



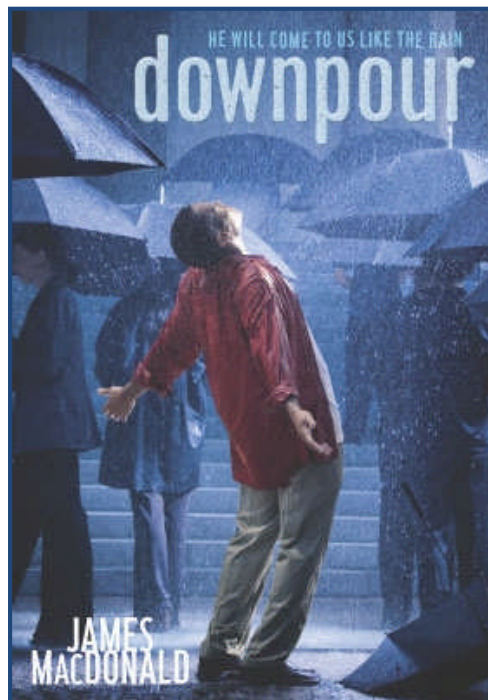
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

THE
PASSION
OF THE CHRIST
[EPHESIANS 2:8-10]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

FEBRUARY 15, 2009

LESSON #5 FROM THE **MASTERWORK** SERIES STUDY OF:



THE
PASSION
OF THE CHRIST
[EPHESIANS 2:8-10]

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Imagine with me you're in a hurry. You're late for a very important appointment. And now, well, now you've decided to push the pedal. To put on the gas and you're breezing along. You're cruising. Now 70 mph in a 35 mph zone. At first you're concerned, but nonetheless you sense it's OK. Why, "I'M IN A HURRY." So much in a hurry now there's a traffic light. It looks red. You start to slow to a stop and then you look. No cars close by. You convince yourself, it's OK. And you disobey the law. But again, it's OK. Why? You're in a hurry.

And now at the next intersection, the sign says no turn on red. Remember, you're in a hurry. Cars? No one close by. You go ahead and turn. It's OK. Why is it OK? Well, at this point you've begun to justify. You believe that you're someone who needs to follow the SPIRIT of the law, but the LETTER of the law—w-e-l-l, come onnnn. It's OK, you're in a hurry. So much in a hurry, now every sign you see that says stop, you decide to go. Every yield, you decide to speed up. Every limit, you decide to break. And now—ohhh, now—you look in your rear view mirror, there's colored lights flashing. There's a siren sounding and you know it's time to ...WELL, because you're in a hurry, because you're late, you decide you're going to continue to push that pedal. You don't care.

And now that law enforcement officer, he calls for backup. In just a few moments time, we have...well, it's the air national guard. It's the Horry County Sheriff. It's the Myrtle Beach Police. It's the Highway Patrol and SLED. Everyone has showed up and now they put down one of those nail strips. Suddenly all four tires are out. You're surrounded. Helicopters above. Now the squawk box is loud. PULL OVER! PULL OVER! This is it. And at that moment, you realize, as you've suddenly come to your senses, WHAT DID I DO? HOW DID I DO IT? You begin to repent, convulsively sorrowing, you know. OH, PLEASE, HAVE MERCY ON ME. The policeman approaches, gun in hand. PUT DOWN THAT WINDOW. I want to see a driver's license and a current registration. You hand him the

registration and a drivers license, and with tears flowing from your face, you say, "I-I-I thought it was OK,(sob) cause I was in a hurry." He says to you, "Don't you ever do that again. This time, it's a warning." (PAUSE)

Are you dreaming? Are you awake? You just broke every single law in the book and he said, "Hey, don't you ever do that again?" LISTEN, this is a warning. Now, I ask you. Pulling away, from this large posse of police, do you PUSH the pedal again? Make a little noise? Leave a little rubber? Get a little gravel? No, no, no, you don't! Your hands are at the 10 and 2 positions and you move out very, very slowly—choosing to limit FOR YOUR LIFE—this bad behavior. WHY? You were given grace. You were given grace. Oh, you know you were wrong, reckless, foolish. You were careless, but nonetheless, in light of someone's grace, you decide to CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR??? Exactly!

