

Favorably Disposed Toward Us

Ephesians

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I invite you to turn to the book of Hebrews 10 which gives us such a clear view of the finality and the sufficiency of the cross which we come to celebrate here this evening. Christ is offered once, not multiple times. Once at Calvary, not multiple times at a Mass. Hebrews 10:11, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 'THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,' He then says, 'AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.' Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

As we come to a biblical meditation to prepare our hearts for communion tonight, I want to impress upon your hearts to the glory of God that God is favorably disposed toward you. That in the cross of Christ, in his shed blood, we see an assurance that God has brought us into his fellowship for the purpose of blessing us and for encouraging us and for strengthening us and for forgiving all of our sins that we would have the sense that we could come into his throne room at any time with full and complete and settled confidence that he will gladly welcome us when we do. That in addition to that, that we would look forward to the future; we would look forward to the day of judgment without fear. That we would look forward to the day of judgment with confidence because our brother in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, has done everything that is necessary to secure

our soul and that our sins are truly forgiven, that our account with God is completely righteous and that there is nothing upon our account for which God would ever judge us again. Christ has taken all of our sins away as far as the East is from the West. He has given us his own righteousness to place to our account. We stand before God in a perfect position with no fear of judgment whatsoever.

That is the wonderful position that we have as Christians and, beloved, I want you to have this sense that God is favorably disposed toward you this evening. In Christ, in his Son, God receives you and welcomes you. And I want to take you to a familiar Scripture to prepare your hearts for communion tonight with those welcoming thoughts in mind. We have finished the first 2 chapters of Ephesians and when you preach verse-by-verse, when you know you have turned a corner in a passage, it's a little bit like sending one of your kids off to college or saying goodbye to a loved one when they are leaving and you know you are not going to see them for perhaps a very long time. There is a sense of gratitude for the past and yet you hate to say goodbye. So I want to for multiple sakes really, I want to go back to the first 2 chapters of Ephesians this evening in part to simply summarize what we have studied over the past 6 months together, in part to bring the big view picture of the panorama of salvation to your mind and in part to speak to you tonight about very familiar truths that we have gone over again and again so that rather than trying to process new information as you are hearing familiar themes repeated, that it would just deepen your sense of gratitude and give you a sense of anticipation as we come to the Lord's table tonight. So we're going to cover the first 2 chapters of Ephesians and take a look at the panorama of salvation as Paul presents it for us here.

The first thing that Paul really does for us is he gives praise to God. He gives praise to God as this book opens. Look at chapter 1, verse 3, and I just want you to see how the big sections fit together as we come to the table tonight. He is praising God. He says in 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." Paul opens and is praising God and, beloved, as we come to the table tonight, that is the same spirit of gratitude that we receive the elements ourselves. Praise be to God that he has sent Christ and that he has interceded on our behalf so that we could be reconciled to him. We have no fear of judgment from a holy God because someone else interceded for us. Someone else did the work. Someone else satisfied the demands of God on our behalf.

So Paul is praising God as he opens this and he is praising God and we'll just look at 3 reasons that he praises God. First of all, he praises God because God chose us. God chose us. If you are a Christian, beloved, you are in the wonderful position of knowing that God called you out by name before time began. Look at verses 4 and 5. Paul says, "I am praising God," verse 4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." There you have it, beloved. There you have it: as a Christian, you have laid out before you the plan of God for your salvation which he established before time began. He called you out. He chose you individually and by name, not as a mass of humanity but he chose us individually by name that he would bring us one day, that one day we would find

ourselves adopted into the family of God and that God, a righteous, loving, gracious God would be our Father and we would be children in his family with Christ Jesus himself as our brother who know intercedes for us in heaven. What a magnificent possession we have. What a magnificent position of blessing in Christ has been bestowed upon us to think that a self-sufficient God who needs nothing from any creation, a self-sufficient God created a people to give to his Son and he included us in that plan. We are greatly blessed because God chose us.

