

REMEDY FOR BUZZ LIGHTYEAR SYNDROME

6th in a Series on Ephesians called, “Messages to the Misfits”

Ephesians 2:8-9 – Topic: How to Be Rescued

Year after year in the television show *24*, thousands of lives were at stake. It always came down to Jack Bauer and his heroics, usually acting in direct disobedience to authorities over him to somehow come to the rescue and stop the evil plot that would have ended so many lives. That is a scenario that gets replicated in countless action movies.

One of my favorite scenes in a television show occurred in an episode of the show *Castle*, which you can still see at times in reruns. In this particular episode some terrorists have gained control of some radioactive material and have made a dirty bomb that they plan to detonate in the middle of New York City. In the climactic scene, the main characters of the show, Richard Castle and Detective Kate Beckett, have managed to locate the device, but it is on a timer that is counting down the last two minutes before detonation. There is no time for the bomb squad to arrive and disarm the bomb. It looks like it is too late. As the last seconds tick away Castle just reaches into the bomb, grabs a handful of wires, closes his eyes in anticipation of the blast that will end their lives, and in desperation, yanks them out. To his surprise and relief the bomb doesn't go off and the timer stops counting with just a few seconds left. In triumph, Castle says, “*Yes!*” and pumps his arms, then points at the bomb as though taunting it. His reaction is perfect.

That kind of last second rescue is common in books, movies and television shows. Obviously the big reason for that is that the drama of such a rescue is exciting, even if it has become a bit clichéd. But I wonder if there isn't another subtle factor in the appeal of such rescue stories. The appeal is that we all have a sometimes unconscious sense that maybe we need someone to save us. In fact we are all in need of rescue. *The story of our rescue is the greatest, most dramatic rescue story in history, and it is not fiction.* It is absolutely true. We will catch a glimpse of this powerful story in Ephesians 2:8-9.

WHO NEEDS TO BE SAVED?

Paul says in these verses that we have been saved. But what does that mean? There is the cliché guy who stops people on the street and says, “Have you been saved, brother?” Saved from what? When Toby was in college up in San Luis Obispo he used to surf in the cold water up there in the Central Coast area. One day he was surfing at Pismo Beach when there was a pretty good swell running, so there were some big waves. He noticed a guy who was struggling in the surf over by the pier. He saw him get knocked off his board, then battle to try to get back on with no success. As he paid attention to this guy, Toby realized he was getting into some danger, for there was a real possibility of him being battered against the pilings of the pier. He paddled his board over to the guy and said, “Hey, do you need some help?” He was clearly exhausted, and with obvious relief he said, “Yeah, I really do.” Toby said to him, “Grab onto my board and keep holding on,” then he paddled toward shore, towing the tired surfer and his board until he got him to safety. The kid thanked him profusely for his help. Toby rescued that kid. He saved him.

Most of us have never been saved like that. More to the point, we don't think we need to be saved. Some might even be offended at the suggestion that they need to be saved. So who needs to be saved and what do they need to be saved from? There are some things that are consistent in human beings, things that alert us to the need for rescue.

All of us are engaged in an ongoing search for meaning and significance. Despite the insistence of some in our culture that life has no meaning, the human soul cannot live with the idea that life is utterly empty. It keeps trying to plug that hole with some kind of purpose. It also is desperate to feel its own worth, to believe that it is somehow significant. The really odd fact is that no matter how powerful, important, or famous people get, they still feel the need for more. It is like a bottomless hole. We all also have a strange sense of not measuring up. Often we don't even know what it is we don't measure up to, but it leaves with that nagging sense of falling short and with a persistent sense of guilt. In addition people most of the time live with a sense that something is missing in life and they are on a continual search for that piece. Most common of all is a lack of peace. People are desperate for peace and mostly don't have it. Finally, there is a desperate need for hope. We need that because everything in our lives is in the shadow of death. I recently read an article that was about how many people have a fear of flying. The heart of that fear is the fear of death. If, somehow, we could have an absolute guarantee that there was zero chance that we would die from a crash, if death could be totally removed from the equation, then flying might be uncomfortable or inconvenient, but there would be no fear involved. In the face of the horror of death it becomes very clear that we have a desperate need for hope, for some answer to death.

