

Mercy for the Ages

Building a Christian Mind

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Bible Verse: Ephesians 2:4-7
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Well, I invite you to turn to Ephesians 2 for the text, which will be the subject of our consideration this morning. We're going to focus on verses 4 through 7. It's a passage that's really too wonderful for words but I'm going to read beginning in verse 1 just to set the context; we've considered the first three verses over the past two weeks and it seems fitting to me to read those as the review that will help us appreciate what we find in verses 4 through 7. So Ephesians 2 beginning in verse 1 we read,

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

I want to start today's message with what they tell you to do kind of at the end; they tell you at the end of a message, as they teach you to preach, to make application and to help people see the significance of what they've heard, today we're going to flip that script and we're going to reverse it. You know that I like to break the rules that people try to impose on preaching, and so I'm going to do that today because I think it will be helpful and I speak to you individually in what I'm about to say. I'm speaking to each one of you and calling you to one of two kinds of responses, depending on what you were like when you came in, and even where you are at with the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are not a Christian, or you have been a careless, casual Christian and spiritually indifferent and prayerless for an extended period of time, this message is a call to you to repent. It's a call to you to repent in light of the greatness of the goodness of God that you have treated so casually and have despised with your indifferent life and your hard, callous attitude toward Jesus Christ and his saving gospel. If you've been bitter and resentful and questioning God, I

call you to repent in this message that lies ahead, because there is no justification whatsoever for that kind of life, for that kind of attitude in response to the God that I am and the Christ that I'm about to have the privilege to proclaim to you. So understand that God has brought you here, put his thumb on your heart, and said today is the day of repentance for you in light of what you're about to hear. For those of you that are walking with Christ and bring so much joy to your pastor, you manifest it in so many different ways that you're earnest about the things of Christ, you love his word, you love his people, you long for heaven, you love to pray, you have burdens, spiritual burdens for those that are near you, which is a mark of the work of the Spirit of God in your heart, today's message for you is a joyful call to gratitude and to give thanks to God for the goodness that he has shown to you, as explained in the passage that lies just ahead of us. We either walk out grateful or we walk out repentant in response to today's message, or if you harden your heart against it all, you walk out condemned because there is no other way to think about the passage that is in front of us here this morning.

This passage that I just read, it is far too wonderful for words. How do finite words from creatures adequately magnify the grace and kindness of God that he has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ? And how do we possibly begin to express the fullness of the measure of that kindness in particular light of our prior spiritual state and spiritual disobedience? How can we ever begin to put proper words to these things? The more I preach, beloved, the more I realize how utterly defiled and inadequate my tongue is for the things that I've been called to declare. Today is one of those days where it's just especially highlighted by the grandeur of the subject that is in front of us this morning.

Remember from last time, we looked at the first three verses and we said that every unsaved person, everyone that's born into this world, is born into a condition, a state of separation from God. It's what we inherited from Adam. And even Christian parents cannot genetically pass along salvation. What we pass along to our physical progeny is the corruption. It takes a work of God for someone to become a Christian. You must be born again. Every one of us has been born once in this room, those of you over the live stream are watching on the video in subsequent time. We've all been born once, the question is whether we've been born again. And if you've not been born again, what Scripture says is that you were dead in trespasses and sins, that you were a rotting spiritual corpse with no spark of divinity, no spark of goodness in you in the sight of God, no matter how you might be a kind person on a human level externally, but none of that brings any merit to your soul before a holy God. In God's estimation, because you do not love him and do not worship him, and you've not received Christ and yielded to the Lord of creation as the Lord of your life, well, God looks on that as a condition of spiritual death, dead in trespasses and sins, and more than that, a slave to the world, a slave to Satan.