Now, there is more reason for praise, of course, in this passage. Paul goes on and on and on. God not only chose us put Christ redeemed us. Look at verse 7 where it says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." Christ purchased us from the slave market of sin. He paid the price that was necessary to bring us out of sin and into communion with God. That's what the word "redemption" means and he paid for it literally with his own blood and we remember that at the table tonight, the forgiveness of our trespasses. And beloved, with the theme in mind that we want to focus on today that God is favorably disposed to us, look at the words at the end there of verse 7. We have "the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." I know that you're like me and at least in times past if not in the recent past, you have a sense that maybe for some reason we fall into this bad pattern of thinking that God is a God with his arms crossed and he is a little bit unapproachable, that he's not really willing to help us. We view him wrongly because of a failed understanding of how perfect the work of Christ was on our behalf. Well, what I want you to see in this passage, what Paul is saying to Christians under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is that God did not do this reluctantly. God was not stingy in his mercy. Look at what it says there in verse 7, he did it "according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." The wealthy King of the Universe poured out his riches gladly. It delighted his soul to do so and we are now the recipients of the riches of the goodness and the grace of God. Let us never, ever think again that somehow God is opposed to us because circumstances maybe are hostile or we have a sense of a guilty conscience over things that we have done or said or thought. Whatever else you think about that in the confession of sin, recognize for you as a believer in Christ, God has been gracious to you. No, no, God has been richly gracious to you. No, no, God has lavished richly grace upon you.

Think high thoughts of the goodness of God, beloved. Think high thoughts of the his mercy. High thoughts of his grace. High thoughts of his love because in love, it says, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." Think worthy thought of a gracious God tonight and as you come to the table, realize that this is an expression, this is a tangible remembrance of the fact that God has lavished grace upon us in Christ and that Christ was no unwilling victim. He gladly gave his life for us that we might be redeemed. And with that sense of truth informing your mind, with that sense of truth informing your conscience, rejoice, be glad and sing. Our God has been good to us. Our God has reconciled us to himself and he did it gladly because he wanted to bring us into his fellowship.

There is more in this passage as Paul praises God. He chose us, he redeemed us, the Holy Spirit sealed us. Look at verse 13, it says, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." The seal was a mark of ownership, a mark of belonging and it was a mark of authenticity and so by giving us the Holy Spirit, God has marked us out as his own. God did not abandon us as orphans to find our way through this world. He sent his Spirit and his Spirit now indwells us and inhabits us to strengthen us and affirm us and assure us and to keep us all the way to the end. If you are truly in Christ tonight, you will not be lost because nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. You have been sealed. You are kept. You could never go back. You could never choose your way out. God will not reverse salvation. There is no such language in Scripture that God would save someone and then reverse the judgment that was fulfilled at the cross.

No, he sealed us perfectly and so here we are, chosen before time began, Christ having redeemed us at the cross 2,000 years ago and now today as we live and breathe in 2015, sealed by the Spirit, sealed in Christ, the mark of God's ownership all over our souls. Praise God! Praise God and all of this was exactly to the praise of his glory, that this might cause us to turn back to God and honor his name. Look at chapter 1:6. Paul in this praise of verses 3 through 14 and verse 6 says, "What I'm saying is to the praise of the glory of His grace." Verse 12, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." Verse 14, "He is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."

So, beloved, as we come to the table tonight, we come with a sense of wanting to praise God for the fact that he, without any compulsion other than the loving grace of his own heart, has brought us into his family and experiencing and knowing the joy and the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, that we would return praise to God because he is so favorably disposed to us and that Christ, our brother, paid the price with his own blood. If your life had somehow been saved by somebody who died in the process of saving yours, you would always have a special memory of that person who gave his life for yours on an earthly sense and you would recognize the self-sacrifice of that just on an earthly sense. Well, we as Christians understand, don't we, so much more from an eternal perspective that our brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, laid himself down for us so that we would be saved; so that we would be adopted into God's family; so that we would be redeemed and forgiven completely and without fear. Here we are, brought together around a table of remembrance that we would praise God and as we in a few moments take communion together, we would look at those elements and say, "Thank you, Lord, for your shed blood," and we would have alongside it, "This shed blood is a reminder to me that God is favorably disposed toward me. He is not my enemy." We once were enemies in our sin but no longer because we have been reconciled to God through this act of redemption that we remember in communion.