These are all elements of a condition from which we need to be saved. Imagine that a patient comes into the Emergency Department and Dr. Toby Myatt is assigned to treat them. This patient has a cluster of five different symptoms and it is hard to see how they could be connected. How would you suggest he deal with that? Should he try to treat each individual symptom and leave it at that? Or should he look for some underlying condition that is causing them all? Obviously the latter is the right way to go. Unfortunately, most of us try to treat each symptom individually. That's a mistake. We should look for the underlying cause. And we saw what that is in the first part of Ephesians 2. *It is that we are spiritually dead.* This is the cause of all of those symptoms. It is the root cause of all of the selfishness, insensitivity, abuse, unkindness, violence, racism, poverty, dysfunction, loneliness and dissension that is found in the human race.

We need to grasp the depth and the hopelessness of our peril. In any situation we can ask, "What's the worst that can happen?" Well the worst is that we would die. And that is what has happened to us. It has happened to all of us. We are all spiritually dead, cut off from God, the source of all life and the source of all good. We saw two weeks ago that the horror of being spiritually dead is that we can't change the situation. A dead person is dead, with no ability to alter their condition. So we are in the worst possible condition, and we are unable to lift a finger to help ourselves out of it.

Given that we are spiritually dead, thus in the worst possible circumstance, and unable to effect any kind of change, we are badly in need of rescue. This is not about a particular group of unfortunate, benighted humans. It is the plight of the entire human race. In other words, we all need to be saved.

We need to be saved from death. Verses 4-7 say that God made us alive in Christ. He saved us from that worst possible condition. But how does that happen?

HOW CAN WE BE SAVED?

Notice in verses 8-9 the preposition “by” is used twice. Verse 8 says “It is by grace,” and verse 9 says, “not by works.” This is important to pay attention to because we are asking the question, “how can we be saved?” The answer will necessarily involve the word “by.” We must be saved by some agency, some method, some action or some person. So these verses present two alternatives for attempting to be saved.

One approach to being saved is what Paul calls “works.” This is something we are familiar with. It literally means that we must save ourselves. This is the way all humans naturally think they have to be saved. We all believe there is something we need to do. If you asked people what they need to do to be saved, what do you think the most common answer would be? It would be something along the lines of “try to be a good person,” or “try to have good outweigh the bad.”

This makes sense to us for a couple of reasons. One is that it is how everything on this earth works. You get the good things because you deserve them... with the possible exception of desirable college admissions apparently. There you don’t earn it, you lie, cheat and then buy it.

I recently was reading a story in the newspaper about Chris Paddack, the Padres’ rookie pitcher. There were some cool things about his story. One is that he has exceeded expectations for him. He has arrived in the major leagues before even the most optimistic projections for him. The story was about how the Padres’ manager, Andy Green, surprised him in the middle of Paddack’s last exhibition game by coming up with a cool way to tell him that he had made the major league team. Paddack was surprised on that Sunday, four days before Opening Day, when Green came out to the mound to take him out of the game much earlier than expected, for no obvious reason. When Green got there all the infielders were at the mound. Green looked at a couple of them and said, “Where are you guys going to be on Friday?” They said, “In the field standing behind Chris.” It was the first time he knew he would make his next start for the Padres as a Major Leaguer for the first time. It told how Paddack got choked up on the way to the dugout as he realized his lifelong dream was coming true. My reaction to the story was to wonder what that must be like. I wished that I could experience that magic moment. To this day I have a tiny bit of disappointment that I was never even close to getting a whiff of that kind of athletic success. It was a dream for me, too, and my dream was crushed like a bug very early on. Do you know why that happened? It was because I was never even close to being big enough, strong enough or talented enough to be a great player of any sport. I never got to experience that great blessing because I was light years away from being able to earn it. And the only way you get that kind of thing in this world is you have to earn it. Nobody gets to play professional sports just because everyone wants to be kind to them.

Michael got a job flying jet airplanes for Delta Airlines because he is one of the best pilots in the world. Toby got into and graduated from medical school because he worked for it, and he is now a doctor because he earned it. That’s how things work. Everything in our world works that way. And

that seems fair to us. That is the principle calls “works.” It makes sense to us that the way we can be saved is by that same principle. It is by works. We earn it.

A second reason this makes sense to us is it seems like that’s the way God set things up in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 28:1-2 says, “If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God.” Then in verse 15 it says, “However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you.” Then there is a long list of horrors. That sure sounds like the familiar pattern, “do the right things well and you’ll get the good stuff, do the wrong things and you’re going to get creamed.”

