

The Plan of Grace

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding our union with Christ, and how it enables us to have victory over sin and temptation.

Duration: 1:01:29

Scripture: Ephesians 2:5

Topics: "Grace Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the second chapter of Ephesians, which he describes as a manual for developing our full potential in Christ. He emphasizes the importance of understanding our union with Christ and distinguishing between things that differ. The speaker explains that we were not only saved by Christ, but we were also crucified and buried with him, making us wired for victory over sin and temptation. He shares a personal anecdote about speaking to college students and emphasizes the need to believe in the power of victory in Christ.

Transcript

Will you turn please to Ephesians. This morning we are in the second chapter. We're dealing with Ephesians as we've seen it, a manual of developing our full potential in Christ.

We will not cover the ground that we've been over other than to ask you to notice again verses 5 and 6. Yesterday we looked at the people who are the partakers of God's grace, the kind of people whom God draws to himself, such as us. But that fourth verse, God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead hath quickened us together with Christ, by grace you are saved, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We need to go back to Romans, the sixth chapter, in order to adequately understand these few verses.

In the sixth we find that the Apostle is presenting for the first time, at least in the canon, not in terms of time necessarily, but in terms of the arrangement of the epistle, for the first time he is presenting the fact of our union with Christ. We see it in the sixth verse. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with, when you see the hymn is interpolated, but crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Now it's important to understand the relationship between the fifth chapter of Romans, the sixth and seventh chapters, and the eighth chapter. Romans 5 presents to us the testimony that Christ died for us.

In verse 6 of the Roman fifth chapter, when we were yet without strength in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.

And in the eighth verse, God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That's the key word. The death of Christ for you.

He died for you. Now the sixth chapter presents it in something, just a little shade of difference. In Romans 5, Christ for us.

In Romans 6, we are introduced to the fact that Christ died as you. Now there's a difference between the two. He was your representative, your substitute.

He was there in your place, doing what God's law required that you do. And because he was the infinitely holy Son of God, there's no limit to his character and his righteousness. He could not only die for me, but he could die for you.

He could die for all men, because since he is without limit in his character, there would be no limit to the number of people for which his death was adequate. But if God saw him, and since God saw him as you, saw him as me, then in a sense, as he hung on the cross, he was there not just as the Son of God dying for sinners, but he was there as the sinner for whom he died. He was there as me, as you.

This means that looking down at the cross, in order to help us visualize it, we could see, say, that there were in a sense, just help us, two people on the cross. Christ was on the front of it, dying for you. But since he was not only there for you, but as you.

To help you grasp this, can you visualize yourself, as it were, on the back side of the cross, bound by the same nails, crucified with him. The day Christ died, the Father saw you die. That was the day.

Now I want this, I want you to come to grips with this, because it's the argument of the Apostle, and it's the basis of this life of victory that he has, in developing our full potential for Christ, we're not going to ever attain to that potential, until we realize that not only did Christ die for us, but he died as us. We were there in him, and thus with him, when he died. And that that you, that you are by nature the source of all your problems and difficulties, that I, that I am, was crucified with Christ.

Now that's the testimony. The fourth verse of the sixth chapter tells us that we are buried with him, by baptism into death. Crucified with him, buried with him.

Now this is the terminology that's selected by the Holy Spirit, given to Paul. Paul repeats this in Colossians, buried with him. Here he says baptism is a picture of that union with Christ in his burial.

Therefore he not only saw us on the back side of the cross with Christ, he saw us in the tomb with Christ, buried with him. He was for you. From the Father's eyes you were there with him.

You were in him, and there in a sense with him. He was crucified for us, that he might deliver us from the penalty of what we had done. We were crucified with him, we are told, that we might be released from the tyranny of our own personalities, our own habits, and attitudes, and dispositions, and traits, and so on.

Now you've got two items of this series. Crucified with him, and buried with him. Now go back to Ephesians chapter 2, and we add to it.

God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath what? Quickened us together with Christ. But where were we? We're buried with him. Christ was crucified, and he was buried, and he was quickened.

But since he was doing all of this for you, and as you, the Apostle tells us that you were crucified with him, that you might be released from the tyranny of yourself, and you were buried with him, that you might be released from the pull and hold of the world. And we have three enemies, you know, the flesh, the world, and the devil. And the flesh is what I am by nature, and the world is that system that the God of this world controls.

The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. And of course then the devil is the personality himself, who in so many ways would seek to snare and entrap us, and keep us from being effective for Christ. So we are, we see that we were quickened with Christ.