Look at verse 2 with me, just by way of reminder, you once walked in those trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, this world which is enmity against God, and that's what you followed, that's what you immersed yourself in, all of the entertainment and all of the sin and the false philosophy and false religion of this world, that was your realm. If you're not in Christ, it's your realm now. "Following the course of this world,

following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Not only dead within yourself, but following the course of a world that is hostile to God, following after the invisible enemy, adversary, Satan himself, fully arrayed against God, and you're following after him. Jesus said, "You're of your father the devil." He was a murderer, a liar from the beginning, and that's your nature also apart from Christ. And in that sinful state, beloved, in that state of slavery to invisible forces outside of your control and liking it that way, you were under the condemnation of God. You were doomed to suffer the wrath of God had that condition continued.

Look at verse 3, "among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature," this is your very essence, this is not something incidental, an occasional bad thing or a bad word or anything like that. No, no, no, no. This, in the deepest part of your inner man, in the deepest recesses of your heart, you "were by nature," by character, "a child of the wrath of God like the rest of mankind." And it's in that sinful state that you were. But Paul's writing to Christians, and notice what he says to Christians, and yet now here you are a Christian standing in grace with the certain hope of heaven, having received all of the riches of Christ and being in him, the question is, how can that be? How did that possibly happen? How did you go from being a rotting spiritual corpse to being a living soul in the presence of God? How did it come to be that you were dead in trespasses and sins and now you are alive in Christ? How could that possibly be when you were a slave, you were under the mastery of this world, you were under the mastery of Satan? When you take seriously what the Bible says about the spiritual condition of lost man, you realize that it could not possibly have been anything that you did on your own. It could not possibly be that you made an independent move to God because dead men don't move. Slaves can't just up and leave their master of their own accord because they're owned by someone else. So how can it be then that we are in Christ this morning? How could it have come from us? What does a sinful creature have to offer its holy Creator when the creature loves what God hates and does what God condemns? How is that possible? As Jesus said with men, it is impossible and so we are shut up to ourselves, we are excluded from any realm of spiritual pride or self-congratulation and Scripture explains to us how it is that we came to be in this state of grace. Beloved, it must have come from God because it could not come from us. It did come from God, it did not come from us.

Let's look at verses 4 through 7 again, "But God," notice the "but" there. It's a contrast. He's contrasting what he had just said in the prior three verses about our prior spiritual condition, contrasting that with what the new reality is in Christ. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses," notice that Paul doesn't want you to lose the point, before he even gets to the verb, he extols the mercy and love of God and he says, and remember you were dead in trespasses and sins, and then it explodes upon us like the majesty of a rosy purple sunrise exploding on the previously dark night sky. Verse 5, he "made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

That passage that I just read tells us why God saved us and it tells us what he saved us for. What was it that motivated God to rescue wretched creatures like us and what was the goal that he had in mind when he did it? Well, let's look first of all at the mercy of God. The mercy of God. Why did God save us? Are you a Christian here this morning? Why did God save you? People ask that question, sometimes it's asked earnestly, you know, with a sense of wonderment, "I don't know why God saved me. Why did he look on me and not someone else?" Well, here in this passage we get the answer. Why did God save us? Did you do something to earn that and to earn his favor? Well, in verse 4, we see that Scripture gives all of the glory, all of the credit to God alone, and leaves us out of that picture altogether. Look at it there in verse 4 with me, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us." Notice those two perfections of God that are expressed there in that verse, mercy and love, and not just mercy and love but rich mercy and great love. Paul has flipped a switch, you might say, and has brought us to a profound contrast. You might reasonably make the case that this is the most profound contrast in all of the universe that could ever take place in the course of time.

