



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
April 7, 2013

THE GRACE TICKET

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ
Ephesians 2:1-10

I'd like you to open up your Bibles with me to the book of Ephesians. Let's pray and then we're going to look at Ephesians 2.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and for the opportunity that we have to allow it to change our hearts. We see that regularly as we open up your word individually or when we come corporately to do that. So now, Lord, we recognize that it's all in time as we come before you asking you to speak to us. We know that you do that in different ways for each person based on their own needs at the moment. So, Lord, you know what the hearts are here. You know what the needs are, what the challenges are and we ask that you would impart your grace to each one of us as we listen to your word. Use it to encourage or convict or to provide us with a hope that's necessary to live this week. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

The book of Ephesians helps us understand our identity in Christ and what that's all about. We started in Ephesians 1, the first part, learning about adoption and all of the benefits that come to us as result of being adopted into God's family. We then studied the second part of Ephesians 1 and looked at the resurrection power of Jesus, and the key word there that I like in that whole part is the word 'us.' It's available for us. We have access to that resurrection power.

Today we're going to talk specifically about salvation as we come into Ephesians 2:1-10; what it is, how we get it. So if you're here today and you're not a Christian yet then you've come at a great time because you're going to get to understand more about what it means to know Jesus Christ personally, what it means to have salvation in your life because that's what the passage in the Bible is all about.

There are a lot of polls that have been taken in recent years which have asked questions about people and their relationship with God. Fifty-seven percent of Americans believe salvation is earned through good character or behavior. Seventy-seven percent believe there's a heaven. Seventy-six percent say their chances of going to heaven are good, are excellent. Eighty-five percent considered themselves to be Christians.

USA Today did a "man on the street" survey. What do you think your chances are of getting into heaven? Here are some of their answers. "Fifty-fifty. The older I get the more my chances improve." Another person says, "Eighty-five percent. I don't think the entrance exam will be that tough." Someone else says, "Fifty percent. You have to be a nice person, so I think I'm still in the running." People have lots of ideas about how they're going to get to heaven. In this passage

today we're going to see how Paul helps us understand how heaven happens for any individual and how we can take part in that.

He starts with the problem, a very important part to start. After all, if you're going to get saved then you need something to be saved from. So Paul starts in Ephesians 2:1 by describing the problem to us.

Look at that. Verse 1: *As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.* That's not very good news for those who think they're going to get to heaven based on their good works. Paul starts by telling us that we are dead in our trespasses and sins.

Now transgressions, that's the word there, is the word *trespass* which means a false step or stepping off the path. God has a righteous path that He holds up as the standard. Whenever we do the wrong thing, we have stepped off the path, that's called a trespass or a transgression.

The second word used there in verse 1 is the word *sins* which means to miss the mark. God has created a standard and when we're doing the right thing we hit the mark, but if we're doing the wrong thing we miss the mark.

Every one of us has transgressed or trespassed. Every one of us has sinned. We have a problem because the result is we're dead because of those things. We've crossed the line; there's been an offense. And an offense creates a problem in our relationship with God.

Paul uses the graphic illustration of being dead. Often we talk about people being spiritually sick. I've got news for you; it's more serious than that. If a person's sick, there's hope that they're going to get well. If they're dead, they're dead. There's a difference between a hospital and a morgue. We're talking about the morgue. We are dead spiritually, not spiritually sick. People who are dead spiritually are insensitive to what is happening from God's perspective in the world. When a person comes to church or starts reading the Bible they start to become more sensitive and many times that sensitivity is sensitive to their own need, the need to have Jesus as a Savior in their life. That spiritual sensitivity becomes the first part of what's going on.

Do you remember the story that happened to Jesus in the gospels where He came and He healed the demon-possessed man and all of the demons went into the pigs and they went off the cliff. Then all the businessmen from the town came out and (what did they focus on?) they focused on the pigs and losing all of their business. They weren't able to see what was happening inside of this man who used to be possessed, tormented. But now he's sitting there *in his right mind*, the Bible says. Wow.

