

Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)

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500 Years of Grace / God: Grace; Salvation / John 11:1–44; Romans 3:23–25; Ephesians 2:1–10

Start with the story of Lazarus. Explain Grace Alone. Show the parallels between God's Grace in our life, and Jesus' grace towards the dead Lazarus

1st Century Jewish Funeral

Jewish funerals in the first century were quite a bit different than our funerals today.

- We might have special music, and some hymns or choruses.
- In first century Israel, they had professional mourners.
- flutes were especially good at playing a sad dirge
- the more wealthy the family, the more musicians would be present
- We might try to hide emotion, or we might cry.
- In first century Israel, your display of emotion was a meaningful way to express your loss.
- People were hired to simply mourn, cry, and give an example for the kind of loss that was felt due to the passing of the deceased.
- We embalm and bury our dead. Taking the time to plan a funeral properly.
- They did not embalm, and so they buried the dead on the same day that they died.
- (sometimes they weren't even quite dead yet, and very rarely they might make a sound or a noise, and then be found to be alive.)

Why do I tell you all of this? Because I want for you to have some understanding for the context of John 11. This is the chapter in the Bible where we read about the well-to-do family with the siblings Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

Lazarus was incredibly sick. The sisters sent word to Jesus that he was going to die, and that Jesus should come as quick as he could. But Jesus was in Northern Israel at the time, approximately 150 kilometres away, and on foot. The average healthy person could have travelled at a rate of 40 to 45 kilometres a day.

That means that by the time that the messenger got to Jesus, the message was already 4 days old.

But Jesus didn't leave that day for Bethany, where Lazarus was. Instead he stayed where he was for another 2 days. He says to his disciples, "Let's go to Judea again".

He says, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm on my way to wake him up."

John 11:17 HCSB

When Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

Jesus arrives along with his followers. It turns out that he was right, Lazarus was dead.

The musicians were playing their sad songs. The mourners were wailing. Friends and relatives had come to Bethany to be with the family.

One of the disciples must have let Martha, Lazarus' sister, that Jesus had arrived, but was not yet in town. She came out to the place where Jesus was.

John 11:21-27 HCSB

Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.

Yet even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You."

"Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her.

Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live.

Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world."

What faith she has. She trusts Jesus. She hopes in Jesus. She is in the middle of mourning her brother, but she has Jesus.

Martha sends for Mary. Mary gets the message that Jesus is calling for her, and she gets up to go out and meet him. All of the mourners who are there consoling her thought that she must be headed out to the tomb to go cry their. And so they went with her.

She got to where Jesus was, and she fell at his feet. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

She's not mad at Jesus. Don't read anger into her words. His love is not in question. She's just wishing that he could have been there 4 days ago, instead of this day.

Jesus had a plan. Mary just didn't know what it was yet. But there she was, fallen at his feet, mourning the loss of her brother, Lazarus.

John 11:33 HCSB

When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, He was angry in His spirit and deeply moved.

Why the anger? Why the raw emotion from Jesus?

I'm going to venture a guess here, and say that he's not mad at the mourners, and he's not mad at the sisters. I think that Jesus anger

has to do with death.

Death is ugly. Death seems so wrong. It takes loved ones away. I think that Jesus is angry with death itself. I think he is angry at what sin does to people. How it robs them of the life that God created them for.

But Jesus, the son of God, is a worthy opponent of death. He goes to the cave where Lazarus was laid to rest four days ago.

John 11:39–40 HCSB

“Remove the stone,” Jesus said. Martha, the dead man’s sister, told Him, “Lord, he’s already decaying. It’s been four days.”

Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

That is why the delay was necessary. So that the glory of God would be on display. What Jesus was about to do would not be mistaken for anything, but an act of God. That’s why he waited the two days. It was to give glory to God, no one would think that Lazarus had been mistakenly buried. What was about to happen, would point these people, and all who heard the story, to God.

Lazarus was buried in a cave. There was a stone that had been rolled across the opening. There would have been an indent in the ground for that stone to sink into. So that it wouldn’t accidentally go away. That is the stone that they rolled away. Now the tomb is open. The stage is set. What is Jesus going to do?

He starts off with prayer.

John 11:41–42 HCSB

So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You heard Me.

I know that You always hear Me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so they may believe You sent Me.”

And after Jesus prays, he shouts out, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus would likely have been laid to rest on something like a stone shelf in that cave. He had been dead for days. He was without natural hope. How can a dead man even hear the shout of Jesus? How can a dead man come to life?

Yet, in spite of the fact that he had been dead for 4 days, Lazarus is obedient to the command of Christ.

John 11:44 HCSB

The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him and let him go."

I tell you that story from John 11, so that I can teach you about grace.

Grace

Grace is more than the word for a prayer before you eat.

Grace is more than a good feeling, or an act of kindness.

God's grace takes a person from death to life.

Like 4 day dead Lazarus, that person had no power, no ability to save themselves, but God calls to them, and they respond to his words of life, and they are brought from death to life.

And so, we join in with those in the reformation who say that we are saved by Grace alone. There was no work that we could have done to save ourselves, for we were spiritually dead in our sins. It is by God's grace alone that we are brought to life through Jesus Christ.

Let me show you from God's word how to understand Grace a little better.

Ephesians 2:1-3 HCSB

¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins

² in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler who exercises authority over the lower heavens, the spirit now working in the disobedient.

³ We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.

Dead in your trespasses and sins

Its easy to minimize the effect of sin through self-justification.

- its just a little lie
- it wont hurt anybody OR nobody got hurt
- I can fix this
- i'm only human

But Paul, the author of Ephesians, shows us that sin is a serious problem.