By contrast, we were ruined, hopeless, and condemned, but God, "But God" there at the start of verse 4, but God accomplished what we could not do. In fact, he gave to us that which we did not even seek. We did not seek him. He sought us. The seeker in salvation, this is one of the reasons to detest seeker-sensitive ministry, because it commends people as though they are seeking God when Scripture says it's the exact opposite. Read Romans 3:10 through 20, and see if you can come to any other conclusion. There is no one who seeks for God. So to label, self-consciously label yourself as seeker-sensitive ministry is to define yourself by definition as someone who's not doing biblical ministry because there are none who seek for God. The seeker is God himself. And why did God do it? God, write this down if you're taking notes, God was motivated in salvation by his own mercy, by his own love. Salvation is a gift that God gave that came from within the fullness of the perfection of his very essence, who he has always been. He's an uncreated God. He's always been. There's never been a time where God was not like this, full of mercy and full of love, and it's from the infinite fountain of his own mercy and love that salvation springs forth and showers upon us. Nothing from ourselves. Not something that he saw in us.

This word mercy, this word mercy is a wonderful concept. It means that God had compassion on those who were in need. Compassion. He felt sympathy. There was a sympathy in God. There was a kindness in God that – watch this, you stay with me today, this is too important to let your mind wander off – God felt a mercy, a compassion, a sympathy upon sinners that caused him to reach out in order to relieve their suffering. God looked on you in the depth of your sin, in the depth of your slavery to the world and to Satan, looked on you in the ignorant rebellion that you lived against him, looked beyond your transgressions, looked beyond your sin and said, "I see the need there. I care about that need." I care about that person whose soul God knows intimately, whose hairs God numbers on their head as an indication of the minute detail with which he knows us and knows our condition. And there you were, beloved, there you were in great need, whether you were an outwardly moral person that just had no life of God within you, or whether you were a profligate sinner lying on the road drunk and out of your mind, or

whatever point in between you might have found like that. You were oblivious. You were unaware of the danger. You were unaware of your masters. In short, you were in very great need, separated from God, captive to evil powers, and condemned as a son of wrath. And God, through nothing in you, looked on you, and as it were, in the moment that the Spirit of God came to you and drew you to Christ, said, "I will have mercy on this one. I see that need. The bowels of my compassion are kindled, and I now will carry out what I planned before the beginning of time, and which I've purposed to end in glory. Now I will act in compassion, in mercy, in kindness, in patience, in goodness, in immeasurable grace." The Spirit of God came to you through somehow the proclamation of the word of God to you, and worked in your heart to draw you to Christ. Jesus said no one can come unless the Father draws him. And so God was rich in mercy upon you, and beloved, mark it, he compassionately rescued you from your captivity and as we read these simple words, in one sense the words are very simple, there's no multi-syllabic theological terms there in verse 4, are there? The longest word is two syllables, mercy and because. Everything else is a single syllable. So accessible is the knowledge of these things that God sets it forth in language that the simplest and most uneducated can understand. God had compassion upon you. He had mercy upon you. And if you are here and in Christ today, you are a recipient of mercy, not one who deserves a trophy for your merit."

Now, this is all very humbling. I'm in Christ today not through anything good in my hands. Trust me. You don't have to trust me. You can read it in Scripture and say, "Oh, that was true of him too." Dead in sin. And there's just no question, beloved, that we don't dwell here enough. It's why we start to grumble about our circumstances. It's why we get discontent. It's because we're dissatisfied, we're not thoroughly acquainted enough with this great mercy of God and recognizing the infinite value of his mercy, recognizing the infinite worth because it comes from his infinite essence and so look at verse 4 with me again, "God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us." God loved us with a great love. He didn't just turn on the garden hose, one little click, and let a little bit dribble out for you to take and drink from. He opened up the full faucet with a six-inch pipe, so to speak, obviously, I'm speaking metaphorically here, and he just opened the pipe of his mercy so that it gushed out upon you. And it's still gushing out today. And it'll gush throughout all of eternity so great is his love.