You see, when we come to know Jesus Christ, when we get to know Him we become spiritually sensitive, we get to understand a little bit more, we look at things differently. We don't look at things the same way anymore. I like to say it this way: God gives us spiritual glasses. You know that because as you're looking around in life you see people and you say, "Boy, I just wish they could see it." Because you can see it, right? You can see what needs to happen, how God can do this deeper work in our lives. Spiritual sensitivity is part of what happens and if you're dead you don't have that.

Sometimes counselors as they're helping somebody understand themselves they use the word 'dysfunctional' or something like that. There's nothing wrong with that and I know that some of our problems that we have are caused because of some of our past experiences. However, there is a spiritual dimension to this where we can experience God's grace in a great way. We don't have to be spiritually dead, but that's what we're talking about in the first part of here. That is the spiritual condition that we experience. We have to start there if we're going to understand what this salvation is. We are dead spiritually.

Let's go to verse 2. *In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

He's further describing what happens when you're dead spiritually. He's saying that there is a power that you have. Do you see the word there? The word at work in verse 2, *who now is at work*, is the Greek word *energeo* where we get our English word 'energy.' That means that the person who is not saved, the person who is dead spiritually is still getting energy, but they're getting the energy from those two sources. They followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

If you're getting your energy from somewhere, one of the places you can get energy from is the ways of this world. It is not a very helpful place. When you're spiritually dead that's where you're getting your energy from is the ways of this world. The word *energeo* provides this idea of energy and Ephesians 2:2 says that that energy can come from the world.

Let me show you another reference in the Bible. Philippians 2:13 will contrast this because it uses the word *energeo* again, but in this case uses it to refer to the energy that comes from God. In Philippians 2:13 it says, *For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.* Now you see there's energy that can come from God and there's energy that can come from the ways of this world. I think it's important for us to recognize that there are a couple places where energy can come from.

Galatians 5 further amplifies this idea for us when it says this: *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.*

Are you getting the idea here? There's an energy that you can get from the ways of the world and there's an energy you can get from God. It's very important where we're getting our energy from in this particular situation. It's like there's a battle going on within us as to where we're going to invest to draw that energy out. We have choices and those choices have ramifications for our lives.

Ephesians 2 is making the case for a Savior that we need a Savior to come into our lives so that we may be energized by God. But there's this magnetic pull toward doing the wrong thing. In fact it's even more powerful than that. It's not a magnetic pull; the person's dead, that's the idea, in their trespasses and sins. We have no power to please God in and of ourselves. It's not like

there's a pull from both sides and we're either going to choose today to do this. We are dead and we don't have the capacity except that a Savior comes in and provides that salvation for us. That's what happens in a person's life who is a nonbeliever.

But as a believer we have choices that we make too. We have to choose today. Are we going to draw on the ways of this world for our energy or are we going to draw on God's power for our energy? We have to decide because there's a tendency sometimes for us to choose the ways of this world.

Notice verse 3. It says, *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.*

The word *craving* describes something I have to have. Have to have some coffee, have to have some coke, have to have some chocolate. You know what that craving is. We're talking about a spiritual craving now. What does that mean? I think sometimes we have a craving in our lives. A craving for justice, revenge. A craving for some pleasure here or something like that. When we go after those cravings we're drawing on the energy of the flesh, the energy from this world.

Are you getting the idea here? There's a contrast here between the energy that God provides and the energy that's available through the world's system. And that creates a significant problem for us. If we continue on in verse 3 it tells us what that's going to do to our relationship with God. If you have a problem with sin and transgression, which we all do and therefore we are all dead in our spiritual lives, then we need something. But before we can get there we still have some bad news because it affects our relationship with God.

It says, *Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.* What he means is that God is a holy God, God is perfect, and God cannot have a relationship with someone who has sin in their lives, who is dead in sin, who has sin or transgressions, they have missed the mark. And that is all of us. Not only do we have a problem not being able to connect with God, but God has a problem because He wants to connect with us but He can't because of His holiness. And so God has a problem that He needs to satisfy His own character in the midst of that.