The day that life returned to that bruised body, the body of our Lord Jesus, in the Father's eyes, that was the day when you were quickened. You were quickened. You were quickened with him.

Now maybe it was 2,000 years before you experientially received that life. But from the eyes of God, that's the day you were quickened, because the life you received was the life that began then. We were quickened together with Christ.

Now he wasn't just made alive to remain in the tomb. But we are told he was raised from the dead, and so you notice, we were raised up together with him. Raised up together.

In the Father's eyes, when he saw his son raised from the dead, he saw you raised from the dead. Now apparently it's important that these believers at Ephesus should know this. This is no little right thing that they can take, and just little clever tricky thing that the evangelist or the Bible teacher gives to fill out an hour of service.

This is something that's going to make a tremendous difference in their prayer life, and in their witnessing life, and in their walk for the Lord. And they jolly well better understand it, or they're going to be just as crippled as someone who decides that they're not going to eat properly, or that they won't learn how to read, or any other evidence of dereliction of responsibility. To know the truth and not to do it is sin.

And to know from the Word of God that you were crucified with Christ, and not to care enough to find out what this means to you in your day-by-day walk with Christ, is to tread under our feet the blood of the everlasting covenant, and to count this benefit of his death as having no meaning to us. And it can't be lightly taken. If God went to such great length as to put it in Romans, and put it in Colossians, and put it in Ephesians, he wanted us to know about it.

And we'll never develop our full potential in Christ until we understand our union with Christ, and the purpose for that union. He died for us, all that's clear, to pay the penalty of our sin, and to remove the way, the mountain of guilt, and to give us a clear standing before God. Justification by faith, on the basis of the finished work of Christ at Calvary.

Everyone likes Romans 5, because that gives them the assurance that if they get run over by the truck, they're going to be end up in heaven instead of in hell. But I don't find nearly as much eagerness to understand Romans 6 on the part of the children of God, because the basic benefit of that is not for us, but for God. And we're always much more eager, it seems, for what's going to be, ensure our happiness, than

what's going to ensure his glory.

So we don't want to miss Romans 5, but we can take or leave Romans 6 and Ephesians 2. Those aren't really that important, you see, to anybody but God, and to the developing of our potential for Christ, and coming to that measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ unto a mature man, a full person. But if we're to ever become that mature Christian, then we're going to have to understand why, when God saw his Son on the cross, he saw you there with him, and you were crucified with him. Well, we discover that's how we have victory.

That's the source of victory. Some years ago, this auditorium was wired for electric light. They didn't have to rewire it this morning or last night.

It was wired at a given point, and then it was pronounced wired. It was connected to the wires that took it out to the high line that went to the generator. And all we had to do this morning to get light to dispel the gloom was to put a switch on.

You were wired for victory at Calvary. But if you don't know where that switch is, you're going to grope in shameful failure and cry out to God and say, Oh God, deliver me from my temper, deliver me from my imagination, deliver me from my sarcasm, deliver me from my criticism. And you're going to beat heaven and storm heaven, and God's given the way of deliverance, and if you don't care enough to find out what it is, you just aren't going to be delivered from those things which are delivered by understanding our union with Christ.

So it's extremely important for us to distinguish between things that differ. We eat with a knife, fork, and spoon, don't we? Those are the tools of our trade. Those are the things we use in this task of eating.

But you don't use the--you distinguish between things that differ. There are certain things you do with a fork you don't do with a knife, and certain things you do with a spoon that you don't do with a fork or a knife. And if you can't tell the difference between--you say, Well, I eat with a knife, fork, and spoon, so I can do anything I want to with any of them.

They're all the same. You just haven't learned how to eat properly yet in good company. And so you say, Well, this is all salvation.

Yes, but we must distinguish between things that differ. Romans 5 said Christ died for us. Now that's not the same as Romans 6, which says he died as us.

He died for us to deliver us from the penalty of what we have done, and he died as us to deliver us from the power of our own disposition and our habits and our traits and our attitudes, and we can have victory--we can have deliverance from the penalty of passings and not have deliverance from the tyranny of our own disposition. Because whereas it's all accomplished by the death of Christ at Calvary, we must understand and appropriate in terms of the particular intention of God and the particular need of our heart at the time. So if we're to develop our full potential in Christ, we must understand that at Calvary we were wired for victory, and we must know that when we are tempted that God has made a way of escape, so that we need not be victimized by that which tempts us.