And understand, beloved, when you think about the love of God, you should not equate it with the superficial, sentimental way that the world treats love in cheap songs and in cheap media entertainment and cheap videos and all of that. You shouldn't think about it in those sentimental ways that just kind of tug at your heartstrings and then you move on to something else, you know, five minutes or 30 minutes later. No, no, no, no, we should not think such meager thoughts about the great love of God. God's love is his commitment to act for the highest good of his people. God loved you not with an impulse of emotion, but God loved you as an expression of commitment that he would make you belong to him, that he would redeem you from sin, that he would adopt you into his family and keep you in his family until you arrive safely in heaven, "For I'm confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus our Lord." And so God is not, you know, this is not teenage puppy love. This is an order of love that is geometric magnitudes above what we could ask or think. He

secured your good. He secured your temporal good and more importantly your eternal good by saving you in Christ.

Now look over at Romans 5 with me. This is a good text to have alongside in our minds in Romans 5. Again, beloved, as you're turning there, let me just remind you, one of three things happens as you walk out here today, you either walk out with a heart full of gratitude for the God of your salvation and the Christ of your salvation, profoundly grateful for what he has done to your unworthy soul, or you repent and say, "I've treated this far too lightly. I haven't even been a Christian," but I repent and turn to Christ today, and I walk out a repentant joyful soul, or you walk out condemned for being so cold and indifferent to the matchless mercy and love of God. There's no other alternative.

Romans 5:6 through 10, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us," in this way, "in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Notice the time frame. Notice the state in which Christ did this. It's while you were still a sinner. It's not that you became good enough and God responded to your goodness by saying, "Oh, I'll save you now." No, it's while you were a sinner. And so perhaps someone's here, hasn't been here long, and you're thinking, "Well, I'm going to work on getting better so that God will save me." Perish the thought. Give it up now. You can't make yourself good enough for God to love you. There's nothing you could do to earn the rich mercy and great love of God. To think that you could earn it is misguided. Satan misleads you. Your past false religion carries you away into the remnants of its effect upon you. No, this is for sinners. Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Stop trying to make yourself better. Come as a sinner who deserves nothing and ask for mercy and what will you find? You'll find rich mercy, great love poured out upon you because it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us, not after we made ourselves better. See, you're hopelessly ruined and when you're trying to get better to earn the favor of God, you're showing that you don't understand the gospel at all. You don't understand yourself at all. The understanding with which we approach Jesus Christ for salvation, "I am ruined, I am lost, I am condemned, and justly so. Justly so! And so God, have mercy on me, the sinner." That's the condition in which we approach him. Look at verse 9, Romans 5, "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies," there it is again, beloved, while we were enemies of God, "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

You see, there's only one kind of person that God extends his love and mercy to, because it's the only kind of person that there is for him to exercise it upon. God extends his love and mercy to people who are ungodly. God justifies the ungodly, Romans 4:5. And what this tells us about the God of salvation, what it tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ, oh, the delicacy of the spiritual riches that we are about to taste. God is a kind and gracious God, not harsh and vindictive. If he were harsh and vindictive, then there would be no salvation offered. The fact that you're here in Christ shows that God has not been harsh or difficult with you. He's been abundant in grace. He's been very kind, very loving, very

merciful. And if he was like that while you were ungodly, while you were his enemy, then follow the logic of Scripture all the way through. If he did this while you were an enemy, beloved, then recognize that nothing changed when he saved you. The same love and mercy that saved you is what animates the way that he deals with every detail of your life now that you are in Christ. The God who is gracious in saving you is gracious in everything even if you don't understand how all of that could work out in your present circumstances in the moment. The mercy of God is what motivated him to save us. We deny ourselves, we take up the cross of mercy, the cross of grace, and we follow after him with profound gratitude in our hearts and with wonderment that there is such a God as that, with profound wonderment that there is such a God as that and that the God who rules over all is a God of great mercy and great love.

And so God's love and mercy is why you were saved. He's been kind and gracious to you. And now Paul declares, as we continue on in the text, he declares exactly what it is that God had done, exactly what it is that God has done. We've seen the mercy of God, the love of God as being the motivating reason that he showed us and brought us into his family, now we're going to look at point number two, the action of God. The action of God. What exactly did God do when he saved us? Well, beloved, follow me here. Follow me here. If you were dead in trespasses and sins, which you were, and that's your point of need, then obviously God is addressing your spiritual condition at the point of need. If you're dead, if you were dead, what did you need? Life. If you were dead, you could not generate that yourself any more than the corpse in the casket can pop the lid off and jump out and start dancing. No, if you were dead, then God must have given you life. He must have given life to you, and that's precisely what Scripture says he did.