Up to this point we've talked about a pretty dark picture. I remember the darkness when I was in Kenya. Some of you may have experienced such things where you've been in a place that's really dark and when it's so dark there are no street lights. When I was in Kenya there were no street lights at all. Obviously it's very dark and when there's no moon out you've got to walk to one house to the other house on a dirt road and it is really dark. Furthermore the Africans are black and it makes it hard to see them until you almost feel them. You're on top of them as you're walking on the road. So it's a very eerie kind of experience as you're walking in the pitch black.

But here's the fun thing. When you look up you see stars that are more brilliant than you've ever seen before. You can see the Milky Way with all of those stars. You almost feel like you can reach out and touch them it's so powerful.

So I would suggest that what he's saying in the passage here is he's giving the dark picture so that we can see the light more brilliantly as we continue on.

We're going to go into verse 4 and we're going to see in the next verses four different words. I want you to notice them. The word *love*, the word *grace*, the word *mercy*, and the word *kindness*. Three of them are found in the next two verses. Let's look at that in verse 4.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

He's saying let me tell you the solution, not just the problem. The problem is that we are dead in transgressions and sins. We are dead. We need to be made alive and through a Savior we experience that.

Notice the motivation of God, verse 4, *because of his great love for us, God* did this. God wants to have relationship for us, so He created the solution so that we could have this relationship with Him. That's the description here. He made us alive with Christ. Even when we were dead in transgressions.

There are two words in verses 4 and 5 that I want to draw attention to. Those are the words *grace* and *mercy*.

Mercy is withholding a bad thing that we deserve, like a punishment. Grace, on the other hand, is giving us something good that we don't deserve. Like some kind of a gift. In fact the word *karis*, grace here, means gift. That's what it refers to.

Here's what mercy is. Imagine that you are driving down the road a little bit too fast and you see those red lights start flashing in the back and you feel that in your gut and you pull over and you go, "Oh man." You roll down the window and the police officer comes to the window and he says, "Do you know what you were doing wrong?" And you say, "Yeah, I think so." He says, "You were speeding." You say, "Yeah." He knows you're guilty, you know you're guilty. And he says, "Okay, I'm not going to give you a ticket this time. I'm going to let you go." And you go, "Yes!" That is mercy. You're not getting a punishment that you deserve.

Here's what grace is. You're driving down the road in your car, red lights start flashing behind you, you feel that "oh no, what did I do wrong?" in your gut. You don't know what it is. Maybe I missed a sign, a speed sign. Maybe I have a taillight out. I don't know what it is. You pull over to the side of the road. Police officer comes to the side of the car, you roll down the window, and he says, "I pulled you over today not because you did anything wrong, but because we're giving random motorists 500 dollar Walmart gift certificates. Here's yours." Boom. That is grace! You get something you didn't deserve.

You see, that's the difference between mercy and grace. Don't count on that from the police, but that's just what God does for us.

Look in the passage. What does God's grace look like for us? Remember, number one we're dead in sin. God has mercy on us by not giving us the wrath that we deserve. He saves us by grace. That means He's making us alive, He's giving us something we don't deserve. And here's what the grace looks like. Look at verse 6. *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

God is talking here about seating assignments in heaven. That's what He's talking about. Do you see that there? I want you to know that the seating assignment you're going to get in heaven if you're a Christian is a great seating assignment. He's going to talk about it here. Some seats are better than others. Out here they're all about the same.

I remember one time; the first time I ever flew first class on an airplane. My wife and I were getting ready to go on a five hour airplane ride and they had switched the aircraft so that they didn't have enough seats on this next aircraft for all of us to get on. My wife and I were newlyweds and we didn't really have a seat on this flight.

There were people at the front that were yelling at this lady who was behind the counter. They were being mean. I just went up to her and I said, "Hey, we're one of those people who don't have a seat yet. We'll just be waiting over here." So we waited patiently and after a few minutes she turned around, leaned over to us, and she said, "Here. I got you first class seats." Whoa! That's grace, but that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about the best seats.

