

Mercy for the Ages

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I invite you to turn to Ephesians chapter 2. We've been teaching through this book verse by verse for a few months now and we've come to one of the great signature passages of the entire New Testament that speaks about the reality of the work of God and the wonder of God in the work of our salvation and what God has done for us is he has showered mercy on us for the ages. Literally speaking, God has poured mercy on us that will echo and reverberate throughout all of eternity and we're going to see that in our passage here this morning. But before we get to that, let me give us a little bit of a running head start since we do have so many visitors with us just so you'll know where we're coming from.

Last week in chapter 2, we looked at the first three verses and I want to read those because it will help set the context for our message today but this is not the passage that I am preaching on. This is what we preached on last week. Ephesians 2:1-3, look at it with me there where Paul said writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this is God's word to Christians. He says,

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Now, this passage is a very dark picture of what it means to be a non-Christian, of what it means to not be born again, of what it means to be a natural man, the unregenerate man and it's a picture of all humanity. It's a picture of every man, woman and child who is apart from Jesus Christ, those who are trusting in their own righteousness, or those who are atheists, or those who just simply don't care. This is a picture of their inner life. This is a picture of what their spiritual existence is as defined by God himself. There is no arguing with this. There is no disputing this. This is the truth of God's word. When you read the first three verses of Ephesians chapter 2, you are seeing God's assessment of the unsaved man and what we saw last time is it's a condition that is rightly called spiritual death. Death because they are unable to communicate with God. They have no life of God. They have no interest in God. They had no affections for God. Their entire perspective is earthbound, physical and what pleases them at the given moment. Whether they pursue that in a sense of self-righteousness or self-sacrifice, there is not a God-ward dimension to it because they are dead to God and what Scripture says perhaps about some of you here this morning and we looked at this last time, I'm not going to rehearse it all, but Scripture says that the unsaved man is captive to evil powers, that he is subject to the world, the devil and even his own evil desires, his own evil lusts within his heart.

That's all there in the first three verses and in those sinful lusts and in that condition of death and captivity, Scripture says that unsaved men are children of wrath, children who are condemned by God for their sinful condition. And what Paul says there, look at verse three with me, is that's what we were all like. We say this not in a spirit of pride or self-righteousness or that somehow we were better, Paul says we all formerly were like this and it is only the power of God, it is only the saving grace and mercy of God that releases anyone from that condition. No one has the intrinsic power in their own heart by their own self-

effort, by their own righteousness to release themselves from that captive condition. In fact the more that you try, the more that you tighten the ropes around your own soul because you cannot release yourself from sin by your own effort. You cannot get free from Satan by human means. He's a supernatural power. You cannot escape the world environment in which you live.

It's a desperate condition. It is a dark, black condition and there is for the natural man humanly speaking, no hope whatsoever and yet now, speaking to those of you who are Christians along with me, now we stand in grace. We stand with the certain hope of heaven. We stand with new life, as it were. We are animated by a new life spiritual principle that has guaranteed heaven for us and has cleansed us and made us someone new. How can that possibly be? How did that state of affairs come to pass if you and I had no spiritual capacity in order to bring it to pass? If we had no spiritual ability of our own, if we were dead in trespasses and sins and enslaved to evil powers and condemned to the wrath of God, how did we ever get out from under that? Was it something in us?

Look, how could it have possibly have come from us? How could we have possibly generated what was necessary to relieve ourselves from that spiritual captivity, that spiritual death? How could we ever get beyond God to escape his condemnation? How could we go through some religious works or some good deeds and on the outside how can we do things with our hands that would release and forgive us from the captivity and the sin of our soul? That's foolishness. There's no way. There's no way that it could have come from us. You could ask the question this way: what does a creature have to offer its creator when the creature loves what God hates and does what God condemns? How can that possibly result in spiritual liberation? How can we possibly from that condition of death and captivity do anything that would release ourselves and free ourselves? That is not the message of the Bible. Self-salvation does not exist in the terms of Scripture. No, no, just knowing what we were like we see that it must've come from God and, in fact, it did come from God and that brings us to our passage this morning.

Look at verse four Ephesians chapter 2. This is one of the starkest contrasts that you will ever see in Scripture. It is one of the greatest differences between what just went before to what now comes after that it defies the language of human experience to be able to express. Look at verse 4, "But God," but God. Now, remember what he said, he's just described us dead in sin and in our captivity to evil and that there's nothing we can do to deliver ourselves. It is utterly hopeless. If Paul had stopped writing after verse 3, the curtains would have come down and the lights would be out and there would be no hope for man in light of what was said in those first three verses. But Paul didn't stop there and he makes this great contrast: as hopeless as the condition of man was but God. But God. But this great contrast of God has broken into the scene. God has done something for us as Christians that changes the whole calculus, that changes the whole dimension of experience. God has done something. Paul writing to Christians here says, "God has done something for us that we could not have done on our own." It came from God.