Look at verses 5 and 6, "even when we were dead in our trespasses," God being the subject here, God is the subject of the verb, God "made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Now beloved, I'm gonna repeat what I've been saying for weeks, simple language grammar. There's a subject in a sentence that is doing something. There is a verb that recognizes and that expresses the action that the subject performs, and sometimes there are direct objects who are on the receiving end of the action that the subject did. Now, in the most obvious, clear way, Scripture says the subject is God, we are the objects of the verb, he made us alive together in Christ. We did not make ourselves alive. We did not do something to ourselves. God did something to us in our dead condition in order to change that and to bring us into his family. And so here in verses 5 and 6, we see the contrast God is rich in mercy and we were dead in transgressions. There's no room to think that we cooperated with God or that we were joint partners with God in the salvation of our souls. Stop thinking that way. I don't care how many years it was grained into your head, that God did his part and you did your part, you need to repent of that whole false religion that thinks that way. Dead people don't cooperate with the living. Sinners don't cooperate with God in their salvation. God made us alive together with Christ, and as he made us alive he imparted to us faith and repentance and all that was necessary to respond to him as an act of his mercy, not because you and I had a good idea one day that we'd walk the aisle and get saved because we were tired of the 20th verse of "Just as I am," for those of you that have lived long

enough to remember those kinds of invitations. There's no room to think that we cooperated with God.

So what's the action of God? Well, first of all, he made you alive with Christ. He made you alive with Christ. Look at it there in verse 5, he "made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved." This is the biblical doctrine of regeneration. God imparts new life to the one who is dead in sin. He imparted life to you, beloved, when you were unable to respond. And when it says, as you read on there, he made us alive together with Christ, there's a parenthetical comment that he makes. He says it's by grace you have been saved. By the undeserved favor of God. When you deserved judgment, when you were dead, while you were dead, before you did anything, God did this. God graciously made you alive in Christ. And the language in the original text expresses the ongoing results of a completed past action. God did this to you in the past. God saved you in a moment of time. God made you new and now, whether it was 40 years ago or whether it was four weeks ago, now you stand and you walk in the afterglow of what God has done.

And beloved, as a result of that, I speak to my brothers and sisters in Christ here today to encourage you, to remind you of the greatness of the God of your salvation, as a result of what God has done for you, your spiritual condition now, your spiritual state is completely reversed. Whereas you were dead in sin, now you're alive in Christ. Whereas you were a slave of Satan, now you are in the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Your whole state, your whole condition, your whole spiritual realm has been utterly, completely, 180 degrees reversed by your salvation and the reason that you're in that blessed condition, my friend, the sole motivating factor was because God, in his compassion, wanted to be good to you. He wanted to be good to you when you wanted him to go away. He wanted to be good to you while your life was an offense to his holiness. And yet God, as it were, I speak to try to help you understand, God looked and he wanted to be kind to you, fully aware of all of your rebellion against him and the hardness and the evil and the wickedness of your heart, fully aware that you would continue to sin against him after salvation. But it's like God said, "I know all of that." He is omniscient after all. He did know all of that, right? He knows all of that and yet there was something transcendent in which he, born out of motivations from his own character, said, "Yeah, but I want to be good to him, to her. I want to be kind." He wanted to be kind to you. He wanted to show mercy to you because that would please him if he could do that.

