that God the Father chose to adopt you, not only before you could make a decision to believe in him, but before you even existed.

Romans 8:29

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

Some people like to say that this verse means that God "foreknew" who would have faith and choose him, and so he predestined them for salvation.

But that's not what Paul is talking about. The word foreknow, or know, reaches back to the OT where "know" emphasizes God's special choice, and covenant love.

Jeremiah 1:5

Before I formed you in the womb I KNEW you, and before you were born I consecrated you...

God is not saying that he knew about Jeremiah before he was born; He's not saying he knew what Jeremiah would choose when he grew up; God is declaring that before Jeremiah was born, God loved him and chose him to be set apart for his purpose.

So when Romans says that God foreknew us, it means that before creation, God chose to love us with his unconditional, covenant love.

You need to understand this...God's love for you is not conditional. There is nothing you can do to earn or deserve it. God chose you, predestined you, before he made you, because it was his pleasure to do so!

And every person God the Father chose before time, he sent God the Son to rescue and redeem with absolute effectiveness.

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...

The Father chooses his elect in love; the Son rescues those whom the Father has chosen.

John 6:37

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

That's a promise!

The Father, in his infinite wisdom and goodness and sovereignty, chooses who will be saved, and he sends the Son to rescue his chosen people.

But let's talk about this great rescue.

Much of my life I pictured God's rescue of sinners as something like this:

We are sinners and we're slaves of the devil. But we grow tired of being a slave to the devil and we want to be rescued. So we cry out for God to save us, and God sends Jesus to come and bust us out of the devil's prison and carry us off to heaven so we can live happily ever after.

That sounds like a good rescue story, right? The problem is that that's not what happened.

The ugly truth is that as sinners we weren't prisoners of the devil, we were partners in crime/co-laborers.

John 8:44

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

God's grace was radically poured out on you in that he didn't come and save you when you were the devil's victim.

He came and saved you when you were a willing participant in the devil's schemes.

He came and saved you when you were shaking your fist at him in open rebellion.

He died for his enemies!

That is the grace of God poured out on you!

Jesus has done what Adam should have done when Eve was looking longingly at that apple.

Jesus took the serpent and crushed his filthy head into the dust and proved himself to be a better husband than Adam ever could have been.

When a man and woman marry the Bible says they become one flesh. Everything that was the husband's now belongs to the wife, and everything that was the wife's is now the husband's.

In the same way, because the Father chose us to be the bride of his Son, we have now been united to Jesus, so that we share in everything that belongs to him.

So he gets what is owed to us and we get what is owed to him.

He gets our sin, we get his righteousness.

He became a substitute for us when he went to the cross to pay the debt that we owed.

But here is the question we must answer when we talk about the substitutionary death and atonement of Jesus. Who did Jesus actually die for?

There are 3 possibilities.

1. Jesus died as a substitute for every human being

One of the popular answers to this question is that God died to save everyone. But if this is the case, then we must come to the conclusion that God failed miserably! God tried, he wanted to save everyone, but he just couldn't make it happen.

When Jesus hung on the cross he declared "It is finished". God accomplished exactly what he purposed to accomplish through the death of his Son.

2. Jesus died to make everyone savable

Since we have to throw out option one, many of us turn to this second option, which is that Jesus died to make every human being's salvation possible...if only we would choose him.

There are some problems with this kind of thinking. For starters, Jesus did not die for possibilities. He died for persons. His atoning death was absolutely effective to save God's elect. As Jesus hung on the cross he wasn't thinking, 'I hope some people will come to me', he was thinking about his sheep who he had loved before the world was made.

We celebrated the baptisms of the King family last week. But God wasn't up in heaven saying, 'I really hope they'll choose me'. He had already chosen them and appointed them to believe. Jesus hung on the cross knowing he was purchasing their salvation.

If our salvation hinged on our ability to choose to follow Jesus, there would be no hope for us. The reason for that is because we were not just stuck in our sin, Ephesians says that we were dead in our sin. And dead people can't willingly follow Jesus.

When I was in gross anatomy I spent 2 months in a room full of dead people and you know what...those people were dead. They couldn't do anything except be dead.

John 15:16

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...

Jesus has just told his disciples earlier in John 15 that they should bear good fruit and thereby prove that they are his disciples, but he then makes it perfectly clear that they are able to do this because Jesus himself has chosen them and appointed them to bear fruit. **Acts 13:48 - And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.**

3. The third option is that Jesus died to secure the salvation of particular people. Revelation 13:8 tells us that our names were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world!

You are the chosen bride of Christ. Scripture tells us this over and over and over. You were chosen. Despite your sin, despite your rebellion...God chose to love you.

Peter calls us a chosen race, a nation set apart. God chose Israel in the Old Testament to be His people, His possession, and he makes it very clear that he did not choose them because they were better than the other nations around them. He chose them because it was his pleasure to do so.

And Israel in the Old Testament is a picture, a foreshadowing, of the church. God didn't choose all nations, he chose Israel. And God does not choose all peoples, he chooses his elect.

The Father chooses us; the Son saves those whom the Father has chosen; and the Holy Spirit seals those whom the Son has saved.

Ephesians 1:13-14

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the

guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

We could preach an entire sermon on these verses, but the point is this. If the Father has chosen you and the Son has redeemed you, then you are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

To seal something implies many things, but most importantly it implies ownership. When God seals you with the Spirit he's saying, 'you are mine and no one can change that'!

I love my kids with all my heart. But I don't love them based on how good they act. I love them because they're mine. And that's grace!

I'm not unaware of the fact that this is a difficult doctrine to work through, and of course the question that many of you are probably asking is, why does God choose some and not others?

Why did God choose Abraham? Why did God choose Isaac and not Ishmael? Why did God choose Jacob and not Esau? Why did God choose Israel and not some other nation? Why did God choose me?

The simple truth is that I don't know!

After Paul unpacks the doctrine of God's election in Romans 9-11 he concludes by saying, **Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!**

As Christians we're not called to know all the mystery of God, but we are called to trust Him!

So why does planned grace matter?

We could preach an entire sermon on this, but I want to highlight 2 reasons for you.

1. Planned grace promises and provides security. There is nothing more debilitating than thinking that your salvation somehow depends on you. Nothing! That's why religious people are miserable people. Because every moment they're wondering if they've done enough. (Martin Luther)

Planned grace means that Jesus has paid it all, so there is nothing left for you to pay. (not Jesus paid it some) So he invites you to come to him to find rest.

You are sealed, and God says, 'You are mine!'

2. Planned grace ensures that God gets all the glory. Back to Ephesians 1, what's the end goal? **The praise of his glorious grace!**

When people are saved the response should never be, wow, look how good I did; or God, we did it.

The right response is to fall on our faces and worship God. Look what God did! My life was a mess, I was dead, I was a rotting corpse, but look what God did!

When people look at your life they should say, wow, look what God did.

Church, your plans and dreams may fail. They might be failing as we speak. But rest assured, God's plan for you WILL NEVER FAIL!

Look what God has done!