

God's Grace is Shocking!

- Recently I've really come enjoy good mystery story. Series bks reading, series TV shows from BBC I occsnly watch – mystery stories, usually mrdr mystery, or some other crime. Smtms called *whodunnit* story, where find out crime at very beg; then thruout book/show, get know chrctrs (or think); more/mr details re crime & re chrctr's lives come light; and there are twists in plot and unexpctd turns/story. And as put self in mind of detective, try figure out *whodunnit*. And then, just when think you've got all figurd out, solvd crime (this what I love re good mystery story): smthng shockng haps, smthng never expect – some detail, some piece of evidence, some plot twist that reveals identity/crmnl & solves mystery. And you never saw it coming! What!? She did it!? It was him!? It's that shock factor that really makes the story. Times I've finished reading good mystery novel; then turned back to beg, started reading again; bec even though I know how story ends, I'm still surprised by what haps; I'm still shocked by how it unfolds. It's that shock factor that really makes a good mystery story.
- The story God's love for wrld, story our slvtn in XpJ, is not mysterious to you. I'm speaking to Xians who know this story very well; you've heard it again/again; you know exactly how it goes. You know how J came from hvn, lived sinless life among us, gave life on cross, then rose fr dead, to forgive our sins, give us etrnal life in hvn. This: story God's grace – his undsrvd love for you/me. God's grace: foundtn our faith/ch; you come ch ev Sun to hear this story/grace; your life revolves around this grace; you know this story well. But never let God's grace lose the shock factor! Never let story/salvtn lose for you that sense of amazmnt & surprise – that intense & unexpctd shock at what you're hearing. Today as Ap Paul tells story of God's grace in Eph 2, even though I know you know how story goes, nvrthls: let yourself be amazed & surprised, even shocked by God's shocking grace.
- This story begins w/crmnls right up front. **“As for you,”** (talking to you/me; shocking to think that in this story, we are bad guys); **vs. 1**. We: dead, spiritually lifeless, like corpse in coffin. There was no pulse of Xian faith beating in hrts. And just like person physcly dead has no ability: move, think, act, do anything; so also a person spirtly dead has no ability: bel in God, love God, thank God, trust in God, do anything for God. We were **vs. 1b**. That's our natural condition, ever since fall into sin. Term we use: original sin, bec originates from ancestors A&E & is passed down thru generatns to us/children: a spirtl lifelssnss. **Vs. 1-2a** – notice: can be alive but dead same time. This world: filled w/living dead; not talkng zombies. Livng dead are unbel, who are physcly alive (live in your nghbrhd, across wrld), but have no faith in Xp, so they're spirtly dead. And that's what you were: **vs. 2-3a** (watch). Wanted highlight these 3 great enemies of Xian: wrld, ruler/dvl, flesh. Dvl: ultimate source tmptn; wrld: so corrupted by sin that it tempts us turn away from God & follow ways/wrld; and sinful flesh, not skin, but original sin that clings to us – the part/us that hates God, wants make ourselves God, & wants gratify own cravings instead followng God. Those: 3 great enemies that cause us to sin, with result that: **vs. 3b**. That's shockng word: wrath, wrath/God, fire/hell, which you deserve, and so do I. We should nvr let that terrible truth cease to shock us!
- Now, after 3 vss of our sin & God's wrath, what you think should come next in story? What'd come next if this was story re kids in school? Broke these rules, did this wrong, disobyd tchrs: therefore, detention. What'd come next if: re person at work? Late for this, didn't get job done, forgot this: therefore: fired. Don't you think here, logcly, next wrd should be therefore. **“We: deservng/wrath,”** therefore; and smthng bad'd follow. But look at **vs. 4**, at very next wrd: but. And but takes us in new, unexpctd, surprsng, even shockng dirction. **Vs. 4a** – hold on: w/in few wrds of eo you have God's wrath & love. Who is this God dealing w/here? Bipolar, so quickly switchng btwn hatred/love. No: God of L&G. Story/slvtn is story of L/wrath & G/love. **Vs. 4** (mercy billionaire) – **vs. 5a**. Made us alive. Earlier talked re being spirtly dead; now have those dead being made alive. This psg talking re being convertd from unbelief to faith, from spirtl death to living faith in J as Sav. W/o faith in J, you're the living dead; but when God makes you alive w/Xp & works faith in hrt, then you are truly alive.

- Only 2 types ppl in this wrld: bels/unbels; you're either dead/alive. And just like dead cannot make selves alive, so also unbels cannot bring selves to faith. God has do it – which in itself is shocking concept. We like to think selves as very indpdnt, autonms indivdls. We bel what we want bel when we want bel it. So it's shocking be remindd: not only did God save us; also gave us faith to bel that he saved us. J once: **“You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16)**. We didn't choose bel in J. God HS deserves all credit for our faith. It's gift/grace.
- Which brings us to wrd/day: grace. At its root, wrd grace means: gift freely given, as opposed to smthng deservd. If work, deserve paycheck; if break law, deserve punshmnt. But grace is God's undsrvd love for us, given freely as gift. In **vs. 5b**; repeats in **vs. 8**. God is greatest gift giver! Gave us J. Gave us J to be our brother, who's always w/us, there for us; hears prayers, blesses us. Gave us J to be our Sav, who faced agony/cross in our place, for us, to pay for all our sins, once for all. Gave us J to be our Lord, who's more pwrful than death, who came back to life for us, and is more pwrful than any trouble we'll ever face in life, even our own death – bec when we die, J will be w/us, and he'll raise us to life smday to live w/him forever in hvn. God is greatest gift giver ever – gave us J! That's grace! That's God's undeserved love for you! If you, right now: struggling w/guilt over some sin you've committed, this grace is for you! If struggling w/sadness/weariness over some burden you're bearing in your life, this grace is for you! If wrestling w/loneliness at death of loved one; or if going thru any other crisis of faith, this grace is for you! We all need this grace!
- Think re this example of grace. Think who wrote these wrds: Paul, formrly known as Saul. Remem what Saul did before became bel in J? Murderd Xians; tried squash Xian mvmt. If anyone deservd hell: Saul. But God brought Saul to faith. Remem: traveling to Damscs, bright light, fell to ground, blinded, J spoke, brought to faith. That's grace! God even chngd his name, from Saul to Paul. You/I probly didn't get name chnge when God brought us to faith. But we certly had a change of heart. That's grace! Listen some of the descriptions of grace listed here in lesson: **great love, rich in mercy, incomparable riches, kindness, gift of God**.
- **Vs. 8-9**. So, you have to let the gift be a gift! You cannot earn own salvtn (work rightsns); and as unbel you cannot accept Xp & bring self to faith (decsn theolgy). Cannot rely on anything you do to be saved – otherwise you'll always disappoint self, and always doubt whether you've done enough. But here's what you can do: look at cross & remember J, who did do enough, for you and for evryone – who gave life on cross for you, to forgive you & save you, bec loves you. That's grace!
- I never like it when mystery story is left hanging, when doesn't resolve, and they can't solve crime. I like it when catch bad guy, save good guy. And I love it when storyline shocks you and surprises you, and the plot twists in ways you'd never expect. The story of our salvation is not mysterious; we know it well. But I love it, bec of shock factor. You would nvr have expected this ending: objects of wrath are loved by Lord; spiritually dead are raised to new life of faith; the undeserving are shown undesrvd love. That's the gift of grace! Shocking, isn't it?!

Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air [dvl], the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.