In the same way, your life, for how many years were you breaking every law in the book? You were reckless and you were foolish and you were careless. And certainly, as God pulled out every stop to get your attention, to arrest your affection. And you, well, you assumed, now that God's caught up to you, "This is going to be it." You begin to convulsively repent, "Oh, God, please, I'm sorry." And He said to you, "This is a warning. Hey, this time—well, just don't behave that way ever again." REALLY, Dean? We see the concept of grace, but what about the need for grace? Think back just a few moments to our speeding and reckless driving example. In order to appreciate grace, we have to understand how badly we need it, right?

Today we wrap up Week Five of our study from Dr. James MacDonald's book, *Downpour*, we turn to probably the biggest part of what makes our salvation, as Christians, so great—GRACE as the result of Christ dying on the cross at Calvary. As a matter of fact, one day the great Christian author C.S. Lewis walked into a room where a group of men were debating what makes Christianity unique among all the world's religions. The question was posed to C. S. Lewis, who answered right away, "*That's easy.*"

It's grace." Then he went on to explain that no other religion teaches the concept of a God who takes the initiative to respond with undeserved favor to sinners. Grace has to do with the work of God. It's simply His gift to us. Turn to **EPHESIANS 2:8 (NIV)**:
⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

In order to put this into perspective, I have a clip from the Mel Gibson movie a few years ago, *The Passion of the Christ*. We will never be able to appreciate God's amazing grace until we remind ourselves of the great cost. You spent a few days this week studying what Jesus was doing on the cross and you probably have a "sense" of what went on. But, as I understand it from Bible scholars and commentators, even the scenes in this movie didn't truly depict how **BAD** crucifixion really was. It's horrific and beyond our all reasoning. [PLAY EXCEPT FROM [THE PASSION OF CHRIST SHOWING CHRIST BEING NAILED TO CROSS & BEING CRUCIFIED.](#)]

Turn to **ROMANS 6:23** (NASB) and let's be reminded of what God says about the consequences of sin and WHY His Son died on the cross: *For the **WAGES** of sin is death, but the free **GIFT** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. **That verse speaks of wages and a gift. What is the difference?*** Paul says: "If we got the pay we had **EARNED** it would be death; but out of his grace God has given us life." **What exactly is meant by death in this context? Everyone dies, right?** [This result of sin is not just physical death—everyone dies physically, believers and unbelievers alike. This refers to eternal separation from God in hell.]

Now I know we've been over this and been over this, but I can hear some of you saying, "I'm really not too bad. I live a good, moral life. I just told a little lie." You see, that's our perspective on earth, but when that hits the courtroom of God in heaven, it's a capital offense. Remember what happened to Adam and Eve for the disobedient act of eating forbidden fruit? Most of us wouldn't have classified this as a terrible sin, but it is when it's measured against the law of God. Turn to **EPHESIANS 2:1**, *¹"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins".* When the Bible

says that people are dead in sin, it doesn't mean they are incapable of doing good things. It means that none of their good deeds can raise them from spiritual death to spiritual life, because these deeds are done apart from a relationship with God.

You know one thing I've learned in this study by Dr. MacDonald is that everyone of us can experience a torrential **DOWNPOUR** of God's grace and mercy—if we will just remove the obstacles we've discussed over the last four weeks. Recall the words from one of our memory verses, **Jeremiah 29:11**, about God's Plan for His children—"*plans to prosper us...to give us hope and a future—not to harm us.*" But it's all tied to grace by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus pictures the great chasm between man and God and how there's nothing we can do to bridge that gap. In **LUKE 16:19-31**, Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus died and went to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man went to hell. In the flames of suffering the rich man begged for mercy, but listen to what Abraham told him in **verse 26**: *'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'*