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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 ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Beloved, this passage tells us why God saved us and what he saved us for, what the ultimate purpose of your salvation is and where salvation originated from. This is a defining passage for Christian understanding, for Christian doctrine, for Christian salvation. It is a defining passage for your affections for God. It is a defining passage for your own view of yourself because this passage humbles us as Christians to the ground and exalts God to the highest place in heaven. Beloved, if you're a Christian when you read this passage and when it is explained to you in the moments to come, there should well up within you such a delightful sense of joy, such a wonderful sense of worship, such a profound immeasurable sense of gratitude that God saved you in your sinful condition and to understand why he did it and what he has in mind lifts your mind, lifts your heart, lifts your very existence to a realm that goes way beyond earth and should motivate you to be tender toward God in conscience, in will, in a ready willingness to obey him and follow him and love him with all of your heart.

We're going to structure the message today around three points which is what I usually do for some reason. But we're going to look at the mercy of God, the action of God and the purpose of God here in these four verses and by the time we're done, the wonder and the excellence and the glory of God will be so imprinted in our minds that we will be forever grateful.

The mercy of God. Why did God save you? If you're a Christian, I'm speaking today to Christians. I'll have a word for you unbelievers at the end of the message but here at Truth Community what we've said from the beginning is we teach God's people God's word. We order our services for the sake of Christians to be instructed and edified out of God's word and Ephesians is a book that is clearly and specifically written to Christians and so we're speaking today primarily to Christians, speaking and assuming the reality of your Christian conversion. And if you're not a Christian today, let me tell you what you're really like: you're like somebody that's on the outside of a great candy store and you've just got your nose pressed up against the window and you're looking in but these things don't belong to you. If you're a Christian today, these things are meant for you to take, eat and enjoy. But if you're not a Christian, what this should do is it should work in your heart a sense of isolation and separation that causes you to flee to Christ for mercy. This is not written to saved and unsaved people alike, this is written to Christians and so I speak today as speaking to Christians which I understand is the primary audience here in the room today. We get to rejoice together over what we're going to read today.

So here's the question: why did God save you, Jeff? Amy? Brian? Amanda? Aaron? Will? Why did God save you, Andrew? Kim? Why did God save you? Were you somehow better? Were you somehow a little smarter, a little more spiritually sensitive than the other person who's not saved? That has nothing to do with it. It's not about you. It's not about what you brought to the table to God because you were spiritually bankrupt and so was I. Why did God save you? Was it something that you did to earn his favor? Did you come waving the banner of, "Here's my faith, God, now you owe it to me to save me." That is not it at all. That has nothing to do with it in terms of the primary moving force of your salvation and what the motivation that saved you was. It did not come from within you at all. It was something outside of you. It was something beyond you. It was something that you had no control over. It was something that you had nothing to do with, that you did not generate. Remember, you were captive to evil powers and you were condemned to suffer the wrath of God. It could not have come from you.

Let's do away with that thought. I feel like a fireman up here trying to extinguish any spark of self-righteousness in your soul today. We have to put that away and recognize our prior guilt and condemnation before we can actually enter in the wonder of what this passage is saying. It's only when you're willing to sacrifice your pride and self-righteousness that you can enter into the joy and the understanding of true biblical Christian salvation and that's what this passage is all about. We saw your prior guilt and helplessness and your depravity and your inability. Now, Paul is not talking about you anymore as we move into verse 4, he's talking all about God. He's talking about who this saving God is and explains how it is that you're a Christian today so those of you I named by name and those of you who feel left out because I didn't specifically identify you by name but we include you all the same, look at verse 4. Why did God save you? Look at it here. In clear simple language the Bible declares that it came from God not you.

Verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us." The mercy of God, that's our first point this morning. Here is a profound contrast: there you were and some of you maybe can remember back just prior to your conversion when the conviction of sin and guilt came upon you, there you were ruined and hopeless and condemned but God accomplished something for you that you could not do for yourself. And whatever we're going to see, we haven't gotten to the lead verb yet, that doesn't come until verse 5, Paul injects God into the situation of your guilt and condemnation. He injects God into it and before he can even say what God did he says, "I've got to tell you what this God is like and what this God is like is someone wonderful. Is someone exalted. Is someone so good and gracious and marvelous that human words can't rightly praise him for what he is."

