

LifeWay Family Bible Series for April 11: God's grace gives testimony to his great love_40504

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God's grace gives testimony to his great love

Matthew 28:1-10; Ephesians 2:4-9

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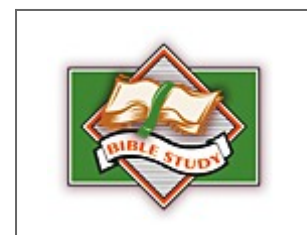
First Baptist Church, College Station

In college, I drove a Ford Pinto. You may remember that particular puny pony as the one with the optional exploding rear end.

It also had something few cars today seem to possess. It had a metal dashboard. It was like having a refrigerator door right there in the car, the ideal place for magnetic art. I had a magnet on it that read, "Smile! God loves you." The letters were arranged in old English script over a scene of the three empty crosses on Calvary's hill.

I picked up a friend after class who was having the kind of bad day that seemed to promise an even worse semester. He looked at the magnetized

message on my dashboard and asked, “How do you know God loves you?” From the pages of Matthew's gospel we can find sufficient witnesses to tell us the facts of God's love. From Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we can find the grace needed to accept his love.



Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were the first to make the discovery that the grave had lost its victim (Matthew 28:1). There was an earthquake, and then the women were touched by an angel. He told them not to be afraid and to go tell the disciples to go to Galilee if they wanted to see Jesus. They went. Jesus appeared to them on the way, greeting them and repeating the instructions of the angel.

The first witnesses of the resurrection were women. They did as Jesus told them. They were effective communicators. According to Matthew, the disciples made their way to Galilee on the basis of the preaching of the two Marys. “Then the disciples went to Galilee ... then Jesus came to them” (Matthew 28:16, 18).

“How do you know God loves you?” I do not always feel loved. I do not always receive God's love. I often do not show God's love to others. But when I look at the cross, I have no doubt that God loves me. He loves me so much only Calvary could tell the story. The cross is the objective truth that God has entered into this world to bring his people to himself. The song we learned as children still says it best: “Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

“How do you know God loves you?” This love must become more than an objective truth. It needs to be subjective truth as well. Heart knowledge is

needed as much as head knowledge. From the facts of Matthew's resurrection narrative, we move to Paul's resurrection application. He began the second chapter of Ephesians with a description of the human spiritual condition.

His summation? You were dead—"Dead in transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Then comes some of the greatest words in the entire Bible: "But God ... made us alive ... raised us up ... and seated us in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 2:4-7).

In these words, we are suddenly transported from the spiritual morgue to the delivery room. In the birthing room of salvation there is only one midwife allowed, and her name is grace. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

I am grateful for the witness of Mary Magdalene and the "other" Mary. I am grateful for the witness of my parents, my brother, my pastors and teachers. But none of these witnesses brought me into God's kingdom. My church did not give me birth. My denomination did not forgive my sins. My works did not give me a single breath of new life. My best efforts did not result in spiritual self-delivery. It was all "by grace." God's grace.

Grace is the gift of God. It is not pay for a job well done or reward for noble effort. It is not the luck of the draw. It certainly is not a capricious action on God's part where he chooses to bless some and condemn others. Grace makes faith possible. It enables belief. It empowers spiritual growth. It turns sinners into saints and atheists into missionaries.

I have never found a definition of grace that fits well. How can you describe the indescribable? It's like trying to verbalize a sunset. You have to see it, and you have to experience it. In the pages of Scripture, we read of the resurrection of Jesus. In the church, we hear contemporary witnesses tell of

how Christ has come alive in them. When we hear and when we believe, we can experience the resurrection of Jesus in our own lives.

“How do you know God loves you?” I know he loves me because of the cross. But more than that, I know he loves me because he came into my life when I put my faith and trust in him. Just as he was raised from the dead to never die again, he has come into my life and will never leave.

Our world still needs powerful witnesses of the resurrection of Christ. The two Marys are available as witnesses today only through the pages of Scripture. We are the ones who will have to verbalize this message in the world today. When you do, you will find there is another who will join you in manifold witness. Her name is “grace.” By grace, and only by grace, others will come into his kingdom too.

Question for discussion

- ◆ How do you know God loves you?

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