So those 12 verses, verses 3 through 14, we are called to praise God. Well, secondly, as we remember these first 2 chapters of Ephesians, we remember the power of God. We

remember the power of God. Paul turns to prayer after he has been praising God. He turns to intercession. Look at verse 15 here. He is turning to intercession and he says in verse 15, "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Paul has turned to prayer now and he is grateful for these readers who he knows are part of the kingdom of God who belong to the body of Christ and he knows that the wealth of the truth that he is speaking about is something that is beyond the capacity for mere human comprehension to grasp and so he prays that the Spirit of God would help them and expand their mind and illuminate their understanding so that they could go beyond their human capacities to understand the greatness and have a deeper grasp of what it means to be redeemed by Christ and to be a true Christian. So he is praying for them and what he prays is that they would grasp something of the power of God that has been exercised on their behalf.

Look at verse 19. He speaks of the power of the resurrection and we talked about this many times and I am gladly repeating it for you here this evening. We know, everyone says that repetition is the key to learning, well, how much more than that we would repeat and remind ourselves of these central truths so that they would go deep into our soul so that we would not stray from them or abandon them in a time of weakness. That we would be encouraged by the fact that God is favorably disposed toward us as shown by the way that he exercised his power on our behalf. So in verse 19, Paul prays, "I am praying that your eyes would be enlightened so that you would know," verse 19, "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." Paul says, "I am praying that you would understand that the power that saved you is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from physical death. That you would be in awe of the majesty of salvation when you realize that a supernatural act that brought Christ from the dead, that no human being could ever do, no human being can raise a man from the dead, only the power of God can do that," Paul says, "Christ is raised from the dead and what I want you to understand is that that same power is what raised you from spiritual death."

Beloved, don't you see? Don't you see it? Aren't you in awe of the love of God and the favor that he has shown toward you in your salvation? That he held nothing back of his grace? He lavished his grace upon us and he used the powerful right arm of his omnipotence to exercise power to raise Christ from the dead and then he turned and used that power in your life as well to save you from your sin. There is a sense, isn't there, where you almost bow your head in recognition of these truths. It's humbling. It's so greatly encouraging but it's so humbling that you just bow your head and say, "O God, thank you. You have been so good and gracious and powerful on my behalf. You have displayed goodness to me that is eternal in its consequences that I did not deserve and yet here I stand on the receiving end of lavish grace and omnipotent power and, God, you

have been so good to me. Father, forgive me for those times where I thought unworthy thoughts. Forgive me of those times where I resented your work in my life. Forgive me of thinking that you were anything less than the most wonderful, gracious Father that any human being could ever know. Forgive me for thinking less than the highest, loftiest thoughts of you, God, in light of the fact that you chose me, you redeemed me, you sealed me. You did all of this according to the same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead. You held nothing back for the good of my soul. Father, I thank you for that and I see and I recognize that you are favorably disposed toward me even though maybe that wasn't the dominant thought in my mind when I walked into this room tonight. Now Lord, from your word, I see it and I see why Paul is bursting with praise because as I think about these things, O God, my heart is bursting with praise also."