Our lips unaided by the Spirit of God cannot rise to the level of praise that God deserves. Here it is look at it with me. Look at it again in verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us." What you're seeing Paul lay the foundation for here is the motivation for Christian salvation and where Christian salvation comes from is from the immense depths of the goodness of the character of

God. Paul says, "God be rich in mercy and great in love." God was motivated to save you, Christian, understand this, God was motivated to save you not by something that he saw in you but something that came from his own mercy and love. It flows out of his being not out of yours.

Paul says, "He's rich in mercy." The biblical concept of mercy is a wonderful concept. We have more study of this in days to come ahead of us down the road. What does it mean to be merciful? Here in this context it's saying that God had compassion on those who are in need. It's not just that he had compassion, this is who he is by nature. God is compassionate on believers. God has had compassion on you in your need. There you were in your guilt and in your slavery, your captivity to your environment, to an unseen evil spiritual world and to your own evil lust. You were in a miserable condition and, Christian, what happened is that God looked on you, saw you in your miserable position and said, "That moves me to compassion. I will act on behalf of that one." You who had shook your fist at God, as it were, or you who had put your head down and shaken your head as someone once again explained the Gospel to you, "Here we go again. I don't want to hear this." Either in your indifference or your outright rebellion or somewhere in between, in your total deadness to God, God, as it were, looked at you and said, "That's a miserable condition and I have the power to relieve it. You know what? I'm going to."

God was merciful. He reached out to you in order to relieve your present spiritual suffering and the certain future spiritual suffering that awaited you in death, condemnation and eternal judgment. God saw the whole big picture laid out before him, saw you walking in sin, saw what that led to, saw the outcome of hell and condemnation upon you and said, "Manuel, I'm going to have mercy on you. Jerry, I'm going to have mercy on you. I'm going to express compassion." He showed compassion to you by name and exercised his power and his love on your behalf. There you were, Christian, in your great need and God who is not just merciful he's rich in mercy, he's abounding in mercy, it flows out from him, it overflows from the endless depths of his being, that rich overflowing mercy compassionately rescued you from your captivity. When God had every right to execute the sentence of judgment on you, his mercy, as it were, acted on your behalf and saved you and rescued you and brought his love and power to bear on your soul in a way that you never could have forced him or obliged him to do.

Christian, we are on the receiving end of the rich mercy of God. If you're here today and you're a Christian, understand what your salvation is speaking to, what your salvation is testifying to as you go through life. What the outpouring of this position of grace that you find yourself in, what that is saying is that God had mercy on you because salvation, listen to this, you can write this down, you can write anything that I say down, okay, but you can write this down: your salvation is an expression of God's mercy, not of your merit. It has nothing to do with what you deserve because what you deserved was something far different. For you to be saved here today is an expression that God had compassion on you in your miserable helpless state and delivered you unto something new. Something good in exchange for the evil in which you were ensnared.

This is incredibly humbling. When you rightly understand your position as a dead sinner, in one sense your first reaction to this should be, "But I was in verses one through three. I don't deserve that. I didn't deserve compassion. I didn't deserve mercy. I didn't deserve a rescue. What is this? It can't. It wasn't. I don't deserve that," and that is precisely the point. It is precisely the point that you were undeserving so that we have to clear out all that underbrush, we have to cut down all of the weeds and trees and clear out a clearing so that there is space in your mind and in your heart to understand that what you are is an object of the mercy of God, not a trophy of your own efforts. God had mercy on you and then you start to turn away from verses 1 through 3 and you look at what this means and you say, "God must be someone really wonderful then. God, you've been so kind to me. You have blessed me. You have dealt with me not according to my sins but by another measure, by the measure of your own attributes."

Look at verse 4 with me again. He's rich in mercy. He's rich in this compassion that alleviates suffering and he's not talking about an earthly physical suffering here. It's not mercy like you have on somebody who is in need of a meal, this is a mercy in the spiritual realm as shown by the context of the prior three verses. It has nothing to do with your earthly suffering. It's all about your guilt and condemnation and God acted to relieve you from that far greater need.

And it goes on and says "because of His great love with which He loved." Don't you love the adjectives in this verse? Paul could have said, "But God being merciful," but he didn't say that. He said, "God being rich in mercy." Not simply because he loved us, but "because of his great love with which he loved us," and this is not a sentimental emotion that Paul is describing here. What he's describing here is a commitment from the mind and the heart and the intentions and the actions of God to act on your behalf, to seek your spiritual welfare, to commit himself, as it were, to your highest spiritual good. He loved you with a commitment to secure you. It's not about he had these fluffy feelings about you, like he was some kind of spiritual boyfriend or something. It's not that at all. He's rich in mercy and he has this immeasurable commitment to his people to love them, to be good to them, to secure their well-being. This great immeasurable commitment. This great immeasurable movement of his power on your behalf. This great expression, bestowal of undeserved favor upon your life.