The Bible, in **ISAIAH 59:2**, says that our sins have hidden God's face from us. Listen to these words: *²But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.* Sin! Sin! Sin! Get the picture, now? That's what Jesus was doing on the cross. God's intolerance of sin is a foreign concept to the world, and too often to believers, because we **ACCOMMODATE** sin. Grace is so sweet because God's wrath is so awful. Now, let's turn and look at the process by which God reaches down to sinful people and showers them with His grace. Look at **ROMANS 11:32**, which says, *³²For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.* You see, all people are shut up in this container called sin, with no way out. The only way the container will be opened is if the One who shuts it opens it.

Look at **EPHESIANS 2** again. Paul opens this chapter with how we are all sons of disobedience and children of wrath, but now there's a change coming. Look at verse 4 and tell me what the first two words of VERSE 4 are? **BUT GOD**, yes. In other words, God is not going to leave us in this mess. WOW. See the need for the cross a little better. Starting with verse 4, follow along: *⁴But God, being rich in **mercy**, because of His great **love** with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

See what happens here? Grace is the coming together, according to Paul, of God's mercy and His love. Now, remember, there's a difference between mercy and grace. *Mercy* we said is God not giving us what we deserve, while *grace* is God giving us what we don't deserve.

Let me illustrate the difference this way. Recall my driving escapade that I used to begin today's lesson? If the officers had given me a speeding ticket, say, for less than 10 mph, 2 points, and fined me \$200, that would have certainly been mercy. I deserved reckless driving, 6 points and \$1000 fine—and probably a little jail. But, what I got was grace—I only received a warning from the officer. Clearly I got what I did not deserve. And that's what's so amazing about grace.

The Bible tells us that God acted because of His great love for us. **ROMANS 5:8 (NIV)** says, *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Biblical love is an act of self-giving on behalf of the one who is loved. It is more of a decision than a feeling. Feelings come and go. I hear it all the time—I just don't love him (or her) anymore. Or, we've fallen out of love. Listen. God's love is an irreversible decision to love those who were not deserving of His love. And that's what we call Grace.

But, let's answer our question. Just how great is God's grace? Look at what Paul says in **EPHESIANS 2:7**. He says that God saved us by grace "⁷*so that in the ages to come He might show the*

surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” See that. God’s grace is so amazing and immense that it will take an eternity for you to grasp all that He has in store for you. And the most amazing thing still is that it’s a **GIFT**.

Go back and look at verse 8-9: *⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* God alone gets the credit here. There’s nothing we can do. It’s all complete.

That makes me think about when our children were small. It seemed as if every toy we bought them for Christmas or birthdays contained these discouraging words on the box: *Batteries not included.* That always frustrated me and I wanted to ask someone, “Why are you selling me this thing without selling me the power to make it work?” I wanted the toy or whatever to work without having to buy something else.

Well, the good news in our study about receiving a **DOWNPOUR** of God’s blessing, love and grace is that when God saved you, the batteries were included! Your great salvation is complete. Grace not only provides you with the GIFT of salvation but with the power to make the gift perform. GRACE IS A COMPLETE PACKAGE. Listen to Paul’s words in **verse 3** of **Ephesians 1**: *³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **EVERY** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*

JAMES 4:6 tells us that God also gives us “a greater grace.” I’ve heard it described as “more and more abundant grace.” In other words, grace keeps on coming when we are committed to living the way God wants us to live, which is the context of James 4.

TITUS 2:11-12 (NKJV) *¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹²teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,*

Your attention please, again the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men TEACHING, it's teaching, and what is it teaching us...listen to this, it's teaching us that the grace of God was not designed for jumping. For jumping. NO! The grace of God was divinely designed for **FALLING** into sin—but not for jumping into sin. Oh, you recall with me, it's **Luke's** Gospel, the **fourth** chapter, the temptation of Christ. How many times is He tempted? And on that final temptation, in **LUKE 4: 9-12**, to the top, to the pinnacle, He looks at all that is available to Him, for Him, and the TEMPTATION? Hey, if you are the Son of God, why don't you **J-U-M-P OFF**? Doesn't your Bible say that God will give His angels charge over you, lest your foot is dashed upon the ground? Come on, you can jump. No, no, no. God's grace was not designed for jumping—it's designed for falling. *I will not test the Lord my God.* How's that? Please...don't test the Lord thy God. His grace was not given to you for jumping into sin. It was given to you for falling into sin. WHY? Because the grace of God teaches—the grace of God teaches?—yes.