There is a major flaw in that system for us. It is like the flaw that kept me from ever being able to even think about being a professional athlete. That flaw was that I never got within millions of miles of having the athletic ability to earn that. I didn’t deserve it. You hear people say, “If you just believe in yourself and work hard enough, nothing can stop you. You can do anything.” Nice sentiment, if you’re into lies. That statement is so not true. No matter what I did, how much I believed, and no matter how hard I worked, I was never going to get there. And we are never going to get there, be saved, by works, by trying hard to deserve it. The reason for that is that the standard is infinitely higher than the standard for becoming a professional athlete. It is unimaginably farther beyond our ability than the standard for athleticism was beyond me.

If you want the short version, just look at Matthew 5:48. Jesus gave us a capsule summary of where the bar is for earning being saved. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Uh, perfect? Yeah, that might be a problem. You think? Do you get what perfect means? Suppose that you are meeting that standard, and you have been doing so without fail since you were an infant. You are the first person since Jesus to ever get that far. But then, for one second you step out of line. Maybe some idiot pushes the right button to really hack you off, or maybe some supposed friend takes advantage of you and cheats you, or stabs you in the back, and for that one brief instant you fail. But then immediately you are right back in line and stay there for the rest of your life. Are you perfect? No, you are not. It may have been fleeting, but for that one instant you were not perfect, therefore you have failed to meet the standard.

That’s the short version. Let me also give you the long version. What would we have to do to be good enough to save ourselves? Jesus talked about that in the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon has some daunting things to say about God’s standards. I will give you just one sample of Jesus’ description of perfect. In Matthew 5:21 Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’” To be subject to judgment means you flunked. You didn’t meet the standard. But this is good news for me. Do you know how many people I’ve murdered in my entire life? That is exactly zero. I have been perfect. And I fully expect that when my days on this planet are through, my record will be spotless. I’m never going to murder anyone. I won’t even have to break a sweat to live by that rule.

Unfortunately, notice what word Jesus starts the next verse with. It is the word, “but.” Uh oh. There’s a catch. Jesus said in verse 22, “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.” Wait, is he saying if you’ve ever gotten mad at anyone you failed to meet the standard? He’s saying just getting mad at someone is as much a failure as murdering them?

Yes, that’s exactly what he’s saying. The standard of perfection means that you are so good you don’t even feel that flare of anger when someone has hurt you, betrayed you, attacks you or harms you. All you feel toward that person is kindness and love. How is just getting hacked off at someone as bad as murder if you don’t act on that anger? Jesus’ point is that spike of anger is evidence of some self-centeredness in your heart that is the generator of all the ugliness, violence and murder that has ever happened. As much as you don’t want to believe it, that evil in you makes you capable of unimaginable atrocity given the right provocation. So Jesus said the standard is to have a heart so pure and so good that its response to every person and every provocation is pure kindness, gentleness and love.

I recall one incident in our previous ministry when there was a woman who criticized Laurie. Her criticisms were unfair and totally untrue. They painted Laurie in terms that were outrageously false. The woman even wrote Laurie a letter explaining her supposed shortcomings. My feelings about that woman were not kindness and love. I was mad at her. I pat myself on the back that I didn’t go nuclear on her, but the fact is, I was angry. Honestly to this day I don’t have kind thoughts about that person. I saw her recently and had a visceral reaction to her still. Honestly, I wish I didn’t have that kind of feelings about someone more than ten years after the fact, but I do. I am angry at the woman and Jesus said that makes me subject to judgment. If “works” is the plan, then I’m in a world of trouble. I can’t save myself because as much as I try to have kind thoughts about that person, down in the deepest part of me, I just don’t. I can choose not to act on my upset thoughts about her, and I do choose that, but I know that they are there and I can’t talk myself out of them. You can apply that same standard to things like greed, lust, honesty and love. God’s standard isn’t looking like we are making the grade in those areas, it is actually being 100% pure in them in every atom of our being.

Why would God set such a high standard? Because anything else would inevitably result in evil and harm to other people. Only if people are true, 100% good, perfect in goodness like this, can there ever really be unity, safety and peace for the human race. Any slight compromise of that perfect good is a time bomb that will go off.

The point of that long discourse is the human default, the works approach to being saved, never has, and never will, work. This is consistent with what we saw before, that we are dead, and dead people do not have the ability to alter their condition. This means that we can never be saved if the only plan is works, or “save yourself.” So God has another way. We can be saved by grace.