We get in. I never knew what first class was. They give you little socks to put on your feet that you can wear during the flight to be comfortable. They give you your own meal and they give you your own little salt and pepper shaker with a silver top on them sitting right there on your plate. This was bizarre for us to be sitting in first class and be experiencing this great event travelling in this great seat.

But that is nothing compared to the seat that is mentioned in verse 6. It says we're seated with Christ, with Him in the heavenly realms. That means if you're a Christian you get box seats in heaven. And you get those box seats and you get to sit next to Jesus. That's great in and of itself.

I've gone to sporting events and you turn around and you see those (I don't know what you call them up there) the club or whatever those things are. There are windows there and these people are in there eating and having a great time while they're watching the game. I've never had the privilege to be in one of those, but in heaven I'm going to be in one of those and I'm going to be sitting right next to Jesus. That's what it's all about here. I'm going to be able to watch the show. I don't know what you think about heaven or what your ideas are about heaven, but it's talking about we're watching a show here. You getting that? We're seated with Jesus in the box seats watching this show.

Do you see what it says there? *In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.* There's going to be wave after wave of God's mercy and grace and kindness demonstrated to us over that period of time.

It's like we'll have 3D glasses on (if you like 3D movies). We'll be able to see the dimension of the beauty of God's grace in the midst of that. It's powerful.

What a great seat that I'll be sitting in. There's room in the box office for you. I just want you to know. You can sit with me and Jesus if you'd like. I want to invite you to do that. It's a great place. And if you've accepted Jesus Christ into your life you're going to be there with me sitting next to Jesus in the box office watching the glorious riches of His grace unfold throughout time.

Last August Carrie and I went on a vacation and we looked at several castles. We were in England as she was doing some research for her latest book. Amazing stuff. Room after room of luxury or innate architecture. Just the number of rooms in these castles is fascinating. Beautiful. That's nothing compared to heaven. And what's going to happen is we're going around there, Jesus is going to give us a tour of heaven and all the beautiful things that are there because that's where He is right now.

He's preparing a place for us, John 14 says. He's preparing a place for us so that we can go there. He's going to say, "Wow. Here's a mansion over here." And we're going to come over here. And here's a mansion and it says "Erik Lydick's mansion" and I'm saying, "God, how come he got such a big mansion?" That's grace. Something he didn't deserve. But powerful. But we're all going to get those mansions. It's an extravagant thing. We're going to see the riches of God's grace. We're going to be in the box office seats. That's what grace is and that's how he's describing it to us in this passage so that we'll understand it.

Let's go back and read more because Paul wants us to understand how grace works for us. Because he's already given us all the grace, but not everybody gets it. Got to understand that. So he wants us to understand how grace works. Look at verse 8. *For it is by grace you have been saved* (that's our word 'saved' there. So if you're not saved today, you've got to know that that grace is available to you. It's a grace-based salvation. That means it's a gift), but it comes *through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

It's not going to be set up in heaven that you get there to the gate and God's going to say, "Okay, let's see how your scales balance out. Well, you just made it in because you've got your scales a little bit better on the good side than on the bad side, so you get in." It doesn't work that way.

The way it works is that God looks at us and sees that we're dead in transgressions and sins. But He sees a Savior, Jesus Christ, who says, "Hey, this is one of mine. Let him in." So we're able to get in. That's the grace we're talking about. It's a gift. The more we grow up in God's grace the more we understand what it's all about. This idea of grace basically means that we get good gifts in life.

There are two kinds of grace we see in the Bible. There's common grace that everybody gets and there's special grace that come to those people who trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. So when people are experiencing common grace that's like the sun comes up on the righteous and the unrighteous, the Bible says. Or that we all have the opportunity to have health or whatever it is. Those are the common grace things that many people experience.

And then there's the special grace that comes for people who accept Jesus Christ. It's that special grace that allows us to have salvation and then to nurture that in our lives in some particular ways. That is what we're talking about here.