What God is like that? What God is like that? Only the God of Scripture. Only the Lord Jesus Christ. Because remember, beloved, remember that this wasn't just something that he kind of waved a magic wand and made happen. This was carried out and purchased for us at the cost of the Son of God leaving heaven, becoming man, walking the face of the earth for 30 years and offering up his perfect blessed life and shedding his precious blood for the payment of the price of redemption to wash you from your sins. God didn't just... Oh, the limitations of my tongue. The Lord Jesus Christ poured himself out for us. He gave up the glories of heaven. He lived as a man stricken with poverty. Indeed, Scripture speaks about it that way, doesn't it? He became poor so that we could become rich. What God is like that? A God of mercy. A God of grace.

And so he made you alive together with Christ. The preaching of the gospel came, and somehow as the word of God worked in your heart over time, God made you new, imparted the ability to believe, made you a new creation in Christ, "Behold, the old things passed away, all things have become new." And as you read on, you realize that it's not just that God made us alive in Christ. Look at verse 6 with me. He didn't just make you alive in Christ, he raised you up with Christ. He raised you up with Christ. Verse 6, "and raised us up with him." So there you were, dead in sin, captive to Satan and your own sinful corruption, and God comes and he raises you up out of that. Scripture tells us to think about our union with Christ, that what happened to Christ is something that we share in and we participate in by his grace. Christ died, he was buried, he was raised with resurrection life, with resurrection power. He had a new position after his resurrection, new life after his resurrection, you could say. Now what Scripture says is that in like manner Christians have a new spiritual life as the sons of God. We have been raised up to something that we did not have before. We were physically alive but spiritually dead. God made us alive in Christ and now by the same power that raised Christ from the dead has raised us up to new spiritual life and we share in the very resurrection life of Jesus Christ himself because he's given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Listen as I read Colossians 2. Colossians 2 beginning in verse 13, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." You were dead, God made you alive. You were a slave of sin and Satan, God released you, delivered you from that prison and now you've been raised up with Christ to share in the life that he has. And so when he raised you up, he forgave all of your sins, past, present, and future. You're counted righteous in the sight of God. Your sins buried in the depths of the sea, to use a metaphor, separated as far as the east is from the west. He gave you the power, the ability to function spiritually, to respond to him, to read his word with understanding, to pray with intimacy, to have spiritual power to serve in the body of Christ. None of those things did you have before you were a Christian. He freed you from the demonic powers that held you captive. And so you're raised up to a new life, a new position, a new power that you never had before and God did that because he wanted to, and he wanted to because he's a God of great love and rich mercy and he chose to shower you with all of that. And so how can we respond with anything other than gratitude? How can we respond by saying, "Lord, I've sought you with my inner man, I've sought you, I love you, I worship you, and yet I realize that even the best that I have to offer you isn't enough to be worthy of all that you've given and shown to me."

And so he made you alive, he raised you up with Christ. We see also that he seated you with Christ in heaven. Look back to Ephesians 2 here. Look at the end of verse 6, chapter 2 verse 6 in Ephesians, he "seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." What God did for Christ, he's also done for you. God raised Christ from the dead. Christ ascended into heaven where he's at the right hand of God interceding for the brethren and

Scripture says that he's raised you up and seated you in the heavenly places with Christ. Now, Paul obviously is not speaking geographically here. We should not think about this in spatial dimensions, because obviously Christ is in heaven where we cannot get to right now. We do not see him with our physical sight. He's removed from us. As he said to the apostles, "I'm going away. I'll send the Helper, but I'm going away." And so we shouldn't think about ourselves as being somewhere where we're not. We're all physically still on earth, not in heaven, and so what does it mean that we're seated in the heavenly places in Christ? Well, the great theologian, biblical commentator, the Princeton theologian from the 19th century, Charles Hodge, who taught at that seminary for 50 years or more, Charles Hodge said this, he said, "The heavenly places is that state of purity, exaltation and favor with God into which his children are even in this world introduced." Purity, exaltation, favor with God. Now I'm expanding on what he said. I'll let you know when I get back to the quote. The purity of Christ, the exaltation of Christ, the favor with Christ that Christ enjoys at the right hand of God, we share in that. We participate in that. Now continuing the quote from Charles Hodge, "Christians belong not to the earth but heaven. We are within the pale of God's kingdom and have in Christ a title to its privileges and blessings." In other words, we are in Christ, we have the title deed to heaven itself because that's where Christ is and we have a right to be there. We will be there one day because that's what Christ purchased to secure for us. In the meantime, we share in that position of favor with God, one day we will enter into the heavenly places for real. And keeping in mind the first three verses of Ephesians 2, the heavenly realm compared with where we used to be, Christ lifted you from your prior evil realm to a position above the wickedness that once enslaved you. You once were dead in trespasses and sins. Christ has lifted you out of that and the same spiritual life in Christ is the life that is at work in you. And the grace of God, the power of God have given to you, my Christian friend, have given to you a disposition toward God, affections for God, power with God, from God, that is utterly foreign to a non-Christian. It was utterly foreign to your prior life in Christ.