Okay, Plan B is grace. But what is grace? We know what it means to be graceful. It is to be beautiful in one’s actions. If that’s the plan then I’m in trouble again, because no one has ever accused me of

being graceful. We were staying at Toby and Anna's for much of this week to help with their kids. Laurie and I were in a small bedroom. The second night I woke up and had to use the restroom. I got out of bed and headed toward that room in the dark. My first step I kicked a suitcase that I had forgotten was there, tripped, pitched forward and somehow bounced off the wall and spun while falling and landed on my back on the suitcase. It was a truly graceful moment. My lovely wife, deeply concerned for her husband's health, was laughing so hard she could hardly breathe. I am not graceful; I am an accident in search of a location to occur. So if being graceful is the requirement, it's a no go for me. More important, that's just another form of the "save yourself" plan.

Grace means undeserved kindness. In other words, ***it has nothing to do with what we can do or accomplish***. It is given in spite of our best efforts, not because of them. With grace, our abilities, our righteousness, our best efforts are completely irrelevant.

We have been helping Toby and Anna this week by riding herd on their two little girls, Ella and Cara. Anna had to go on a business trip for her job and Toby is working long hours as a resident. One day this week Cara, who is not yet two, was in a foul mood. At one point she determined that the most desirable thing on the planet was to climb up and stand on the table in the kitchen. Laurie stopped her. She wouldn't let her do it because she loves her and doesn't want her to injure herself. Cara took umbrage at such legalistic unfairness and had an eruption that would make Mt. St. Helens envious. She got so upset that when Laurie tried to put her shoe back on after it had come off, she grabbed the shoe, threw it on the ground and proceeded to scream at such volume we were concerned the neighbors might think we were torturing the child. And she kept on screaming. I admit it was an impressive tantrum, but in my estimation it was rather unattractive. So Laurie said, "Well, if that's how you're going to act, I don't believe I want to be your grandmother anymore. You're on your own. Good luck when you poop in your diaper because you're not getting any help from me. You can change it yourself, for all I care." No, she didn't do anything of the kind. Instead she just kept loving and caring for Cara. She was relating to her with grace. Cara did not deserve the patience, love and kindness she received. It was a product of grace from Laurie.

God rescues us when we don't deserve it. He chooses to do it, and does it purely by grace. It is a gift. Think about that for a moment. When someone gives you a gift, what is your role? You just receive it. That's it. You don't work for it. You don't earn it. You just get it. But what do we have to do to be given this gift? Paul says it happens by faith. You just believe it. That's it. In John 6:28 when Jesus talked about eternal life, the crowd listening to him said, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" In other words, how do we earn that? What is the standard? What work do we have to do to save ourselves and get that? Jesus said in verse 29, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." You do what you always do when someone offers you a gift. You believe it and receive it.

So grace is Plan B that really was Plan A. You can let Jesus save you by his grace, or you can try to save yourself. You cannot mix the two. People have tried that for 2000 years and it never works. When you try to mix grace and works, what you end up with is just works. You end up saying grace

is nice and maybe necessary but at the end of the day you still have to earn it. And the problem is the same. You can't earn it, so once again, you lose.

God offered us grace through Jesus Christ. We are guilty, but Jesus stood in for us and in his love, mercy and grace, took our guilt on himself. He received what we earned, which was grievous punishment. Then he offered to us what he has earned, which is acceptance, love, life and glory. Our job is to receive gratefully what he freely offers us. That is the greatest grace of all time.

Grace is costly. I read a true story about a young man training to be a pastor, named Michael. While he was in seminary one of his courses required him to serve for a time as a chaplain at a hospital. Late one night during his stint as chaplain, he was called to the hospital. A 16-year-old girl had been driving with friends in her car and had run into a light pole. The pole had broken and crashed down onto the car, injuring those in the vehicle. The worst of the injuries was to a 12-year-old friend of the driver. She arrived at the hospital brain dead. Michael had to walk with that child's family as they went through the awful process of confronting the devastating truth. The next morning Michael visited the driver in her hospital room. She was recovering physically, but emotionally she was a wreck, knowing that her actions had killed her friend. She told Michael, "I'm going to be like a daughter to her parents. I'm going to go to their house every day and babysit for them. I'll wash dishes every night. I'll mow their lawn every week." Michael gently helped her see that no matter what she did, she could never replace their daughter. She could never do enough to make up for her actions. How could any action she did ever make up for the death of their beloved daughter? Nothing could do that. Her only hope was grace. All she could hope for was that somehow those parents might forgive her. Fortunately, those wise and good parents did forgive that girl and set her free from trying to pay back a debt she could never repay - no matter what she did.

