

Sermon 18, But God, Ephesians 2:4-7

Proposition: God favored us with salvation because He loved and will keep loving us.

- I. God's Free, Saving Favor, vv. 4-6
 - A. He Intervened in our Lives
 - B. He Is Rich in Mercy
 - C. He Loved Us with Great Love
 - D. He Loved Us when we were Dead in Sin
 - E. He Made Us Live as He Made Christ Live
 - F. He Made Us Share in Christ's Ascension
 - G. He Made Us Share in Christ's Heavenly Session
 - H. His Favor Is Grace, and it Saves
- II. The Purpose of God's Favor, v. 7
 - A. To Demonstrate the Riches of His Grace
 - B. To Show Kindness to us Forever
- III. The Location of God's Favor: Only in Christ, v. 7c

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to what Martyn Lloyd-Jones called the “nerve centre” of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is of course a vast edifice, and not even a writer as brilliant as Paul or John could put the whole thing into a single sentence. But John 3:16 gets close, and so does Ephesians 2:4-7. Indeed, our text this morning is the core message of the Christian proclamation — that God saves us by His mere grace, that He does in us what He did in His Son, and in fact that all of this is the result of His eternal love, favor, kindness, and mercy. If you memorize this text, you will be able to share the gospel with anyone. It's all about what God did for us when we were dead and helpless to do anything for ourselves, and about the purpose of His doing so much for us — which was to reveal Himself in His glorious mercy. What I hope to show you this morning with God's help is simply that God favored us in Christ with salvation because He loved us and will keep loving us.

I. God's Free, Saving Favor, vv. 4-6

Last Sunday's sermon was definitely and deliberately depressing. I wanted us to feel the weight of the apostolic teaching. We were going to Hell in a handbasket and there was nothing we or any other ordinary human could do about it. There are no exit ramps off the highway to Hell — at least, none constructed by human hands! But of course Ephesians 2 doesn't end with v. 3. Verse 4 begins with a “But.”

Now, in human vernacular, this little word means “disregard everything I just said.” If one of you comes up to me and says, “Caleb, I know you're a great guy and a wonderful

preacher, but . . .” I know something not so nice is going to come next. “But” means “I’m changing direction, and what I’m about to say is not in logical continuity with everything I just said!” In this case, of course, this is fantastic news. We were rotten scumbags, dead, under wrath, following the world’s nasty practices and subject of the Prince of Darkness. But! But God, in fact.

A. He Intervened in our Lives

The one who intervened is God. The one who changed our destination is God. The one who rescued us from that path to Hell is God. That’s what this little phrase “But God” means. I hope your mother taught you, as mine did me, that in this phrase lies the entire Christian confession. We were dead in trespasses and sins, *but God . . .* raised us from the dead! In other words, if you are a Christian a decisive break has come at some point in your life. The “disregard everything I just was” moment has come upon you. It may have been obvious or it may have been subtle, but according to the apostle’s teaching, you were born dead in sin and you stayed that way unless and until God intervened.

B. He Is Rich in Mercy

And why did He intervene? Why did He meddle with us spiritually dead human beings? Because He is rich in mercy. He is not just richly merciful; He is rich, rich not just in money but also rich in mercy! Mercy is compassion on misery. Mercy is looking down and seeing that someone is hurting or in danger and intervening to make that person’s situation better. God is not only merciful, but rich in mercy!

Brothers and sisters, why did God intervene in our lives when we were dead in trespasses and sins? Because He is rich in mercy! Because He overflows with compassion on those who are captive to Satan, following the course of the world, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind, hateful and hating one another. This is our God.

C. He Loved Us with Great Love

And as if being rich in mercy were not enough, He loved us with a great love. This is what our God did, in and of Himself. He didn’t just love us. He didn’t just love us a lot. He loved us with a great love! Brothers and sisters, do you recognize this God? He is love. And this is how He loved the world: He gave us His only begotten Son for Christmas. That is God’s love. It doesn’t take love to give money or material things for Christmas. But to give yourself and your Son for Christmas? That takes love. That takes great love. That takes the kind of love that only the God who is love could have loved us with.