I remember years ago I was invited to speak to a retreat of college students and graduates out of the Boston area, a lot of them from Harvard and Radcliffe and Lawrence and other schools in the area at Boston University. There must have been 100, 115 young people there, and a year later I was back at the

same occasion with some of the same group, and one young fellow that was there a little early when I arrived said, I'm glad you're back, but I just hope you're not going to give us any more of this victory stuff. Well, I said, what's in your mind? Well, what do you say that? Well, he said, you gave it last year, and boy, I was excited about it, and I just hope you don't pull any of that off on us anymore.

You see, it doesn't work. Well, I said, I'll tell you this, if it doesn't work, I'm sure I'm not going to give it any longer, but what tell me your experience? Well, he said, I listened to you, and I tried to understand everything you said, and I got back, and boy, I have some areas of temptation, and so I did just what you told me to do, and it doesn't work. Well, I said, what was it that you recall I told you to do? Well, you gave us that verse that says, there is no temptation overtaking a man as such as is common to man, and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, and will with a way of temptation make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it.

I said, that's a great verse, yeah. I said, what, how did you use it? Well, he said, every time I was tempted, I'd quote that verse and believe it and quote it and believe it, but it didn't work. I didn't have any relief from temptation.

I failed just like I had before. I said, let's go to it, and we turned to it, and I said, now read it for us very carefully, and I came to that verse, that part that says, and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are about, will with a temptation make a way of escape. I said, what's the way of escape? His eyes opened, he said, well, this verse.

I said, no, this verse tells you that there is a way of escape, but it doesn't tell you what the way of escape is. This verse doesn't tell you what it is, it just tells you that there is one. And I, you misunderstood me, I signally failed.

I'll have to correct that, because maybe somebody else misunderstood. I didn't say the way of escape was the verse that says there's a way of escape. I didn't say that you escape from temptation by quoting the verse that says there's a way of escape from temptation.

Boy, I did fail. It didn't fail, I did. I take all the blame.

Well, he says, what is the way of escape? I said, do you remember my talking to you about the fact that the day Jesus Christ died, you died, that there were two people on the cross? Yeah, I wonder how that applied. Well, I said, let's go back to Romans 6, shall we? So we turned to Romans 6, and I took him through that portion. Now I said, look at this verse, look carefully at it, just take a good look at it.

Verse 11, I said, it says, likewise reckon you also yourself to be dead in deed unto sin. Now, I said, what's that mean? What's reckon mean? Well, he said, I'm a math major and counting is one of my subjects, and he said to reckon means to calculate. Base your facts upon, based on, move ahead on the basis of something that's happened.

I said, all right, this verse says that the day Jesus Christ died, you died. We went back to verse 6. Now it says, when you're reckoned, or count, or calculate, or consider, that the day Christ died, you died. Now I said, look, this building was wired for electricity, and it's going to get dark in a little while.

Do we have to rewire the building? No, no, no. He said, it's done. I said, what do we do? He said, all we got to do is go over and put that switch on.

I said, but why would you put the switch on? You can't see electricity. Why do you put it on? Well, he said, past experience has shown that if you put that switch on, it makes a contact, and energy begins to flow. Now I said, you're getting the message.

Now you're getting the message. That when you, when you meet the temptation, on the basis of the fact that you died when Jesus Christ died, and therefore you don't have to be victimized by your attitudes, and by your habits, and by these temptations, and you face that temptation something like this. Father, the part of me that wants this, and could do this, even though I know it's not your will, that's the part that died the day Christ died.

Just now I reckon myself to be dead. You know what happens? He says, what? I said, it makes a contact, and it releases the resurrection life of Christ to flow into your heart at that moment, to give you over that temptation. He said, no wonder I missed it.

I thought it was just quoting a verse. No, it's not just quoting a verse, and it's not self-hypnosis, and it's not anything of the kind. It is the means by which we release the flow of the resurrection life of Christ into our personality at the moment of temptation.

Now we may, we've been singing it for years, and I'm just not too sure that we often really understand what we're singing. It's like saying the blessing at supper, you know. You say it, and then a little later it says, well, wait, Kent, you don't want to eat without saying the blessing, do you? Don't overstate it.

Oh, no, you didn't. Well, they'd been there when it was said, but they were thinking about something else that happened at your house, you know. Don't look so sour at me.

You, you know that. You just weren't paying any attention. And so it is we sing, dying with Jesus by death, reckoned mine, living with Jesus, a new life divine, looking to Jesus till glory does shine.

Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine. Moment by moment, I'm kept in his love. Moment by moment, I've life from above.

What are we talking about? We're talking about the fact that the day Christ died, we died with him. But moment by moment, in the moment of temptation, Father, the part of me that thinks this, feels this, wants this, could do it, that's the part that died the day Christ died. And just now I reckon myself dead.