You are joined to Christ in a vital relationship that is often called our union with Christ. Our union with Christ. Let me give you a definition of this that comes from another great theologian, Louis Berkhof. What does it mean that we are in union with Christ, we're united with him? Union with Christ is that intimate, vital and spiritual union between Christ and his people in virtue of which he is the source of their life and strength of their blessedness and salvation. Let me read that one more time. I know some of you try to take these things down. Union with Christ is that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and his people in virtue of which he is the source of their life and strength of their blessedness and salvation.

Beloved, Christ has life within himself. He didn't receive it from anyone. He has life. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is life. He is strong in and of himself. He is blessed in and of himself. He is the source of God's salvation and in him, the blessing and the power and the life that he has, he shares it with you. You are joined with him and you draw upon the same life and power that he has within himself. That's a picture of our union with Christ, a sense of what it means that we are raised with him in the heavenly places and seated with him. We belong to him. We draw upon him. We, as it were, as Christ uses this picture in John 6, we have eaten of him and drunk of him. His life has

been imparted to us and we draw upon that as we go through. That's what we have. That's what God has done.

Why did God do it? It was the mercy of God, point number one. What has he done, the action of God? He made us alive together with Christ. He seated us in the heavenly places. He raised us up with Christ. And now, point number three, as wonderful as the mercy and love of God are, as wonderful as the action of God is in doing what he has done, making us alive, raising us up, seating us in the heavenly places, as wonderful as all of that is, arguably, there's something even better. Certainly, without argument, there is certainly still more to come that helps us understand the ultimate purpose, the ultimate goal that God had in mind. That brings us to our third point, the purpose of God. The purpose of God. We've seen the mercy of God, the action of God, and now the purpose of God. Why did he do it? His mercy. What did he do? He made us alive together in Christ. What was he thinking? What was the plan that he had in mind?

Now remember, those of you that have been with us, we have been studying how to build a Christian mind. One of the things that we said, and this is where you start to see these things come together with very great power, and why it's so essential to be under the teaching of the word of God on a consistent basis and not just drop in and out as it's convenient to you because these things matter and these things change everything. Understand, remember that when we were talking about the power of God, the sovereignty of God, we talked about the decree of God, that he established a purpose for all of world history before the world was even created, and what follows on the heels of creation is God in his providence working all of that out to accomplish it. And in the decree of God, he established the end of all things. He had a purpose in mind. We're not living in a random universe where we're subject to human political forces. We are living in a world that God has determined the end from the beginning and is working out everything in between so that it accomplishes exactly what he wants in the end. We'll see it all fulfilled. He'll be given great glory as a result of it. And beloved, the purpose for which God showed his mercy to you in making you alive together with Christ is included in that decree. The purpose of God, this is an aspect of that greater decree of his.