D. He Loved Us when we were Dead in Sin

Because notice when He loved us. The commentators tie themselves in knots over the Greek word at the beginning of v. 5, which could mean “and” or “even.” It obviously means “even” to anyone who is even half conscious of what the passage is talking about! God loved us, *even when* we were nasty, evil, rotten dirtbags who would just as soon murder Him as listen to a word He said. Those of you who work in retail, in customer service, or in other jobs that deal with the general public know that people are infuriating. But it is exactly those kind of people that God

loved. It was people like you and me. That's who He loved. And that's when He loved us — not when we were glamorous people on the cover of a glossy magazine, looking great — but when our outer crust reflected our inner turmoil. He was not just compassionate on our misery in general; He loved us in particular.

This is your God, brothers and sisters. He is rich in mercy, and even richer in love. It is our greatest privilege and highest goal to be like Him.

E. He Made Us Live as He Made Christ Live

So what did our Father do for us because of His love and mercy? How did He act to relieve our misery, to heal our deadness? The first thing the apostle mentions is that He made us alive together with Christ. If you are united to Christ, both federally and mystically, then His resurrection is yours. God raised Him from the dead by the power of His power, as we saw in the previous chapter — and now, He is in the business of raising from the dead those united to Christ. You were dead in trespasses and sins. The solution is one that only God could have: it was to raise you from the dead. You didn't raise yourself. You couldn't raise yourself. Only God can raise someone from the dead. Only He can make dead bones live. The exemplary cause of our resurrection is Christ's resurrection.

We were spiritually dead; in Christ, we have been made spiritually alive. Someday, our mortal bodies too will experience the fullness of resurrection because the resurrection Christ brings is a two-stage event. The first stage is a spiritual resurrection; the final stage, which completes the first, is the physical resurrection. The separation in time between these two events corresponds to the separation in time between our spiritual death and our physical death. The spiritual death comes first — and even so, the spiritual resurrection comes first.

By “spiritual” here, as I've said before, don't understand “unreal” or “fake.” “Spiritual” means “relating to the Holy Spirit.” When you are spiritually dead, you are unable to receive anything from the Holy Spirit. You are no more able to communicate with the Spirit or do good things that please Him than a physically dead person is able to communicate physically or to bring about physical goods. To be spiritually resurrected is simply to be put back in touch with the Spirit, and enabled to do things that please Him. Ultimately, this resurrection is the implantation of a new principle of spiritual life at the core of your being. It is an inclining of your heart toward God and away from sin. It is the first, seed form of God's intervention in your life.

F. He Made Us Share in Christ's Ascension

But God's intervention doesn't stop with the implantation of new life. He also raised us up together with Jesus. This is a reference to Christ's ascension into Heaven. Jesus “rose” and He was “raised up” — i.e., He came back to life and He went up to Heaven.

What does this mean? You and I are still clearly residents of Earth. People who begin to believe in Jesus don't vanish directly into Heaven; they remain right here among us. And so how can it possibly be true to say that God raised us up to Heaven?

Basically, that question assumes that Heaven is a particular place, and that if you travel enough miles on the correct heading (or travel through some kind of portal to another world) you

can arrive there. But is that really how you would define Heaven? “Heaven is someplace right now in a galaxy far, far away.” I think most of us would rather say that Heaven is where God is with His people. And that’s exactly what Paul means when He says that we are seated in the heavenlies. We are where God is. We have fellowship with Him, access to His presence, and the ability to speak with Him at any time. God raised us up to Heaven.

G. He Made Us Share in Christ’s Heavenly Session

And more than that, He made us sit down. We are at peace; we are at rest; in Christ, we have everything we need for salvation! We don’t have to be chickens with our heads cut off, running around and trying to be sure that we get ourselves saved. He is the one who raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He did it not because we deserved it; the whole point of the text is that He did it despite the fact that we deserved Hell!

Brothers and sisters, have you applied to your life the truth that salvation is of the Lord and therefore that we can sit down in His presence, resting in the joy of what Jesus is and what God has done for us in Him? A true saint is not worried about whether he’s a saint, whether he’s done enough to make God happy, whether his efforts ultimately matter. A true saint is content with what God has done for him, and sits and rests in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Jesus sits at the Father’s right, waiting for His enemies to be fully and finally subdued; but we sit with Him, knowing that the victory is His and that our call is to abide in Him.