And it's, well, some Christmases ago, some friend gave one of my children one of these iron filing things, you know, where they put iron filings under a little plastic cover. And then they had a pencil-like magnet. And the idea was that you could draw these filings out, and you could make a Santa Claus, or make a fuzzy old burrow, or you could make things with your imagination with these filings that were in there.

And I was clever, and I was sitting around pulling them, and somebody spoke to me, and I flipped it. And I used the other end. And you know what happened? Instead of pulling the filing, it pushed them.

It pushed them. The polarity had changed in the conscious. I guess that's what it is.

Charles Meisner will correct me on that. That's his field a little later. I get all my science from the Reader's Digest.

I don't know what I'm talking about, you know. But anyway, I do know this, that when I turned that over to the other end, the filings didn't follow. They went.

And I sat there, and tears warmed my eyes. And I thought, isn't that just like the Lord to give me an illustration here of something that's very real? When you reckon yourself, you see, there's a gravitational pull. There's a magnetism.

We have appetites and urges and drives, and we're tempted. Temptation is the proposition presented to your intellect to satisfy a good appetite in a bad way. And so there's a gravitational pull.

But when you say, Father, the part of me that thinks this, feels this, wants this, that's the part that died the day you died. And just now I reckon myself to be dead. What's it do? It reverses it.

And it changes the polarity. And the resurrection life comes in and pushes it away. Pushes it away.

Now, if you don't know that, you don't know how to have victory when you're tempted. Someone says, that's too easy. No, it's not that all that easy.

Because, you know, maybe your problem is like mine, sarcasm and biting speech and criticism, finding fault with folks. And you don't know how to have victory over it, then you're victimized by your own tongue. That's not so good.

But there may come a time when you know how to have victory, and deep within you say, you know, he needs a good telling off. So then it's not a question of not knowing how to have victory. The question is, do you want to put the switch on? That's where the battle comes.

Do you want to put it on? Oh, you can have some real things there. Because you know that if you put it on, you're going to be released, but so you have a little bit of difficulty there. I remember one time coming into the Stephen Tavilla home up in Boston, or in Lexington, Massachusetts, and I'd come in quite late.

The family had retired, and I didn't want to put the hall light on, because if I did, it might awaken them. So I went into my room. I'd come in in the afternoon, you know.

I put my case down, and I hung my suit bag up. I saw where the switch was, just saw. And then I went out and came back, and it was, oh, 12, 30 or so.

I'd come in, been with friends, and came in. I didn't want to wait, because I knew that Mr. Tavilla had to get up at 3.30 or so, and so I didn't want to disturb. I wanted to be very quiet.

So when I came in, I put the switch on, and nothing happened. Now, I knew there was a light, because I had seen the light, but that room, it was as dark as the inside of my pocket. I couldn't see anything.

And I went around the wall, you know, and tried to touch gently, so it didn't fall on the floor, and I groped, and finally I decided I could find the bed. So I neatly hung my suit up on the floor, and got into bed. The next day when I got up, I want you to know, I raised that shade, and I, I found out.

I went out, and I shut my eyes, and I walked in, and I put the switch on, because I didn't know when I'd be in the next night. But I wasn't going to get caught like that again. Oh, how many of God's dear children there are that are victor, victimized by their habits, and their attitudes, and their disposition, and their traits.

And they grow up in the Bible, trying to find the switch. Where's the power I hear about? Where's the victory I know about? Where is it? Then they find out. And just once, just once, dear friend, that you're tempted to say something, think something, do something, that you know grieves God.

And you use, find this switch. Father, the part of me that would think this, want this, say this, do this, that's the part that died the day Christ died. And you feel that anti-magnetism pushing it away on the release.

Then remember where that switch was, because moment by moment, you can go back to it and put it on whenever you need. Now that gives you an illustration of the practical application. And if you're to develop your full potential in Christ, then we must know the truth, and we must obey the truth.

Because if we know these things, happy are we if we do them. But if we just fill our, you know, fill our minds with, with ideas, and we never practice it, never becomes experientially real, then what helps it going to be? So he said, I want you to know that you're crucified with Christ, that you're buried with Christ. And so he begins in Ephesians 2 by saying, you have been quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies.

Why? Because he has talked to them about the fact that that religion of which they've been a part was satanically controlled. It was the worship of Diana. But in Ephesus, it was that Satan used this demoniacal worship, this vile, immoral, drunken, debauched worship, to hold the people.

And now they're coming in to stand for Christ in the midst of this, and they must develop their full potential. And their full potential includes knowing that when Christ was quickened, they were quickened. When Christ was raised, they were raised.

When Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father, they were seated at the right hand of the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because, you see, we've talked about two of these enemies. The flesh, I, and the world.

But there's also the third one, the devil. And so we found him saying that he seated us above principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this age. And how are they going to be able to stand? What is the, what is the effectiveness of being part of his body, put all things under his feet? And they just know that one time they were among that number that walked according to the Prince and the power of the air.

Now what power, what effectiveness, how can they stand against such forces as they've known existed, and have been, they've been themselves victimized by? Because they were quickened with Christ, and raised with Christ, and seated with Christ in the heavenly. I said yesterday in closing, every home represented in this auditorium has a tragedy in it so enormous that only the risen Christ is enough to meet it. But the manner in which he will meet it is when you discover the fact that you have been raised up and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ.

Because it's from that point that our ministry, both in prayer and in witness, has its strength and has its authority. So it was imperative if they were to ever full have to develop their full potential in Christ, that they should know and understand this relationship, this plan that God had for them of their union with his Son. But notice that he then begins to say that the purpose for this, in the seventh verse, is that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

We're going to see that in the fourth chapter. I'm not sure we'll get there. But we're going to discover that his grace was that he gave, led captivity captive, and he gave gifts on demand.

We're not only joined with Christ in the crucifixion to have victory over ourselves, in his burial to have victory over the world, quickened and raised and seated with him, to have victory over principalities and powers. But he has done this in order that he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, that we who

were the victims of satanic pressure and power, now should be brought into the place that we're not only released from that power, but we're also to enforce Christ's victory. Exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us.

Then you know that marvelous testimony, by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Don't for a moment say, said he to these Ephesian believers, that you've earned your salvation, that you've bought it, that you've merited it. By the same token, do not limit by saying, well that may be all right for preachers and evangelists, but it won't work for me.

If by grace you are saved through faith, then God has the perfect right to give you as much grace as he wants to give you, and you have no right to set an upper limit to what God will do for you and through you. And yet as I talk with God's dear children, I find them saying something like this, well what are you by the way? What is your work? Well I'm just a housewife. Or I just work in a factory.

Or I'm the teacher. I'm just the layman. God help us from being, setting a limit on the grace of God.

You are, you are his workmanship. Do you see where it leads? Created in Christ Jesus unto good work, which God has before ordained that you should walk in them. What's he trying to do? He's trying to release these dear people from all the inhibitions that were placed upon them because of their tendency to compare themselves with, say the Jews or others.

The tendency to measure themselves by others. I'm not as smart as others. I can't sing like others.

I can't teach like others. I can't do this. I can't do that.

All of the limitations and inhibitions and restrictions that we voluntarily impose upon ourselves. And look what the Ephesians could have done. What, how they could have been, had such in deep inferiority feelings as they related to the Jews.

Oh well, you know. Look, we grovel before Diana. Look at the horrible things we did.

No, God can't use us. But that isn't what it's, he says it all. He says, listen, by grace you are saved through faith.

That isn't of yourselves. It's a gift of God. Not of your works as you should boast.

Now God wants to bring you into that place where his full plan for your life is being realized in you. Not, not your works, not your ideas, but his. For you are his workmanship.

Created in Christ Jesus under good work which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. What a wonderful thing. What a marvelous thing it is to realize that God made a plan for your life before he made the world.

You're important to God. You are, yes, you are indeed important to him. You know, there's two things that are problems to us.

One is we become terribly critical of others, and the second is we become terribly critical and censorious of ourselves. And you don't have any right to be critical of others. But you don't have too much right to be critical and censorious of yourself either, because you're not your own.

You're bought with a price. And you're to glorify God in your spirit which are his. How many times I've gone to people and said, would you be willing to take this Bible class, or teach this group, or have this ministry, and have them say, oh I couldn't do that.

I've, I've never done that. Well you know everything you've learned since you lay in your mother's arms and scald has been learned. It's all been acquired.

You, you've learned a lot of things since then. Don't you think it's very important that you should stay alive all your life, and don't die until you're dead? That's one of the things that thrills me about fellowship with our brother Jones. He's, he's, he's alive in Christ, and he's going to stay alive till the last breath the Lord lets him have.

And oh how I covet that for you, for each of us, that we're going to just live in the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and realize that God has a plan, a plan for your life. You say, well look you don't know how what a sinner I was, and how late in life I was saved. Well that doesn't make any difference.

You know this God of the Bible is not the great I might have been, or I could have been. He's the great I am, and we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus under good work, which God has before ordained we should walk in them. And that plan begins now.