TEACH = DISCIPLINE. The original language, that word for teach means educate me through discipline. In other words, the grace of God calls for a commensurate response on our part—not to try to pay for what we have but out of overflowing gratitude for what God has done for us.

One way we are called to respond to grace is by our works. We've looked at EPHESIANS 2:8-9 this morning—the classic scripture of salvation by grace alone. But those verses are followed by VERSE **10**. Look and listen: *¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* The service we do for Christ is done out of gratitude for grace, not as our attempt to replace grace with works.

Let me close with a story about a man coming face to face with God in a storm and seeing first hand this amazing thing we call grace. He's somewhat of a sailor and his name is John. He had served on the seas since he was eleven years old. His father, an

English shipmaster in the Mediterranean, took him aboard and trained him well for a life in the Royal Navy. Yet what John gained in experience, he lacked in discipline. He mocked authority. Ran with the wrong crowd. Indulged in the sinful ways of a sailor. Although his training would have qualified him to serve as an officer, his behavior caused him to be flogged and demoted.

In his early twenties, he made his way to Africa, where he became intrigued with the lucrative slave trade. At age twenty-one, he made his living on the Greyhound, a slave ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean. John ridiculed the moral and poked fun at the religious. He even made jokes about a book that would eventually help reshape his life: *The Imitation Of Life*. In fact, he was degrading that book a few hours before his ship sailed into an angry storm. That night the waves pummeled the Greyhound, spinning the ship one minute on the top of a wave. Plunging her the next into a watery valley. John awakened to find his cabin filled with water. A side of the Greyhound had collapsed. Ordinarily such damage would have sent a ship to the bottom in a matter of minutes. The Greyhound, however, was carrying buoyant cargo and remained afloat.

John worked at the pumps all night. For nine hours, he and the other sailors struggled to keep the ship from sinking. But he knew that it was a losing cause. Finally, when his hopes were more battered than the vessel, he threw himself on the saltwater-soaked deck and pleaded, "If this will not do, then Lord have mercy on us all." John didn't deserve mercy, but he received it. The Greyhound and her crew survived. John never forgot God's mercy and grace shown on that tempestuous day in the roaring Atlantic. He returned to England where he became a prolific composer. You've sung his songs, like this one: *Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.*

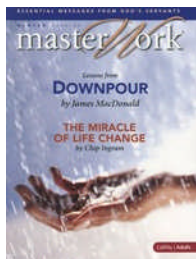
This slave-trader-turned-songwriter was John Newton. Along with his hymn writing, he also became a powerful pulpiteer. For nearly 50 years, he filled pulpits and churches with the story of the Savior

who meets you and me in the storm and showers us with his grace.

As we understand and respond to grace, we will find grace to be a wise teacher. The challenge of our great salvation is to become acquainted with the grace of God that saved us and the God of grace who saves us. Then we will experience the multiplying power of grace. *"Grace and peace be multiplied to you."* **2 Peter 1:2**

It is said that Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, once had captured a prince and his family. When they came before him, the monarch asked the prisoner, "What will you give me if I release you?" "The half of my wealth," was his reply. "And if I release your children?" "Everything I possess." "And if I release your wife?" "Your Majesty, I will give myself." Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he freed them all. As they returned home, the prince said to his wife, "Wasn't Cyrus a handsome man?" With a look of deep love for her husband, she said to him, "I didn't notice. I could only keep my eyes on you—the one who was willing to give himself for me."

Let's Pray.



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