That's what God had as his motive. He didn't look down and say, "You know, he's trying really hard and I need to help him." That wasn't it at all. There was no effort on your part that drew this out of God. Remember what Isaiah 64, verse 6 says: that all of your righteousness is like filthy rags. The best that you had to offer to God was distasteful and abhorrent to him so it wasn't you and as soon as you extinguish the flame of that candle in your soul and let the lights go out and you close the door on your self-congratulation of how good you were, once you put that away, then the stage is set for the love and mercy of God to be displayed.

Look over at Romans 5 which expresses a similar concept as we let Scripture interpret Scripture. Romans chapter 5, verse 6, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Christ died for you not because you were good but because you were ungodly. Christ died not because, it's not that God helps those who help themselves, you were helpless. That's a total foolish lie that comes so easily off pagan lips, God helps those who help themselves, hah, are you kidding? You're helpless and God's not going to help you if that's what you think. You have to acknowledge your total inability, your helplessness. You have to cry out for mercy rather than come to God demanding a reward for your obedience.

Verse 7 of Romans 5, "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die." Here it is, echoing the language that we've see in Ephesians 2, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Motivated by his love, Christ comes and sacrifices himself on the cross as a substitute to bear the punishment that your sins deserved in order to liberate you from the evil powers outside and within you that dominated you. While you were helpless and unable to do anything on your own behalf, God intervened and did it all.

It was from his mercy and, you know, we need to pause it right here and some of us, some of you probably need to rethink your concept of God completely. You've carried over bad things and wrong thoughts from prior teaching or prior things that you thought maybe even as a Christian. We tend to think low thoughts about God. When difficult trials come into our lives we're tempted quickly to think badly about him. "God, why are you doing this? What have I done wrong? Why is God being unfair to me? This isn't right. This isn't kind. I don't like this," and you start to interpret God through the prism of your own dissatisfaction with life and you wonder if he's being harsh, unkind towards you. Beloved, don't think that way. Beloved, stop thinking that way. Stop thinking such unworthy thoughts about a holy, merciful God who is great in love towards you.

If you are a Christian you are on the receiving end of rich mercy, of great love and whatever your difficult circumstances may be and I don't deny that they are difficult, don't use that to attribute unkindness or unfairness to this God who has displayed such great mercy and love upon you in saving you from your sins. We must stop thinking that way. We would never articulate it, most of us, but you have that reservoir, that cluttered closet in your heart that thinks bad thoughts about God and wonders why he's being unfair to you. We've got to open up that closet and clean it out and cast out the garbage. We've got to clear that out because let no Christian ever say anything about the way God has dealt with him other than that, "God has been rich in mercy and great in love towards me and I thank him and I praise him." Yeah, this is hard but so what? "God is good. God is loving. God has been merciful to me," and that becomes the anchor through which you think about everything in life.

The mercy of God. The compassion of God. No one who understands where he fits in Ephesians 2:1 and 3 and finds himself now a Christian should ever charge God with anything, bring any accusation against his holy character. "God, whatever happens to me in life now that I'm a Christian I see that you are compassionate, merciful, kind, gracious, good, and loving and I reject any inner temptation from the remnants of my sinful condition that would prompt me to say anything else. God, these lips, God, this tongue will be devoted to affirming your mercy toward me." That's the only right way for you to think as a Christian. That's what should always be in the depths of your heart as you think about your God.

Look at verse 4 with me again, let's go over it one more time. You "were by nature a child of wrath, But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us." Now, Paul is going to go on in verses 5 and 6 and declare exactly what God has done. Point number two this morning: the action of God. We've seen the mercy of God which the love and mercy of God which is the fountain from which the river of salvation flows, so to speak, speaking metaphorically here. It flows from him not from us. His goodness so much so that it silences any accusations we might make against him.

But what did he do exactly? What did he do for us in our dead spiritual condition? Look at verses 5 and 6. This is a spiritual mouthful. This is a biblical mouthful that we are about to see here in verses 5 and 6, "even when we were dead in our transgressions," stop right there. He's finally going to get to his main verb here but before he does, he just wants to remind you one more time that this was not motivated from anything inside you. This did not come from anything that you did, nothing that you can claim even a little sliver of credit for. Paul says, "Remember, I'm about to say something really important here but remember one last time that you, we were dead in our transgressions. We were dead there was nothing, we didn't move toward God, he moved towards us." 1 John 4 says, "We love because he first loved us." The priority motivation, the priority affection is always God towards sinners not vice versa always in Scripture.