You say well I've wasted so many years. Sure you haven't, you may just jolly well go on wasting them too. I hope you don't.

I hope you don't. But there's a possibility of it, unless you do something about it. You see today you're just as holy as you want to be.

Did you know that? You're just as spiritual as you want to be. You're just as effective for Christ as you want to be. You're just as useful to God and to his church as you want to be.

You are the sum of all of your desires up until today. I'm so glad that we've got some new psychology coming on, reality therapy from William Glasser, transactional analysis, where we're coming back to responsibility to what the teaching all the time. But the fact of the matter is you are what you want to be.

Now it's the function of preaching to show you what you can be, to show you what God wants you to be, and then to show you what you're going to gain if you are what God wants you to be, and then to try to scare the living daylights out of you if you're not willing to pay the price to be what God wants you to be. You see the comfort, the scripture is quite clear. It says that our job is to comfort the afflicted, and we do that, but it also says it's to afflict the comfortable, and we ought to do that.

And when you become comfortable in less than what God wants you to be, somebody ought to afflict you a little, and stir you up, and that's what the Apostle is doing for the church at Ephesus. He's stirring them up, because they could have sat right down there on the welcome mat inside the house, you know, and said, praise God we're saved. Paul says that he's, he thanks God for our faith and our love.

Isn't that wonderful? We've arrived. And the Apostle says, you haven't arrived, you've just barely started. You've got a long way to go.

And so he gets to this point now where he says, look, before God made the world, he made a plan for your life, and that plan is today, now. Now. And if you're prepared to meet God today, then God's prepared for

that plan, plan A, to come into operation now.

Maybe it is, oh for many of you I know it is, but for all of us it ought to be, it must be. So well let's look at it for a moment. What did he say about it here? We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained.

That word ordained is a little bit frightening when we see it there, but if you realize what it really is, and where it comes from, it won't scare you so much. It comes from the marketplace. And really what the word means, it's the word the tailors use, and it means tailor-made to fit, or cut to your size.

Now does that frighten you? Into good works which God has before tailor-made to fit you. Some people think that if they're filled with the Spirit of God, they're going to turn about to be D.L. Moody, or Charles Finney, or Billy Graham, or someone. No, no, you know what you'll be? You, filled with the Spirit, that's all.

You aren't going to be anybody else. You're just going to be you, glorifying God, using the unique characteristics that he's built into you as an individual, never before, never to come again. So that you can bring out of your life the greatest possible glory to the name of the Lord Jesus.

So, here it is then. His workmanship created in Christ Jesus, unto good works which God has tailor-made to fit you, so that you'll be comfortable and at ease in doing them. I had a pleasant time up at Houghton College recently.

They had an alumni weekend, and they were talking about international relations, and they asked me to speak on the economic implications of our international witness for Christ, or our activities. And I was there, and one of the men that was there was a man by the name of Congressman John Conlon from Arizona, a freshman congressman who was elected the president of the group of freshman congressmen in the Republican side of the aisle. And John Conlon had been at Northeastern University in Boston, and through InterVarsity Fellowship, some of the witnesses of the students, he had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was a committed socialist and totally prepared. You know, he said, we love people so much that if they don't take our love, we'll stand them up against the wall and make their brains rattle. We're just going to make them take our love.

And this was his opinion. Well, then he came to know and love Christ, and he went on in government service, and then ended up in law practice out in Arizona. And recently there was a redistricting.

Arizona had grown so much it was entitled to another congressman. And he went to the Republican headquarters and he said, look, I want to run for this new seat. And they said, get in line.

There's 40 ahead of you. And so he said, well, I can't wait that long in line. So he went out and he found 25 people that shared his commitment to Christ and believed that there was a place for congressmen, for Christians in Congress.

And so he had a series of meetings with these 25 and explained how the precinct works and how you get nominated and how you get elected. And so he just took them through this process. None of them knew anything about the electoral process in the United States, as I guess very few here.

Is there anyone here that's active in their local precinct, in their party? Anyone in this room? Anyone who knows any member of the local precinct group? Well, you see how unscriptural we are. The scripture says obey them that have the rule over you. We don't have kings.

We have a constitution. But most of us are utterly disdainful of the electoral process. The mafia in New York says we don't care who they vote for as long as you let us nominate them.

And because we don't know the nominating process, then we deserve what we get, our indifference. Well, Jack Conlon got 25 people committed to Christ, not all one church, but just there in the area. And each one of those 25 went out and got six more and passed on what he'd learned.

