



Do you treasure something that someone else might describe as a piece of junk? Is there something tucked away in your home that you highly value that someone else might be tempted to set out with the trash? If your answer is “yes,” then you get a sense of what Paul is seeking to communicate here in Romans 5. We might paraphrase it this way, “When others considered us a piece of junk, God saw us as a treasure worth buying.”

In our readings from day one, we looked at a moment of great shame in the love of a woman brought before Jesus who had been caught in sin. In her darkest moment, Jesus refused to condemn. Why? Because grace is amazing. Take a moment today to give God thanks that when others considered you a piece of junk, God saw you as a treasure worth buying.

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GPS for Families

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Find a piece of jewelry or some other object that is valuable and important to you. Show it to your children and explain to them why it is valuable, both monetarily and personally. Demonstrate how you polish or clean it if it gets dirty or tarnished. Talk about how you like to show it off, let others see it and how beautiful it is. Explain how you take care to keep it safe and what it would be like if you lost it.

Read Deuteronomy 7:6 aloud. Use a children’s Bible if you have young children. Explain that we are God’s treasured possessions. He thinks of each of us just like that treasured object, a special jewel, a unique creation that is very important to him. He holds us tight, takes care of us and would be terribly sad if he lost us. He wants us to shine and sparkle with his light so others will be drawn to him. So, if we make a mistake or fail to follow him each day, he gently cleans and polishes us with his grace and love. And, he will continue to do that for us forever. His grace never ends. He will never stop loving us, no matter what.

If you are able, think about giving your child a special jewel or even a stone or rock that is beautiful. Give it to them as a reminder that they are treasures to God.

MESSAGE “Whose Story Do You Believe?”

SCRIPTURE John 8:31-36, John 9:1-3

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Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

“The process of spiritual formation in Christ is one of progressively replacing . . . destructive images and ideas with the images and ideas that filled the mind of Jesus himself . . . Spiritual formation in Christ moves towards a total interchange of our ideas and images for his.” *Dallas Willard*

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PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Lord, I confess to you that sometimes I choose to believe the story of guilt rather than the story of amazing grace. I find it easier to forgive others than I do myself. I fall back into the false notion that your love can be earned, your favor can be gained and that salvation can be acquired outside of your grace. Remind me, Lord, that your love is real, that grace truly is amazing and that I am your beloved child, forgiven and set free only because of your grace. AMEN.

The Gospel of John records for us some of the most dramatic encounters of Jesus' life and ministry. What sets this scene apart from the others you will find in the preceding chapters is how high the stakes were in this exchange. A woman's life hung in the balance. Had Jesus convicted her, he would have placed himself in conflict with the Romans who prevented the Jews from carrying out death sentences. A pardon might have indicated that he did not support the law.

How does Jesus negotiate this ambush from the woman's accusers? How does he turn the trap set for him back on those who have opposed him?

In a moment of great shame, Jesus chooses to withhold condemnation. Grace can be understood as God's refusal to deal with us as we deserve. What does this scene teach you about God's grace?

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Grace is often thought of to be a phenomenon of the New Testament. Yet a closer reading of the Old Testament reveals many of the same characteristics which are more vividly portrayed for us in the life and ministry of Jesus. The prophet Hosea describes God's deep and real heartbreak over the waywardness of Israel. God's grief, loss and even anger is real. Yet in verse 14, the tone changes. Addressing Israel's wandering to the false gods of their neighbors, God seems to cry out, "My love will crowd out the false love of Baal."

This is one of many instances where the metaphor of marriage is used to describe God's relationship with God's people. In the midst of anger, verse 14 says, "I will speak tenderly to her." What does this imagery reveal to you about God's love for humanity?

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Today's reading is a portion of the instructions given by God to Aaron and the priests for Yom Kippur, also known as the day of Atonement. This annual holy day was set aside as a time for the Israelites to confess and experience absolution for their sins. The verses for today describe the process by which the sins of the nation were symbolically passed to the "scapegoat" who carried them away.

The church continues to practice "rituals" today whose meaning and value is derived from what they symbolize for us. In Holy Communion, we believe that the bread and juice shared and received is a powerful reminder of the depth of God's love and sacrifice on our behalf. For the ancient Israelites, what did this ritual help them understand?

What do you think God wanted them to see? What does this reveal to you about God's grace?

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John Wesley, who was the founder of the Methodist movement, would often ask his clergy a simple question, "Are you going on to perfection?" The process of being "perfected in love" shared here in I John 4 is one also addressed by Paul in one of the most famous chapters in all of the scriptures pertaining to the topic of love. "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror," he writes in I Corinthians 13, "then we shall see face to face."

Looking back at verse 18, how might the writer John have described this process of being "made perfect in love"? What did he believe was removed by our growing understanding of love? What part does fear play in your relationship with God?

Has fear ever led you to feelings of guilt? How might these words from John speak to that experience?

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