You can position yourself in the right place to receive it. That's the important thing here. It's not just out there, everybody gets it. The only people who get it are the ones who put themselves in the right place to receive it and that, he says, comes through faith. We position ourselves through faith in the right place and the grace then is given to us. That's important for us to have that kind of faith where we're believing, we're committing, we're giving ourselves to God. And when we do that grace just pours right out on us.

That's for the person that's just getting saved. But I think the same thing's true when it comes to grace for all of us who are already saved. God offers His grace to us, but sometimes we don't put ourselves in a position to take it.

Take the person who's anxious about a test that's coming up this week and they're bothered about this and they're worried about it and it's just wrecking their whole week because they're all upset about this particular thing. What they need to be able to do is come to God and say, "God, I want to trust you by faith. I want to allow you to work in my life so that I can let this go. The control that I'm trying to maintain here by my anxiety, I want to release it to you." And when you do, there you go. Here comes all the grace that just pours down on you.

If you're in a difficult relationship and it's hard for you to live that relationship day in and day out, you need to know that you want to position yourself in the right place so that God's grace will pour out on you and you'll be able to receive God's grace that He wants to give to us.

He's not saying that works are not important. Notice he says there, *not by works, so that no one can boast*. He's not saying that works are not important, but they're not the entrance point for salvation. Only grace gets us into the kingdom. You've heard that song:

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.

That's the grace that God is talking about. It's a gift, it's a privilege.

Let me give you a Greek lesson. In the Greek language, tense (that is, past tense, future tense, present tense) is different in Greek. We do not have it the same way in English so I have to explain this to you so that every time when I say the present tense in Greek you'll understand what it means. Because it's not only talking about coming during the current time as we think about in English. It's talking about continual action. Tense refers to the type of action that's taking place.

So if you were to look at Ephesians 5:18, just a few chapters later, it's going to say *be filled with the Holy Spirit*. That's in the present tense which means continually be filled. It's a kind of action. That's the present tense.

The *aorist* tense means one time action in the past. It's the most common form of past tense that's used. It's action in the past that happened once and it's done.

But whenever you see the perfect tense, which is what you see in this passage (*you have been saved*) it's the perfect tense. It means past action with continuing results. There's an implication within the verb tense that we're getting. Something's happening now as a result of something that happened in the past. That's what the perfect tense is all about. You have been saved once with continuing results. That's the idea.

It's also passive not active. Passive means it's being done to the person, not them doing it to themselves. You have been saved. That's the same as in English. It's passive. It's being done to you. You're not saving yourself by your actions. You have been saved and that's the word that's being described here for us. *You have been saved by grace through faith*. Faith involves knowledge, it involves belief, it involves commitment. So faith is our part to position ourselves in the right place to receive the grace of God.

The word grace means gift. That's how it's translated in 1 Corinthians 12 when it's talking about spiritual gifts. That's the word *charisma*. Grace. But there's another word here also for grace, *doron*, which focuses on the giving. It is the gift of God. That's the word *doron* there. The point is you have a gift in salvation. It is a gift, not a loan. With a loan you have to pay it back and repayment is expected. But a gift does not anticipate repayment. It's just a gift. It's freely given. That's what salvation is as it's described here.

I hope you're getting the idea as the Apostle Paul is writing and telling us about this salvation so that we fully understand it. It doesn't come from works, it comes as the grace of God; and we need a Savior because we're spiritually dead.

That whole process of salvation is coming into God's family and we call that salvation 'justification.' Sometimes we use the word salvation in different terms. Justification is coming into the faith and recognizing that we're sinners and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

But he quickly moves into verse 10, which is going to be 'sanctification,' this other part of what salvation looks like. So look at verse 10 with me. It says, *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*.

Notice that good works are important, but they are results, they are not the entrance point. We're motivated to do the work that God wants us to do instead of satisfying the cravings of our sinful nature. That's the point that he's making here.