And with a very small budget, they elected him with a whopping big majority to Congress. And when he got there, as I said, he was elected president of the freshman Republican congressman. One of the first things he did was to start a Bible class in his home, met a woman who's a widow woman from down in Virginia Beach who had a Bible class ministry.

She'd begun this. Her husband had died. She was left until she said, Lord, what would you have me to do? And so she just began bringing in some neighbors and teaching.

And God increased the gift and the ability and the enabling. And so Mr. Conlon met her and asked her if she'd come and have a Bible class in his home. And this has already been publicized, so I won't make any difference if I tell you.

It may encourage your heart a little bit. But at Christmas time, Billy Graham was at the White House for the church service, and he was standing talking to the congressman, Mrs. Conlon, and Julie Eisenhower, Nixon Eisenhower, was there. And he said, you know, Julie, the Conlons have a very important Bible class in their home, and they just live a few blocks from you.

I think it might be very helpful and you might enjoy it if you just begin going. And so she did. And a few months later, a terrific pressure and burden upon her heart crowded her to Christ, and she opened her heart to receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

And is witnessing for him and is fellowshiping with believers, and the whole focus of her interest in life has changed as of several months ago. And what I'm saying is, here is a man who had a vision and a burden of something of what it meant to serve the Lord as a Christian. He didn't know anything about it, but he learned.

He didn't know what it was, what, how the Lord wanted to use him, but he was available. And I'm submitting to you this morning that when we talk about his workmanship created in Christ Jesus under good works, we're talking about developing your full potential in Christ. And I can't tell you what it is, but he knows.

And he's asking you to realize that he has provided everything necessary for you to become everything God wants you to be. Now I saw that. I close with this.

Back in 1935, my father told me in midsummer that he couldn't send me to high school. There weren't school busing in those days. I had the board in town in Anoka, Minnesota, and we had the fourth year of drought on our sand farm in Anoka County.

And dad said, I can't send you to school this year. And he said, if you want to stay and work, maybe I can next year. But he said, you've been saying that.

And I was going into my junior year. I just turned 16 in May 30th. And he said, but maybe, maybe you could, maybe you should start, see if you couldn't go to Bible school.

He said, I know you're too young, but you know, Dr. Riley. So I wrote a letter to Dr. W.B. Riley, who's founder of the Northwestern Bible School in Minneapolis. And he used to come to our farm and hunt pheasants.

And I used to, he used to kid me and say that I was his bird dog and would go out and scare up the pheasants for him. And so he remembers, recognized the name. And I wrote and reminded him of this in a sentence.

And I told him that my father couldn't afford to send me to high school. And I wanted to train for the Lord's work and for the ministry. And I didn't have any money, but if he'd let me come, I'd work hard and I promised to pay my bills.

And he wrote a sweet letter back and he said, son, we don't have much money either. Come on and join us. You work hard and pray and, and we'll just trust God together.

And so that's what I did. I walked the streets of Minneapolis for six weeks and finally got a job with Langford's restaurants, working three hours a day for three meals. That's what they paid me.

And with sandwiches, it was a sandwich shop. So if I don't go into ecstasy over sandwiches, it may be I'm getting a little hot, cold flash coming back, having to go month after month, having sandwiches for breakfast and sandwich for lunch and sandwich for supper. It gets old, you know.

Even Elijah found it was getting a little old, hamburger sandwiches twice a day, you know. And God had to change the diet for him. But at any rate, it came and I got another job later with the Loop Pharmacy on 11th and Marquette.

And I worked six hours on Monday and nine hours on Tuesday and six hours on Wednesday and nine hours on Thursday and six hours on Friday and nine hours on Saturday. And I got three meals and six dollars a week. And I carried a full school load.

And I was rich, except that at the end of that time, 17 years of age, carrying a load like that, I, well, I got sick. That's what I did. I got sick and I hadn't quit school.

And my friends were, you know, I've always been blessed with friends. I've had the kind of friends where I've never needed enemies because my friends were so faithful to me. They did everything for me that enemies could do and they did it in love, I hope.

At any rate, my friend said to me, if you quit school, you're finished. Everybody that ever drops out of Bible school is finished. You never hear from them.

It's over. It's done. And so here I was.

I had to quit. 17 years old and totally washed up and finished. My life was over.

I was a castaway. 17. Oh, I also worked at Mrs. C.J. Martin's for my room.

I was night watchman. When I went there, they had a big 45 in a belt of bullets hanging over the edge of my bed. Boy, I was scared of that.

I was afraid that might go off at night. One day, the man who was in charge of the place said, let's go down and see how good you are with this thing. So we went down there and he put up a barrel, filled it with sand.