And so Paul says, "Remember, you were dead in your transgressions." In fact let me just point one thing out here: in the original text you see this a little bit more clearly, the verb forms could be translated this way in verse 4, "but God being rich in mercy," verse 5, "and us being dead in our transgressions." There is a parallel there. There is a grammatical parallel that isn't immediately evident in the Greek text but here's God rich in mercy and here's us dead in our transgressions in such a way, laid out for us in such a way that one final time Paul declares that this had to come from God because it couldn't have come from you. It couldn't have come from us, Christian, you were dead.

And so what did the living God do? Well, there's no room to think that we somehow cooperated with God and God needed us as an equal partner in salvation or he needed us to push his desires over the finish line. No, you were dead. You weren't running the race. You had fallen down and you were dead and lifeless and motionless. You couldn't get to the finish line of your salvation. The ambulance couldn't come and revive you. All that was left was to carry your lifeless spiritual corpse off the track and to dispose of it. That is where the mercy of God moved into action.

Look at it in verse 5. We're just talking about subject, verb, and direct object. "God," verse 5, "made us alive together with Christ." God is the actor in this verse. He is the subject of the verb and we who are now Christians are the direct objects. We receive the action, we did not contribute to the action. God in his mercy, while we were dead, made us alive together with Christ and Paul parenthetically adds, "It's by grace you have been saved," not by anything that you did. By grace you have been saved describes the ongoing results of a completed past action. You are now as a Christian, you are in a present condition of being saved that is a result of what God did in the past in your life. God made you alive together with Christ. He regenerated you. He imparted spiritual life to you and that life principle now explains how you can be a Christian. You are living in the overflow of a past action of God when he made you alive together with Christ.

Christian, God brought spiritual life to you when you were dead. God resurrected you spiritually in the same way Christ called Lazarus out of the tomb. Lazarus, bound in his grave clothes, four days there, so much so that they say, "Lord, by now he stinketh." And God said, "Lazarus, come forth," and in the effective call of God working in your heart, he said, "You, come forth to life now." God made you alive in

Christ. God imparted life to us when we were unable to respond to him and you who were dead are now alive.

Some of us can look back and remember such a clear difference that, "Yeah, I remember how after my conversion the word of God became alive to me. Where I read it before and it was just a dead letter and really it didn't capture my interest and I really couldn't even understand it now, after my conversion I opened it and it rang with truth. It brought joy to my soul. I was now alive to the things of God in Scripture that previously I was dead to. Whereas before the name of Christ was an empty curse word to me, now it's the sweetest name on earth. Now I love him whereas before I resisted and rejected him." Those kinds of affections, beloved, towards God's Son and God's word, toward the word written and the word incarnate, those kinds of affections are the mark of new life.

It's the mark of what God did for you and the whole point, let me remind you, the whole point of this broader passage of Scripture from Ephesians 1, verse 15, all the way down to Ephesians 2, verse 10, is making the point that what is for us to understand that the power that physically raised Christ from the dead is the exact same power that raised us from spiritual death and so a power, listen to this, God's power that raised you to life is also the power that imparted new desires to your heart that you never had before. That spiritual capacity to receive truth that you never had before. An affection for Christ and his word that you never had before. These are the marks of spiritual life and they did not come from within you. God made you alive together with Christ.

We, you and I, brothers and sisters in Christ, you and I share in the very life that Christ received when he rose from the dead. We have resurrection life that not only one day will physically resurrect us but now today has spiritually resurrected us and done something inside us in our hearts, in our attitudes, in our dispositions that we never could have generated on our own. God made us alive together with Christ. It has to be a spiritual resurrection that he's talking about because we were already physically alive and so he's talking about a spiritual resurrection in keeping with the spiritual nature of the dead condition from verses 1 through 3.

He made us alive together with Christ and Paul goes on and explains even more of what that means. Look at verse 6 now, "and," so he's joining together in verse 6 describing the action of God on our behalf, verse 5, he "made us alive together with Christ and," something more, "he raised us up with Him." Again, speaking of a spiritual resurrection. There you were, dead in sin, captive to Satan in your own sinful corruption and God raised you up in Christ. There you were, dead in your false religion, blind to truth, thinking you were doing good, maybe some of you thinking you were Christian and then having your eyes opened that you were not. And think about it this way and this idea of God raising us up with Christ: Christ had a new physical life and position after his resurrection. He was in the tomb but then he was out and he had a resurrected life now. In like manner, what Scripture is saying to us here, we have new spiritual life as God's Son. We have been raised, watch this, as Christians whether you've been a Christian for 50 years or 50 days, it doesn't matter, the same truth is at work here: you have new spiritual life as God's Son. You have a life that is different from what was yours in your unredeemed state.