Paul goes on. You will remember as he is praying that we would understand the power of salvation, he looked at the power of the resurrection of Christ and then he goes on and says that your salvation is a reflection of that same power as well, chapter 2, verse 1. The power of God in our Savior. The power of God in our salvation. And, chapter 2, verse 1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 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." Remember we said that the word "and" shows that Paul is not introducing a new thought despite the chapter break, he's actually continuing the thought talking about the power of God in the resurrection of Christ and now in the spiritual resurrection of your soul. He puts those 2 things in parallel. He equates them as equal manifestations of the unstoppable omnipotence of God. Nothing could stop him from raising Christ and nothing stopped him from raising us from the dead by his own power.

Chapter 2, verse 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." There you were, beloved, dead in sin, dominated by the devil and by nature a child of wrath.

Verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy." Do you see it again? Do you see the favorable disposition of God toward you in Christ? "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions," he has just built it up and built it up and the tension and the tension and the tension, God was like this and "He made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him," verse 6, "and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Look at those verses, beloved, weary Christian tired of the struggle, burdened under the weight of life, sometimes feeling alone and isolated and frustrated, look at these verses. Look up. Look up. Look up. Look up, beloved, and see what this passage says about your God. Verse 4, look at it with me. Put your finger on the text. Touch the text as if it were precious stone that you would just stroke in affection and gratitude. "God, being rich in mercy," toward you, "because of His great love with which He loved us," mercy, love.

Verse 5, grace, "by grace you have been saved." That's the present position that you enjoy on the receiving end of rich mercy, great love and unconquerable grace.

And beloved, we have only just begun. This is as bad as it's ever going to be for us is to be in a position of being on the receiving end of rich mercy, great love and unconquerable grace. This is as bad as it gets and this is great and the reason that I can say that is what it goes on to say there in verse 7, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." There are unfolding ages of eternity where with undiminished eyes and with souls unhindered by sin we are going to see the unveiled glory of God and we are going to worship him for his grace and kindness toward us. We are going to be glorified. We are going to be perfected. And we are going to know this endless, immeasurable bliss of being in heaven with our loving, gracious, powerful, heavenly Father, casting our crowns, as it were, at the feet of our brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed his blood for us and so overwhelmed and above us and below us and to our left and to our right and infinitely deep into our souls and extending beyond the skies on full display this magnificent grace and love and mercy of God and we are going to understand with unveiled eyes and with expanded minds and understanding that God has done all of this and, "I am on the receiving end of such mercy."

So you see, beloved, whatever you were thinking when you walked in here today, God is favorably disposed toward you. God has an attitude of kindness and favor toward you that is on full display in the Scriptures that you possess now in life and it's only going to get better as we look to eternity. We, of all people, are greatly, richly blessed. All to his glory. All to the praise of his glory. We said that already but we are on the receiving end of a majestic gift that shows us the goodness and the kindness of God.

And just to wrap that thought up, just to climax it, Paul says that salvation was a work of God, not a work of our hands. Oh, out on the thought that we somehow contributed to this. Out on the thought that somehow this great disposition of grace toward us was somehow a reward for our righteousness. As Steve Lawson said, "Salvation was not a reward for your righteousness, it was a gift to the guilty." "We were guilty, vile and helpless we, Spotless Lamb of God was He." And Paul drives that point home lest there be any thought that we somehow deserve this in any way, shape or form, Paul says, look at it there in chapter 2, verse 8, I know you know the verse, "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Here we are, a small body of believers, ever growing in sanctification and in numbers but who cares about that? The point is that here we are saved by grace, saved by the power of God, created, not self-made. A Christian is not a self-made man, he is somebody that God has created in Christ Jesus for good works. So whatever the outside world may think, we know based on the testimony of Scripture that we have been the objects of redeeming love, of great power, that can only lead us to the conclusion that God has the settled attitude of favor toward us and that he who has blessed us thus far will most certainly

bring the gift to perfection. You are positioned so well in Christ and you should think the most lofty thoughts of God.