Now the word *handiwork*, do you see that in verse 10? It's a beautiful word, handiwork. If you have the King James Version then the word is *workmanship*. So you can kind of picture a woodcarver doing his workmanship there. Or handiwork has the idea of craftwork.

But the Greek word is *poema* where we get our word 'poem' from. God is an artist. He likes creating poems. You're a poem, I'm a poem. God is in the business of creating those kinds of things. We're God's poem and His expressions of creativity. When I look at some of you I see He's been pretty creative. The idea here is that we're *poemas*; we are the poems that God has created and that's a privilege.

Notice that it says here *which God prepared in advance for us to do*. The idea is that He packaged these works that He wants us to do. They were packaged before the creation of the world. Ephesians 1:4 says something similar to that. *He chose us before the foundations of the world*. God preordained these things that we should walk in them. He's not saying I preordained them so they would all happen. He's saying we have a job to do so that we would do those things. That's our job. God wants to create this beautiful poem in your life and my life. That's what He's doing is *poema*.

Jeremiah uses the picture of a potter with clay. God is doing His handiwork by molding the clay to turn it into something beautiful that can be used. In Romans 12 it talks about how we're living sacrifices. The problem with living sacrifices, it's been said, is they keep crawling off the altar. And God wants us to stay on the potter's wheel. He wants us to stay there where He's working inside of us to do the work that's needed inside of our very lives.

When you think about the workmanship of God or the handiwork of God maybe you think about the stars in the sky or the sun or the moon or that beautiful sunset. The beautiful handiwork of God. Or maybe you think about the handiwork of God the way He created person with DNA and just the way an eye is made up. How it's so intricate and beautiful how it's designed. And you think about the handiwork of God there.

But I want you to also think of something even more powerful and that God is doing a work in your heart and my heart. That's the handiwork of God in process. He's building, He's strengthening, He's creating inside of you and me what needs to happen inside of us. He's molding us to be the person that He wants us to be.

I want you to see that God gives grace to everyone, but not everyone has access to it. James tells us in his book, James 1, he says *God gives grace to the humble*. "I need you God." That's what the person says. "I really need you." It's the grace to get saved, but it's the grace to get through another day, to deal with a particular situation. That's what grace is. And when we humbly position ourselves to say, "Yes, God, my humility I know is so important here, so please put me in the place where I can receive your grace." And sometimes God does that. He humbles us; take us through a difficult situation so that He can impart our grace to us.

The Bible says He *resists the proud*. Sometimes a person who is in deep need of God's grace doesn't get it because of their pride. They're not positioned in the right place. We have to be willing to admit what we don't have and what we need from God.

There is another word related to this idea of grace that I want to draw your attention to and that is the word ‘gracious.’ I believe that once we’ve experienced God’s grace and understand it that we become gracious people. That is, we become people who dispense grace to others. We want to be the kind of people who give grace to other people who need it. And many people need it, right? The people right around us who are mean to us or they’re hurtful or whatever; they need God’s grace and sometimes we’re in that position so that we can impart that to those people.

I was the overall organizer of the Ravi Zacharias event that took place on Friday. I was responsible for making major decisions over the last six months to make this event work. It was a very difficult leadership task over the last six months. We had to change the venue twice. We had to go to different places. There were thirty-five plus churches and ministries supporting this event. But I was the one leading it and trying to make this happen.

I received an email the night before, on Thursday night, and I want to share the email with you because it became an opportunity for me to extend grace to this person. I was studying grace as I was reading it. Over this week I was studying what grace is, so when I read it it’s all fitting into this context of what God is doing to me and in me.

She says, “Today I’m writing to you to say (this is the night before) that I am sadly disappointed in the handling of the Ravi Zacharias Live event. I have been looking forward to seeing him speak since I was a very young child and now just one day before the event through a series of circumstances I find out that the tickets we received through Eventbrite are null and void. I have contacted others and understand they were also unaware of this venue and event change. Once we had those tickets in hand there was no reason for me to assume that these tickets would not be used for that at this venue. These tickets should have been good to access the Ravi Live at the Princeton Alliance Church and we should have been asked to make a contribution at the door. This was poorly handled.