You have been raised to something that you did not have before and a parallel passage on the other direction in your Bible, Colossians, chapter 2, will help bring this out as a comment on this verse in Ephesians. Colossians 2:13, turn there with me if you would. Colossians 2:13-15. It's wonderful to see these passages echoing and reinforcing each other. In Romans 5 we saw helpless. In Ephesians 2 we saw dead. Here we see that concept of spiritual death being repeated, Colossians 2:13, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him," do you see it again? God is the actor, you're on the receiving end. What he did was he imparted spiritual life to you. What did he do? What's the meaning of this? How can we understand the texture, the nuance of it? Well, what we see here in Colossians is it met every aspect of your spiritual need as a non-Christian. First of all, "having forgiven us all our transgressions." You were guilty as a violator of the law of God and when God worked in your heart and brought you to Christ, he forgave you all of your prior transgressions. Indeed, he forgave all of your sins for all of time past, present and future. It's not that he wipes away the slate and then you have to start keeping God's law in order to finish the job, you can't do that. He's forgiven you all of your transgressions. He met you in sin and forgave it.

Verse 14, "having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Verse 15, remember we said last time, you were captive to evil powers. You walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. You were a child of Satan, the father of lies. What did God do when he made you alive? Verse 15, well, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities," he disarmed those spiritual forces that were over you.

You know, some professing Christians, we won't get into all of this, but some professing Christians worry about whether they can be possessed by demons and they worry about what Satan is doing all over them and they just live in constant fear of what Satan is going to do. Well, if that's you, listen, I've got good news for you: God delivered you from that captivity of Satan and it says right here in verse 15, he disarmed those rulers and authorities. God didn't save you to suddenly leave you vulnerable to an overtaking of the devil and we still have to resist the devil, the Scripture says, but when we resist him he flees. We don't live in fear of Satan anymore, we don't trifle with this power but we don't worry about him taking over because the greatest power of all, God, has disarmed those and released us from that captivity. There is no fear. There isn't that craven fear that Satan is going to jump out from behind a rock and really mess up my life. Your life isn't under the hand of Satan. Satan is not sovereign, God is and God has been merciful and good and loving and gracious to you with an intention to display that throughout all of eternity. He's not going to abandon you and turn you over. He disarmed that power. He forgave your sins.

Verse 15, I'm not sure I finished reading it, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." The triumph is completed and so God forgave your sins when he raised you up with Christ. He gave you the ability to function spiritually, to communicate with him because you've been reconciled to him and adopted into his family. He freed you from the demonic powers that held you captive and blinded you to the Gospel. You're not blind to the Gospel anymore and as we saw last time, that was one of the primary objectives of the work of the devil was to blind people to the truth so they can't believe. Well, you believe now. You've been brought out of that. He gave you new life and desires. You've been raised up with Christ to a position that you did not have before, a position of security guaranteed by the mercy and the love and the power of God. He raised you up.

Go back to Ephesians chapter 2:6. He "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." So you see three verbs here: God made us alive together with Christ, he quickened us, he regenerated us; he raised us up with him, he raised us out of that captive realm in which we had previously lived; and he seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He seated you with Christ.

Now, let me make what I think is an obvious point here: Paul is not speaking in geographical terms here in verse 6. We are physically still on earth while Christ is physically in heaven. He's talking about a different reality than a physical translation into another geographic time and space place. I think the commentator, Charles Hodge, nails it when he says and I quote, talking about what this heavenly place is that we've been seated in, "The heavenly places is that state of purity, exultation and favor with God into which his children are even in this world introduced. 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." Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven," in Philippians chapter 3. We've been brought into a new realm of existence, taken out of that captive, that realm of captivity and judgment and placed into a realm of freedom in Christ belonging to him where we have all of the blessings now with the full manifestation of him. We have title to all of the blessings with the full manifestation of them still to come when we are with Christ physically in heaven. We have been seated with Christ. He has blessed us and brought us into a state of favor with God that is irreversible.

God didn't save you by his power suddenly to leave you to keep your own salvation in your own power and strength and with your own obedience. Why would he do that? God doesn't rest, a God of this great mercy, a God of this great power and as we're going to see, this great purpose wouldn't suddenly leave the design and the outcome of salvation to your own imperfect obedience and your vacillating desires for Christ. No,

what guarantees your salvation is not you but the power and the mercy of God that started it in the first place. Oh, we have to persevere, we have to continue in the faith but what guarantees that is the power that is at work in us that came from Christ rather than a power of self-effort. And so when Paul says here that he's "seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," he's saying that he lifted you from that prior evil realm to a position that is now above the wickedness that once enslaved you.