Well, we saw the praise to God, the power of God and as we have been looking at finally here in verses 11 through 22, the production of unity. Prior to salvation, we once were far off, Paul reminds us of the theme, and remembering your past is a way to appreciate the present and future that you now have in Christ. Verse 11, Paul commands us, "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human hands," verse 12, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ," before your salvation he's referring to. "Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." What we do in order to appreciate our salvation even more from this position of blessing that we now enjoy, part of the way that we enhance our gratitude is we look back and remember what it used to be like, that we were separate from God, dead in sin, having no promises to claim as our own, no hope and without God in the world. For some of you, if you had carried through on your thoughts of suicide back in those days, you would have entered into a Christ-less eternity of incalculable judgment and horror but God didn't allow that. God prevented that because he was favorably disposed to you in the end.

We look back and we see our former life and we were lost and aimlessly wandering with nowhere to go and then God saved us and now, verse 13, "now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. He Himself is our peace." Verse 16, "He might reconcile them both," meaning Jews and Gentiles, "both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity." He slew that which would have slain us which was the condemnation of the law and now in verse 18, through Christ "we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." We are reconciled to God. There is no more disharmony. It has all been put away. Christ has covered it all. In a gracious act of self-denial and self-sacrifice, our Lord Jesus laid down his life so that we might enjoy these kinds of blessings. And so whatever else we think about God, we think as Christians, "He intends good for me. He has blessed me. He has graciously, mercifully dealt with my soul and he will only expand and magnify that even more throughout all the ages of eternity."

Oh beloved, oh beloved, I beg you as we come to the table tonight to think high thoughts of your God. To think lofty thoughts of his favorable disposition toward you so that, so that you would trust him. This table is a tangible reminder that our God is worthy of our trust. That though sometimes we trust him through tears, sometimes we trust him through sorrow, we still trust him and we realize that that which produces the tears does not contradict the fact that God is favorably disposed. God intends your blessing. That's how good he is to his children and he did all of this so that we might be a people who belong uniquely to him and be devoted to worship. Look at verses 21 and 22, Paul says, verse 19, "You are no longer strangers and aliens," that's in the past. That separation, that alienation, that hostility, that enmity with God, it is over. Christ has done away with that. That state, that condition no longer exists in your life as a Christian. Past tense. Present

tense, "you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household. Verse 21, "in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." It just makes your heart want to burst, doesn't it, with gratitude. With thanks. With praise. With worship. With trust. With submission. And when your heart has been brought to that tender point, then what a glorious opportunity it is for us to share in communion together.

Let's bow in prayer as we prepare our hearts.

Father, we do thank you for the lavish riches of your grace. We honor you and tonight, Father, we particularly affirm our confidence that you only intend good for us. The elements that are in front of us are an undeniable reminder of that. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are not ashamed to call us brethren, that is just an incalculable grace on your part. You have welcomed us into the family of God. You have purchased our access to God, Lord Jesus, with your shed blood. You left the throne of heaven, you came to Earth on a rescue mission for sinners and you sought us and you saved us and now we live in light of the blessings of your grace. We thank you for that and we pray now that this time of communion would be particularly rich in our hearts and that the praise and the gratitude of our hearts having confessed our sins, Father, would be a pleasing aroma to you that as we gladly, joyfully, trustingly take communion, you would look down, as it were, and see us being fitted together into a holy temple in the Lord, seeing us being built together into a dwelling of God, see us, Father, manifesting worship with joy and a holy reverence that is befitting of how good you have been to us.

As your heads are bowed, let me remind you that the celebration of communion is uniquely pleasing to the Lord. Christ instituted it so that we would remember him in this manner. He chose, redeemed and sealed us with great power so that we might be delivered from our sins and we gratefully remember this holy Christ tonight. We invite all of you to join us in the celebration of this table if you are an obedient Christian here this evening. In like manner, though, if you're still living in sin or rejecting Christ in some way, we ask you not to profane the Lord's table. Don't pretend to share in a work of Christ that you have actually stood apart from.

Father, we thank you for that and we anticipate this time now in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

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