We are in that same situation. We have a debt that we could never repay. Nothing we do will ever make up for how short of God's standard we fall. But Colossians 2:14 says in Christ, God canceled our debt. It is all paid. Grace tells us to get out of the performance game. It tells us to trust that grace is enough.

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE THIS WAY TO RESCUE US?

The most obvious answer to that is there was no other way to rescue us from our condition. In the end, all attempts at rescuing us boil down to either works or grace, meaning either you do it yourself, or God, in his love and mercy, does it for you. The gospel of Christ is the only method of grace available to us.

But Paul identifies another reason why God chose the "grace through faith" approach. He said it is, "So that no one can boast." That seems like a curious thing to say. We occasionally encounter boasters. I recall one time when we were in a shuttle bus going from the airport to a rental car office. There were a number of people in the bus and one of them was a guy who talked non-stop about himself and his exploits. He was a boaster. You could almost see people gagging and wanting to get away from him. Most of us don't like boasters.

Paul wasn't thinking of boasting like that. *The Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* says the term has the attitude "of self-confidence...and which relies upon itself." It goes on to say that the element of trust is primary in the term. So the basic idea is that this is about what one is going to have confidence and trust in. So what Paul was saying is that no one is going to be able to take pride in, and rely on, what they themselves can do before God.

Why is that such a big deal? It turns out this *is* a really big deal because of the effect it has on us in three ways when we rely on what we do. First, it has a negative impact on how we live. We can't make ourselves truly, perfectly good from the inside out the way Jesus explained it. So that leaves us with only the option of at least looking like we're good. We will have to try to control our behavior so it looks like we're really good. The problem is we are acting in ways that don't derive from what is really true. So we will have to emphasize things that are surface. That's what religion always does.

As we have been spending time with our toddler granddaughters, we have watched quite a few animated movies and TV shows lately. Among them are the *Toy Story* movies. One of the main characters in those movies is a toy spaceman named Buzz Lightyear. The problem with Buzz is, he's just a toy, but he wants to believe he is the real thing. He has wings that pop out and supposedly enable him to fly and a laser like weapon on his wrist. But his wings don't enable him to fly and the light beam on his wrist isn't a laser at all, nor a weapon of any kind. It's just a red light. Buzz *looks like* he can do amazing things, and he chooses to believe he can, but the truth is, it is all for appearance. He's just a toy, and his buying into his own act just makes him pompous and rather ridiculous. And that's our problem when we go for the "save yourself by works" plan. All we can do is look like we are truly good and deserving. We can't do the real thing.

The effect of this is wearing on us, because we are acting like we're really true good, and acting is hard work. The Turners recently took Laurie and me to see Hershey Felder put on the one man play, *Beethoven*. We marveled at the fact that he was doing two performances of the play that day. It was exhausting. Well imagine if he was performing not just a couple of times a day, but all day every day. When we boast, have confidence in ourselves, that's how we end up living. It is life draining.

Second, it impacts how we relate to God. If we think we have somehow earned something from God, we deserve something from him, then we become demanding. Michael was telling us about some of what goes with using buddy passes that he can give us to his airline. You have to fly standby, which can be iffy. But he also said it is expected that you will dress nicely, and be respectful to the airline personnel and grateful. They are giving you grace. Think, then, of the difference in attitude if you're at the airport with a ticket you bought as opposed to a buddy pass. If you've purchased a ticket the airline owes you a seat. You expect to be given your seat and treated with a certain respect. If you have a buddy pass you're just thankful for whatever you get.

Finally, this impacts how we relate to other people. If we have something to boast about, something we have confidence in, then we can view ourselves as better than others who do not have as much to boast about. We start to look down on them. If we see others who have more to boast about than we do, then we start to feel inferior to them. It starts having negative effects on us and we tend to both

envy and resent those who seem to be superior to us. What this boasting in ourselves does is it keeps us from loving them.

APPLICATION

REJOICE IN WHAT GOD HAS DONE

There are a couple of things that it is common for Christians to struggle with, unnecessarily. The first is the idea that God truly loves them. Despite all that God has done for us in Christ, many accept the idea that God loves us unconditionally at an intellectual level, but have a hard time feeling it, believing it in their hearts.