Beloved, rejoice. Be encouraged. Be strengthened. The same spiritual life in Christ is now at work in you. His grace and power have given to us a disposition toward God that is foreign to a non-Christian. What God worked in Christ he has worked in us. You are joined to Christ in a vital relationship, a real spiritual union that is often called our union with Christ and we call it our union with Christ because the power that is animating him is the same power that is animating our spiritual life now. He is in us and we are in him just as a vine flows with the life giving sap and extends it into the branches, so the life-giving power and mercy and grace that animates Christ spreads out through his believers as well. The same life principle. God has withheld nothing from you.

Let me remind you, go back to chapter 1 verse 3 of Ephesians. God hasn't held anything back. There is no second blessing to seek for the Christian. He's already given it all to us. Chapter 1, verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." He didn't hold anything back. His mercy was so boundless and so free that he poured it all out on you right at the start. If you're a Christian, you received the Holy Spirit the moment you believed because Scriptures says, "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him at all."

And so we are joined together with Christ and one theologian, I won't pretend that this is an easy subject to get all of your mind around, the Scripture is pointing toward a shared life, a vital reality that is true about Christians that indicates that somehow what's going on in Christ is also in some measure, somehow, some capacity going on in us as well. And one theologian defines it like this and I quote, "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." In other words, there is a vital connection between you and Christ, my brother in Christ, my sister in Christ. Christ who died and rose again and now is in heaven where he intercedes for you according to the will of God, that Christ is the one who saved you, the one who died for you, the one who redeemed you and the Spirit that makes him so great and exalted, he has shared and brought you into share in the benefit of that. You drink from that same fountain, the same spiritual water flows in your veins. Christ himself is the source of your life. Christ himself is the source of your blessedness. Christ himself is the source of your salvation and as we sing sometimes in the hymn that we should sing more often, "I am his and he is mine," because I am loved with an everlasting love.

You see, I say this a lot and I'll say it again: to be a Christian, to be a true Christian is by far the most noble thing in the world. There is no political position of power, there is no fame, there is no achievement on earth that could ever begin to approximate, to get within seeing distance of the glory and the majesty of what it means to be a true born again Christian who is really a child of the living God and in union with Jesus Christ. Nothing compares to that and that is what God has done for you in his mercy and love. He has graciously brought you out of death to bring you into a place where you can share in that blessedness.

Even if there aren't physical tears running down your cheek, there should be a softness in your heart toward these things that is like physical crying, says God. "God, that's just so good for you to have done all of this for me in my state of rebellion and sin is too wonderful for words. God, I'm so grateful, I'm so thankful you are so good. I so praise you." You see, these things make tender the Christian heart. A belief in the sovereign work of God in salvation rightly understood never makes someone proud and hard, it makes them soft and tender because they realize there was nothing distinguishing about themselves that brought this kind of blessing upon themselves. God did it out of his mercy and ultimately only those who believe in the sovereign work of God in salvation truly love him for who he is. There is just no other way to say it. To think that you contributed somehow, that you got God's attention with your good stuff, or your faith, or whatever, to think that you somehow distinguished yourself from another man by what you did on your is ultimately to say, "I still love myself. Thanks be to me. My choice made me free." Please, God makes his children alive together with Christ and that makes us humble and worshipful in response, denying ourselves, praising God.

And we could stop right here and say a big hearty "Amen!" and walk out walking on air because we are just so grateful and glad for what God has done for us. As wonderful as everything is that we've said about the mercy of God and what he has done to liberate us from sin and judgment, as wonderful as that is, the best is still to come. This is just not what you would expect from human wisdom. You know, you can get so wrapped up into the text. You can get so wonderfully, as we should and try to get our minds around so that we understand the doctrine of what we're talking about and you get so enmeshed in it that it would be possible for you if we walked out right now to miss the most important question. We could go out rejoicing and yet find that our joy later we would find was incomplete because we didn't finish the sentence that Paul wrote. He hasn't finished his sentence yet.

Verse 7 is a continuation of everything else and it brings us to the third point which is: the purpose of God in salvation. We've seen the mercy of God in salvation, the action of God in salvation but there comes a point where you should step back and say, "Why would he do this? What's in it for God? Why would he do that?" We've already ruled out the fact that it's something that we deserve. So what would be the point? Why would a God who is sufficient within himself in all of the perfection of his being, needing nothing from the creature, I mean, he was self-existent and independent before Genesis 1:1 and the Father, Son and Holy Spirit had perfect fellowship and communion together before time began, why would he do this? And that's where verse 7 comes in: the purpose of God in salvation.