This doesn’t mean, of course, that once you’re saved you have no further need to do anything. Paul simultaneously teaches that our salvation is secure, that we have sat down with Christ because everything is done — and that God made good works for us to walk in.

H. His Favor Is Grace, and it Saves

The short way of saying all of this about resurrection, ascension, and session with Christ, all accomplished by direct actions of God Almighty, is that we have been saved by grace. Notice, then, that grace is not a spiritual steroid that makes you able to do superhuman things like save yourself. Rather, grace is God’s favor. God “did you a favor”: He resurrected you from spiritual death. He did you another favor: He put you in His presence, which is what we call Heaven in its seed form. He did yet a third favor: He let you sit down because the work of saving you is done. Don’t you see how the subject clear through this section is God? He is the one at work, He is the one saving, He is the one who shows you massive favors and seats you in His presence. That’s what grace is: it’s God’s free favor that works for your benefit. To say that your Heavenly Father resurrected you, lifted you into His presence, and made you sit down there with Christ is simply to say that you have been saved by grace. It was God’s grace that made Him do all those things — and all those things are what salvation is. To be saved is to receive as a totally free gift the resurrection life of the Son of God pulsing in your veins. And why did God give this gift?

II. The Purpose of God’s Favor, v. 7

A. To Demonstrate the Riches of His Grace

Paul gives us two reasons, or one complex reason. It was to demonstrate the riches of His grace. God did it because he wanted to manifest how overflowing, how overpowering, are the riches of

His grace. Do you see that? God saved you to show what He's like! This is not selfishness; it is the ultimate act of altruism. God is sharing Himself with you because He is the most glorious, perfect, wonderful being that is or can be. He gave us resurrection life with and in His Son to make it clear just how loaded He is — not with cash, but with grace! His favors aren't exhausted by \$50 here and there. His favors are things like a brand-new yacht, every year for eternity! (Obviously, that's a metaphor. His favors often take the form of spiritual riches more than physical wealth — but He favors us with physical gifts too!) He wanted to display His riches, and He chose to do it by taking rotten, nasty people like you and me and showering us with every spiritual blessing. That, brothers and sisters, is the Christian message.

Through the ages to come, God wants His kindness to be on display. He wants His glory to be seen. You and I are what people look at to judge how gracious and kind God is. That's by design. We are supposed to show the world the riches of His grace and kindness. What do people see when they look at you? A gracious, kind person who serves a gracious, kind God? Are you rich in these virtues? According to Paul, you should be, because you were saved to show how gracious and kind God is. (Yes, I understand that the riches of God's grace are also visible if you think of Him saving a demanding, rotten, wretched person who is ungracious and unkind. But people aren't generally going to think, "Wow, that Christian God must certainly be kind if He saved so-and-so grumpy Christian that I know!")

B. To Show Kindness to us Forever

As if mercy, grace, and love weren't words big enough to describe what God did, Paul uses one more: Kindness. God shows His kindness to us in our salvation! We think of love, mercy, and grace as big theological terms. Those are important things that God shows. But kindness is a more human virtue, a more relatable virtue — even, I think many of us think, a lesser virtue. To be kind is something anyone can do, while to love and be merciful and gracious? That's hard. But Paul wants us to know that God is not only gracious, loving and merciful. He is kind too. He doesn't want to overtax us. He doesn't want to hurt us. He doesn't want to use force unsuited to the human being on us.

When did you last thank God for His kindness? When did you last show kindness because your God is kind? You see, if you think God is demanding, you will be a demanding, unkind person. But if you see His kindness, you will be kind too! God wants to show kindness to you, not just now but forever.

III. The Location of God's Favor: Only in Christ, v. 7c

And did you notice where God's grace comes to us? Only in Christ. Only when you are united to Christ by faith do you experience the saving benefits the Father gives. Yes, God raised you before you believed — but as soon as you were raised, you started to believe!

Do you see that the whole Christian faith is only true, and only possible, because of what Jesus Christ did? His life, His death, His resurrection are at the center of it all. Because He did what He did, you can experience the favor of God Almighty. So believe Jesus. Trust Him. Sit

down with Him in the heavenlies. You are a trophy of God's grace, mercy, love, and kindness. So live like it! Amen.