Now, salvation freed us from sin, forgave us, secured for us a place in heaven, we have the title deed. That's all wonderful but, beloved, you could say that that's not even the main point. It's not even the main point. What we see and experience and know here on earth, not even the main point. Look at verse 7. Look at the purpose clause. Look at the purpose clause, verse 7, "so that," God made you alive while you were dead in transgressions so that. There was a purpose to what he has done here on earth in your life. There was a purpose that he had in mind that goes beyond anything that we see or experience right now. We're only in the vestibule, beloved, of salvation. We're in the outer lobby. We're waiting to get into the main auditorium where the real display takes place. We're standing in line waiting for something far greater.

Verse 7, "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." You see, beloved, the purpose of God in saving you, the purpose of the mercy of God on you, was eternal in nature, unending in nature.

His purpose, which we have yet to enter into, is that when we enter into eternity, we would see with infinitely greater understanding, infinitely greater response, infinitely greater perception, how great his mercy is, how great his love is. To be in the abode of God, to be in his presence, to see the crucified and risen Christ face to face, and to be there and for that to be home, with all evil banished, all sin gone, all the enemies of God banished and cast away, so that there is only the perfect love, the perfect righteousness of God undiminished, unhindered by sin and time, that we would be there and that we would see that and give glory to him for it. Who can understand these things? Who can proclaim majesties like that? We're going to enter into eternity and the things that by the Spirit of God we know truly now, we appreciate now, we're going to find that it was a tiny drop of a portion of an ocean of blessing that awaited us when we entered into heaven and somehow, in the unfolding ages of eternity, we are going to infinitely more comprehend the goodness of God, the greatness of Christ, and extol him for the love and mercy to be in such a realm of perfect bliss, joy, and contentment that we never deserved, that we never could.

The point that I'm making so weakly here in this moment is that the purpose of God is eternal in nature when he saves a soul and he has design of eternal, profound blessing that goes beyond all that we could ask or think. Beloved, successive ages of eternity, whatever eternity is like, I realize to talk about unfolding ages is to inject an element of time where time doesn't exist, but how else are we in our feeble mental condition going to have something to grasp it by? "When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, We'll have no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." The unfolding, rolling ages of eternity will not be sufficient to declare the glory of God for such unprompted generosity to us. The glory will never dim. It will never get old. Scripture says it's reserved in heaven for you. It will not fade away, 2 Peter 1. We won't get tired of this. We get tired of everything here on earth. We won't get tired of God in eternity. There was a song that Steve Green used to sing, "Our hearts will never tire of God and God alone." Better stated, our hearts will never tire of Christ and Christ alone. How could we get tired of the love that he showed for us? How could we get tired of the majestic glory of his countenance when we see it? How could we get tired of whatever that perfect countenance will be as he looks on us with love and says, as it were, says, "Welcome home. Enter into the joy of your Master." The glory will never dim. The majesty will never weaken. We praise him now. We'll praise him much, much more effusively and effectively in heaven, and we'll do it forever.

That's why God saved you. He wanted you to be there. He wanted you to be a part of that. He wanted you to share in the riches of his glory. While you were dead in transgressions, while you were an enemy, while you were helpless, God said, "I want you to have that. Come to me." And with omnipotent might, he drew you to himself to make sure that you would not miss it. He didn't leave it to your flimsy will, your non-existent will to do anything good. He didn't leave it to that. God, by mercy, exercised omnipotent power to draw you to himself to secure that eternal future for you without fail.

My friend, somehow you are still on the outside looking in at that kind of grace. Christ calls you to repent and to believe in him, to make this your own. My friend, there is

nothing in God that hinders you from coming. God invites you, God welcomes you, God has given you this, however long I've been speaking, opportunity to realize the riches of salvation and Jesus Christ says, "Come, drink of the living waters. It can be yours for free." If you walk out of here without Christ, it's not on him. It is not on him. All that we've heard today is offered to you freely. Come to Christ and be saved, every one of you, and share in the eternal outworking that will one day be ours in glory.

Let's pray together.

Father, we extol you for your grace. Father, either let us walk out full of gratitude, or let us walk out in repentance. Don't let there be a remainder walking out condemned. In Christ's name, amen.

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