Let me hopefully cut another tether that connects you to your sense of self-importance. Salvation freed us and secured for us a place in heaven, that's true. It's wonderful. It's glorious and I am delighted to know that I'm going there when that time comes. That's wonderful but if that is the only way and the only perspective from which you think about salvation, you're kind of missing the point. You see, salvation was not primarily and first of all about you. You were a means to another end. God's love for you is real, genuine and he has shown mercy to you and we love him for that and we are on the receiving end of so much goodness but beloved, just think for just a moment, let this conscious thought sink into your brain and make its way down to your heart: surely the ultimate purpose of salvation must not be about me because that would make me the goal of it all and that couldn't be. That couldn't be. That can't be. That is not. It's wonderful that God loves us, it's wonderful that he saved us but I don't think it's too much to say that's not the main point.

How can you say that? Well, look at verse 7, remembering that Paul is continuing the sentence that he had started before. Let's rehearse it. Verse 4, "God being rich in mercy," verse 5, "made us alive together with Christ," verse 6, "and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Why? Why did you do that, God? Verse 7, "so that," here's the purpose of it all, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." We are going to be in heaven one day with Christ and with the redeemed through all of the ages and what is going to happen there is what's going to be on display captivating our attention, captivating our praise, captivating our worship, is that God has been surpassingly rich in his grace toward us so that we don't congratulate ourselves in heaven, we see his goodness on display and we praise him for it. It is about displaying who he is not who we are and yet because we love him, because we've denied ourselves, because we are not interested in our own glory anymore, we crucified that a long way back, because his glory is the highest affection of our heart, to see his glory on display is going to be the highest fulfillment of our aspirations. Your joy will be perfect in heaven because this Father who saved you, the Christ who died for you, is going to be on display and everybody, angels and redeemed humanities alike, are going to look and say, "What a wonderful God! What a wonderful mercy! How rich his grace! How good his kindness towards us who believe!" I'm ready for the rapture right now. If I could jump up and make it happen, I would. I want to go there right now into that realm.

Look at what it says here in verse 7, "in the ages to come," like wave after wave crashing upon the shore in a never ending display of ever unfolding wonder, God will be displaying and showing "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." Eternity will not be long enough to put his goodness on display. It's not going to be long enough. I'm glad it doesn't end and I've said this before too, I want you to know, I want to assure you on the authority of God's word that that display of his grace will

never get old to you. The best things in this life are going to diminish into nothing of frivolity compared to the glory of being with Christ in this display.

I want to show you one final thing here, that's the purpose, it's that God would put himself, his glory on display and we would rejoice in that and honor him and glorify him in response for it. Look at this though in verse 7, he's going to show "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." If it didn't take me so long to preach verse-by-verse, that would remind you, that would sound like something that we've heard before, Ephesians 1:19. This is so cool. Paul, verse 18, "I pray that you'll know what the hope of His calling," verse 19, look at this, "and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." Salvation displays the surpassing grace of God because he showed favor to you that you didn't deserve. It displays the surpassing power of God in that he did something that was humanly impossible when he raised you from spiritual death and made you alive in Christ. Everything about your thinking about salvation should come down to the fact that this is so surpassingly great in power and in grace that all I can do is fall down and worship because this is beyond human capacity to understand. So gracious, so mighty where do I look? It captivates the believing heart in ways that never grow old.

Beloved, what God has done for you in salvation is shown you such unprompted generosity that the glory of that will never dim, the majesty will never weaken. Our hearts will love him more when we're with him than they do now and we'll be undistracted by the remnants of sin, this worldly environment will be undistracted and unhindered by Satan and his demons. We will be set free perfectly to see all of the surpassing glory on display unfolding, unfolding, unfolding more and more and more. That's where your heart belongs. That's where you're headed, Christian. You're headed to that great place, that great vision. What will consume you is not, "Wow! Look at the redeemed people that I'm with and oh, I'm with my family!" No, what's going to captivate us is the surpassing greatness of the glory of God. I can't wait, can you?

Let's pray

Father, we do praise you for the power and the grace that raised us from spiritual death and gave us spiritual life. For those of you that are here and you are still on the outside looking in at this grace, your nose pressed against the window but no way to get inside it seems, my friend, I invite you to repentance and faith in Christ. He shed his blood on Calvary to reconcile sinners just like you to God. He will welcome you. He will receive you and by the power of his Spirit he calls you to Christ. I invite you to respond and cry out to him for his mercy, "I don't deserve this but if you've given it to others, will you give it to me as well?" On the authority of God's word, I promise you that Christ will be swift to answer that cry. When you appeal to the mercy of God rather than to your own works of righteousness, you're talking God's language. You're intersecting with him on the terms that he requires, his mercy, not your deserving. Come to Christ. Don't let us go to heaven without you. Father, do a work in those hearts that would secure for them the blessings that you've given to so many of us in this room.