Now he said, aim at that barrel. Well, I did. And that thing was going like this.

I could weigh out there at the end. It was too heavy. And I pulled the trigger and the bullet, it went off because it just threw me.

And we could never find where that bullet went. It didn't go into the ceiling. It didn't go into the wall.

It didn't go into the barrel. It just, it was gone. And he said, I don't think you're ready for this yet.

Oh, I was sure of that. So he got me a broomstick and he said, if anybody comes around, hit him. And I didn't figure that was going to go off in the middle of the night.

So that was better. But you see, this was a student's job. So because I dropped out of school, I had to give up my room.

So here I was, 17 years old, washed up, finished, done. And I lay down by, knelt on the floor and I put myself across the bed and I reached up and got a Bible and I flipped it open. It landed in First Timothy.

And I read and there wasn't a thing in there for me. It was just sawdust I was blowing. And then I got to Second Timothy and I came to verse 8. And it looked to me like the verse began to pulse with neon.

Go on and lights went on and bells rang. And this is what I read. Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.

But be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God who has saved us and called us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose for which he provides grace. His own purpose and grace for which he provides grace. For his own which was in Christ Jesus before the world began.

And before God made the world, he made a plan for my life. And I'm so glad that I'm still on that beam now. And I don't know where he's going to lead me from here on out, but I'm committed to one thing that I made that day.

I put my hands over that book and I said, Oh Father, you don't even need to tell me what your plan is. Because I know enough about you to know that I am not going to change it. And all I would do would be initial it.

Say okay. And so Father, sight unseen, I want your plan for my life. I don't care what people think.

I don't care what others do. I want your plan for my life. And I commit you myself now to take your plan and settle on your plan.

And as best I know how by your grace to obey your plan. I want it. Now that wasn't anything unique with me.

It's something that's the birthright of every believer. And today I want you to do just that same thing. To take God's plan for your life.

Your his workmanship created in Christ Jesus under good work, which God is before all day. If you're to ever develop your full potential in Christ, then you must, you must make an absolute unreserved commitment to all you are and have to the plan of God, even when you don't know what it is. And in every decision that you face, in every decision you have to make, you're one frame of reference.

Oh God, I want this made in terms of your plan for my life. That plan that you made before you made the world. I'm yours.

And that can be yours today. I don't care how old you are brother Jones. It's yours today for the balance of the hours God gives you.

Forever the youngest one here. It's yours. And you can say, Father I want thy will, thy plan.

This that you tailor made to fit me. This for which you provided grace. You see my dear, if you make the plan, you've got to come up with the grace to make it work.

That's right. Because he's reserved his grace for his plan. But if you take his plan, then he provides grace.

Isn't that marvelous to be able to say that to develop my full potential in Christ means that I could take God's plan for which God has provided grace. Well that's pretty good. That's great.

And that's what God wants and I wish it were true of everybody here. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes and just have a moment in which we ask ourselves, is this true of me? Have I really said, oh God I want thy plan for my life. Whatever it means, whatever it costs, whatever it will take me.

Your plan. I'm not going to tell you how or what. I'm just committed to thee Lord Jesus.

Have you done that? If you haven't, will you? And maybe you'd like to just feel it by getting up and coming, kneeling here and having a little time while others slip away and get ready for their lunch. You come and tell him that today on you're going to take this plan for your life. We're not going to sing.

Just giving you now this word of exhortation and invitation. This isn't a settled matter. Settle it before you eat, before you do anything else.

Get up from where you are, your friends will let you out. Slip down and just stay until you're satisfied that you've said, Lord I want thy plan, thy will for my life. Father of Jesus, how we thank thee that you saved us and called us not according to our works but your purpose for which you provided grace in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Were your workmanship created in Christ Jesus under good works that you've before ordained, we should walk in that. And thou can take this company of people and enlarge our hearts and enlarge our expectancy, enlarge our faith and enlarge our ministry. Even though it may not be in terms of, of that which is going to be written up in the journals and the digest.

But if it's going to mean that there's greater glory coming to Christ than there was before from our blood ransom lives. That's the enlargement we seek. And so Father to that end we ask thee to bless these thy dear children.

And should there be some that haven't said that full and complete and eternal yes to thee, might they be discontent until they have. Might it be therefore Father that every one precious, numbered among that, that group that have embraced your plan and your will and settled on it and peace. No further questions about it.

Thy will be done on earth and in my life, even as it is in heaven. Let this be the rule of our lives to the glory and honor and praise of the lamb that was slain. In his name and for his sake we ask.

Amen. Let's stand for the benediction, shall we? Now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus

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