So the second thing they sometimes have a hard time believing in their souls is that they are completely and forever forgiven and accepted in God's kingdom. Somehow it is hard to get away from this feeling that we have to do something to earn God's gift of rescuing us, or somehow deserve it, or in some way maintain it. This passage of Scripture makes it clear that there is nothing we can do to earn it or maintain it. In fact, our efforts to do so actually put us right back into the condition that God wants to keep us from. We are looking for something in which to boast. We have gone back to the works plan.

The works plan inevitably produces fear, hypocrisy and uncertainty. The grace plan always produces rest for our souls and peace. God has made us alive in Christ. He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. He is not going to undo what he has done. He went to incomprehensible lengths to accomplish our rescue at a cost to himself that is immeasurable. He has done this to bring us relief, to bring us life, hope and rest for our souls. He wants us not to worry about our standing with him, but to be happy. He wants us to be filled with his joy. So quit stressing, relax, and be happy!

LET GRACE RULE

God has done something for us that is so full of grace we will never totally wrap our heads around it. What he wants is that now grace would become our *modus operandi*, that it would infuse the way we think, the way we feel, the way we speak and the way we act.

He wants us to become grace. He wants grace to rule how we think about our lives. Our family has a long and happy history with Disneyland. I have become a bit disenchanted with it as an old man, not because I have turned curmudgeonly, but because it is now so outrageously expensive and so painfully crowded. I'd be good if it were one or the other, but both is a bit much even for me. But we have many happy memories there. The happiest place on earth, except when it's not. So many times I have seen kids there whose parents have brought the whole family at obscene cost, have bought the kids Mickey Mouse ears, have bought them that precious souvenir the child absolutely had to have, but now when the parent tells the child they can't have an ice cream cone because they're going to have dinner in 20 minutes, the child has a meltdown of galactic proportions. The poor child is obviously dealing with unbearable injustice and cruelty, and life is hardly worth living anymore. I wish I could help that child see what incredible grace the parents have been lavishing on the kids purely because they love them, and that even saying no to the ice cream is an act of love and

goodness. What that child should be doing is saying, “I am sorely disappointed because you won’t buy me ice cream. But I am having a great time here in the Magic Kingdom. I am so thankful that you have made the effort and spent the resources necessary for me to be here. I know it is costly, and I know you’ve done it just because you love me. And I know that because you love me, you are doing what is best for me, even when it means saying no to ice cream. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for making it possible for me to be here. I’m having a great time, and I love you tons.”

When grace rules how we think during those times when we endure life’s inevitable trials, hardships and losses, we will remember how soaring and overwhelming is the goodness of what God has done for us. We will remember that it is far more significant than anything else that will ever happen to us. Even in our disappointment and pain, we will have trust in God and rejoice in him because of the grace he has given us.

God wants grace to inform the way we relate to other people. We are going to encounter people who are dead in their sins every day of our lives, because the human race is made up of them. We will run into people who have been made alive in Christ, but who somehow still struggle with being what God wants them to be. But we will always view them through the lens of what we were, and what we are now because of what God has done for us.

Pastor and author Mike Yaconelli tells a story of a time they had some home improvement work they had to hire a contractor to do. There was a contractor that he wanted nothing to do with. He knew he was an alcoholic who had abandoned his wife and kids because Mike had ministered to his son. He knew the man had not been trustworthy. But the man told Mike he was sober and was a different man, and his wife insisted she heard good things about his work. He reluctantly hired him, but determined he would watch him like a hawk to make sure he wasn’t trying to pull something. The man would show up at their house and go about his business, being professional and doing his work. And he seemed to be doing good work. Then came the day that the work was going to be completed. In the morning the guy said to Mike, “I will finish today, but when I’m done I want to talk to you about the bill.” Mike didn’t say anything, but inside he was fuming. He knew the guy was going to try to get more money than the agreed upon price. This was exactly the kind of thing he expected from him. He raged to his wife, saying, “I knew he’d pull something like this. Well he’s not getting an extra penny from me.” He stewed about it all day. Then at the end of the day the guy came to him and said, “You know my history. You know all the bad. During the worst of it, you cared for my son and helped him through what was an awful time for him. You saved my relationship with my son, and in part because of that I have been able to turn my life around and get my family back. I have wanted to thank you. So this is how I want to thank you. He handed Mike the bill with the agreed price, but written on it were the words, “Paid in full.” Yaconelli says he was devastated. He, the pastor of the gospel of grace, had been judging and condemning this man, certain that he himself was far better than this wretched man. And this man had shown him what grace is. Let’s let grace revolutionize us, and how we relate to others.