Prior to writing you I called TCNJ for verification and they were totally unaware of this event. They are now concerned that others like myself who were unaware of the change might show up at the campus tomorrow night.”

I’m studying grace and she’s accusing me of poor leadership. The event was “poorly handled” she says and she used words like “should” in order to tell me what my problem was and how she thinks it should have been handled differently. I want to share with you my response because I wanted to be a way for me to share God’s grace with her.

I said this: “Thank you for sharing your heart with me. Your concern has come to the right place. I made the decision to move the venue and to create a new event, making the old tickets null and void as you say. I know you have an idea of how this should have been handled. Maybe you’re right. I don’t have room in this email to explain all the challenges we faced with this event. It has been a painful leadership responsibility.

Briefly let me say that when it became clear that TCNJ was not an option we had a problem. Because the tickets were free people just took them in large numbers. I limited each order to

four, but one man ordered eighty tickets. Furthermore, as soon as we moved venues and chose to run it through the satellites, many with existing tickets wouldn't be used because those people would go to satellites. It became clear that we couldn't just use the TCNJ tickets for the Princeton Alliance event. This was a painfully hard decision to make trying to care for the people who had tickets as well as move the location.

About a month ago when the event was cancelled at TCNJ an email was sent to all the people who obtained the tickets on Eventbrite explaining to them the situation and inviting them to purchase tickets for the new event. I don't know if you were the purchaser or not, but all of the purchasers were sent an email to the email address they gave on the site. We had no other way to communicate to these people except through email. If I would have had all of their phone numbers we would have called them to help them understand. In the email they were given opportunity to purchase the tickets to the event. Many of them did. Some may not have received the email for some reason and may show up at TCNJ tonight. That's painful for me to consider.

When I sold the new tickets I kept some tickets back for people who might have been hurt by the process. I call those "grace tickets." I'm a pastor and I like to give grace tickets to people generally in life. I think we all need it at times. I believe that's what God wants to do with us and what we need to do with each other. I know that some people when they experience problems in life see it as the leader's fault. That's one of the things that makes leadership lonely. Many people don't understand the complexity of the situations we as leaders face. Even when we try to do what's right some people just don't understand. It's as if they believe that if something bad happens it must be the leader's fault.

At any rate, I have some grace tickets if you'd like them. Just let me know how many and I can see what I can do. I know we all need grace at times. I appreciate it when people give me grace and I am prepared tonight to extend it to others as well."

The best part of the Ravi Zacharias event for me was standing out in front as people were coming to the event. Tim Brown and I were the people that held grace tickets in our hands that nobody knew about.

I would say to people, "Everybody with tickets you get in this line here," and this line's forming. "If you don't have a ticket then you need to stand in this line," and people are coming down with their heads down going over here to go in this line. And so they're standing over here. These people get to come in and these people over here are just sitting there waiting. Tim and I were handing out grace tickets to every one of those people. Every person got to come in.

That one young lady came to me. She told me her name and I said, "Oh, you're looking for some tickets." She says, "Yes. I want the grace tickets." I said, "Great. How many would you like?" She asked for three and I gave them to her and she was able to get into the event.

That was the best part of the Ravi Zacharias thing for me is to be a dispenser of God's grace. I want to do that in my life all the time. I want to be the person who's holding the grace tickets in life because I know what people need. I know the struggles that they face and because God has blessed me I want to be able to extend that to other people. Even when people are mean to you

and to me. Even when they're unkind, even when they don't understand, they need grace. And that is the gift, *charisma*, gift that God has given to us. To be able to be people of grace and to be able to pass that on. We all need grace tickets in our lives.

I'm going to be in that box office seat with Jesus. God is in the business of building a *poema* in my life. I invite you to join with me. Come sit in the seat with me. If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you want to make that decision today. Great seats in heaven. It's a beautiful place to be.