Sin is when we go outside of God's rule or will.

We are all sinners, because we come from a long line of sinners.

Adam and Eve started the chain, and the human race has been going against God ever since.

Paul, under the power of the Holy Spirit, says that sin makes us spiritually dead.

Your sin made you spiritually dead, just like Lazarus was physically dead. You were unable to save yourself, just as Lazarus was unable to raise himself from the dead.

This is why we need Grace. We are dead, and without any power to bring ourselves back to life. Not only has sin made us spiritually dead, but it has also made us completely deserving of the wrath of God.

Sin has made us his enemy. Its a terrible, terrible place to be.

Ephesians 2:4-5 HCSB

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, ⁵ made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!

The "But" at the start of verse 4 shows us that we are now talking

about a contrast. Verses 1-3 talk about the sinner who is dead in their sins, and fully deserving of God's wrath.

BUT

Vs 4 is talking about God. What can we learn about him here?

God is rich in mercy

What is God's mercy? Lets take a look at the life of Paul to see.

Remember that Paul had originally grown up as a Pharisee. He was intent on putting as many Christians in Jail as possible. When he had done a great job of that in Jerusalem, he received an authorizing letter from the High Priest, and took off for Damascus to arrest the Christians who lived there.

But on the way, Paul was a recipient of God's mercy. For God stopped him on that road with a blinding light, and Jesus himself spoke to Paul. Paul received God's mercy, because God intervened in his life, showed him the truth, and forgave him of his sin. Paul received mercy because his life was transformed by the Grace of God alone.

God's mercy does that same work in all those who are called to faith in Jesus. He sees us in our sinful condition, and he has pity on us. He sees that we are living in darkness, that we aren't even aware of our own depravity, and he calls us to faith in Jesus.

Remember, we were dead in our trespasses and sin...BUT, God, who is rich in mercy, steps in and changes everything. Why does God do that?

Because of God's great love.

God loves you. God delights in you. Your sin breaks his heart BECAUSE he loves you.

- We have the Bible, because God loves us. Jesus,
- God's son was sent to earth, because God loves us.
- Jesus gives us life, because God loves us.

- God loves you so much, he has made a way for you to cross from being spiritually dead to being alive in Christ. Its all because he loves you.

- God's love is greater than we can dream.

God is rich in mercy, and because of His great love that He had for us...

Ephesians 2:5 HCSB

⁵ made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!

We are talking about a moment in time here. You were dead, but in that moment, God made you alive in Christ. That is salvation.

You are alive, because God made you aware of your sin, you responded with faith in Jesus, repenting of your sin and trusting in him for your righteousness, and now you have become alive in Jesus Christ. This all is a work of God's grace.

That moment is not the end of Grace. God's grace goes with you from now to forever. What is the role of Grace past the moment of salvation?

Ephesians 2:6–9 HCSB

⁶ Together with Christ Jesus He also raised us up and seated us in the heavens,

⁷ so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—

⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast.

Trophies of God's Grace

A trophy is given to the winner. If you are playing a sport, and are awarded a trophy, you might put it on display at your house. And then when a guest comes over and sees it, you can tell them the story of how you got the trophy.

Christians are trophies of God's grace. You look at their life, and you can see the story of God's grace at work. They are saved. God is doing amazing, transforming work in them and through them to others.

We are the proof of God's grace. We were dead, and now we are alive.

We were stuck in sinful rebellion and slavery, now we are free in Christ.

We were living for our own selfish means, now we live to the glory of God alone.

We are trophies of God's grace. That's what Paul means when he says that, "He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus." His grace, his love, his mercy, his righteousness are written on our hearts. We are the display of God's love, mercy and righteousness.

Lazarus was raised to life, and the crowds gave God glory.

Sinners are made right through Christ, and those who witness this miracle should give God the glory.

God gets the glory, because God does the work. It's His mercy. It's His love. It's His sacrifice. It's His power. It's His work. The glory belongs fully to God, and God alone.

Grace restores us

Through grace, and because of His mercy, God has created you for good works. These works are good because God Himself has prepared them. It falls to us to walk in these good works.

Ephesians 2:10 HCSB

¹⁰ For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them. Those of us who have been made alive are restored to good works. We can do the right things for the right reasons.

- We can show people love, not so that they will return the favor, but so that they will know that there is a God that loves them.
- We can help the poor, not so that we will be seen and applauded, but so that they will know that there is a God in heaven who cares for them.
- We can serve our neighbor. Not to build up good will, but to build bridges in relationships where we can share this amazing news about Jesus and the grace that he has.
- We can serve the church. Not because it is our duty, but because Jesus has gifted each one of us so that together, we can function as the body of Christ on the earth.

All of this happens by the grace of God.

I want to conclude today by talking about people who you might think are a lost cause. You've prayed, and hoped, and loved, but they still seem completely turned off to Jesus.

You look at them and you wish that it could be different, but it seems that no matter how hard you work, or how much you care, no progress seems to be made.

Maybe you see yourself as the lost cause. Too far gone to come to Jesus. Too lost to ever be found.

Lost causes are who God's grace is for. Grace takes a person from fully dead, to fully alive in Christ.

Lazarus was dead. Dead dead, 4 days a goner. But Jesus called to him, and when Lazarus was completely helpless to help himself, Jesus spoke life to his body.

God's grace raises the dead to life. God's grace can save anyone.

God's grace is powerful enough to take a lost cause, speak life to a

lifeless heart, and transform that person into one who has abundant life in Jesus Christ.

Remember Jesus words to Martha.

John 11:25–26 HCSB

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?”