

“But God”
Ephesians 2:4
(Preached at Trinity, March 23, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In the first chapter Paul stated that he wanted these Ephesians to understand the greatness of God's power working in them.
Ephesians 1:18-19 NAU - "*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,* ¹⁹ *and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.* "
Paul is now showing them the greatness of that power.
2. In **Verses 1-3** Paul wants us to know just how desperate our situation was.
 - We were spiritually dead, unable to know God; unable to reach out to Him.
 - We were engulfed by this present world, walking according to its ways which are under the power and deceptions of Satan.
 - We were bound by the lusts of our flesh always doing those things that the flesh and mind willed to do.
 - We were under God's wrath and condemnation.
3. Humanly speaking there was nothing we could do. Paul says we were dead. This describes inability. We were no more able to turn to God for the benefit of our soul than a corpse is able to rise up and leave the grave.
4. The Bible portrays this helplessness of man.
John 6:44 NAU - "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."
δύναμαι – This word points to ability – no one is able to come the Father.
5. God reaches out in the Gospel but as corpses we had no ability to reach out to Him.
 - A. God commands us to trust the effectual work of His Son as our Redeemer but we have no ability to believe. Satan effectively keeps us blinded.
2 Corinthians 4:4 NAU - "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
 - B. God commands every man to repent and turn from his sin but we are so in love with our sin we have no desire to forsake our sin and reach out to Him.
We are in a hopeless condition. It is impossible for us to restore ourselves to a right relationship with God.
6. But what is hopeless for man is possible with God.
Matthew 19:24-26 NAU - "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁶ And looking at *them* Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

7. These are two of the most wonderful words in all of Scripture, "But God . . ."
- A. This entire section screams salvation as a supernatural work of God
1. *Martin Lloyd-Jones* said of these two words, "But God" – "These two words, in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole gospel. The gospel tells of what God has done, God's intervention; it is something that comes entirely from outside us and displays to us that wondrous and amazing and astonishing work of God . . ."
 2. Our salvation is entirely of God. Contrast it with **Verse 8**
Ephesians 2:8 NAU - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God"
 - 3 We were dead, God makes alive.
 - 4 **Verse 4** serves as a transition that links **Verses 1-3** to the next section. In other words we were dead and bound by sin and were under God's just wrath and condemnation but as we read in **Verse 5** - "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ"
- B. God is able to raise the dead.
1. Jesus commanded Lazarus with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."
 2. Ezekiel prophesies about a valley of dry bones:
Ezekiel 37:1-5 NAU - "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ² He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. ³ He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." ⁴ Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' ⁵ "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life."
8. **Verse 4** tells us why God has done what He has done. Why did God choose to deliver us from our wretched condition and supernaturally raise us from the dead? Paul tells us it was because of God's mercy and in order to satisfy His love.
9. This morning I want to explore the richness of God's mercy and the greatness of God's love in saving us from our terrible sin.
- I. The richness of God's mercy
- A. First, what do we mean by mercy? How do we define it?
1. Although we often speak of grace and mercy as almost synonymous there is a difference
 - a. Grace – God giving us what we have not earned and what we do not deserve. It is God giving us what we cannot earn. Every blessing comes by grace.
 - b. Mercy – God not giving us what we have earned and what we do deserve.
Romans 6:23 NAU - "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
We have earned God's wrath and condemnation. We deserve it but by God's mercy He has blessed us with pity and compassion.

- c. The distinctions between grace and mercy often fade. This is why we find mercy emphasized here in **Verse 4** but in **Verse 5** Paul reminds us that God's wondrous intervention into the lives of fallen humanity is by grace. Here Paul declares God as "rich in mercy" but in **Verse 7** he declares "the surpassing riches of His grace."
We might say that mercy is God's rich favor of grace given to those who deserve the exact opposite.
 2. All of us have sinned. All of us are guilty and all of us deserve God's infinite judgment but God has chosen to show pity upon His elect people.
 3. Paul is speaking of the riches of God's mercy—infinite mercy to overcome infinite guilt; infinite mercy that is fully sufficient to save each and every one of God's elect people.
John Eadie – "Though mercy has been expended by God for six millennium, and myriads of myriads have been partakers of it, it is still unexhausted mine of wealth."
- B. God's mercy is always an act of His sovereign will
1. Mercy is one of God's Divine attributes – something that is a part of His Divine essence. But God's attributes are always manifested according to God's sovereign determination
 - a. God is infinitely powerful, yet He manifests His power according to His purposes.
 - b. God is love and yet He chooses how to direct His love
 - c. God is good but His goodness is manifested in many ways according to His sovereign prerogative
 - d. Likewise God is merciful, and yet He is free to be merciful according to His divine pleasure.
Romans 9:15 NAS - "For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."
 2. God's attributes are never in conflict. God's attribute of Divine mercy does not deny His other attributes. God remains perfectly holy and perfectly just. God chooses to manifest great forbearance today because of His mercy. But God's mercy does not deny His perfect justice or of His infinite wrath. It only delays it.
Nahum 1:3 NAS - "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished."
- C. God has chosen a people for Himself from among fallen humanity
1. God's election is an infinite display of His compassion. He has taken wretched sinners under His wrath and has determined to adopt them as His sons and daughters
Ephesians 1:5 NAU - "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will"

2. He has chosen to love His enemies. Only a wealth of mercy would lead to such compassion. But Paul says God is “rich in mercy.” The word refers to wealth. God is infinitely wealthy.
3. Do you understand the riches of God’s mercy He has directed towards you?
But now we climb even higher into the heavenly places as we explore our deliverance from sin.

III. Second, Paul tells us that God choose to save us because of the greatness of His love

- A. Love is another one of God’s attributes – love is of the essence of God.
 - 1 **John 4:7-8 NAU** - "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."
 1. What is God’s love? How do you define it?
Matthew Henry says of God’s love – “Love is his inclination to do us good”
Perhaps William Hendriksen said it best, “The love of God is so great that it defies all definition.”
 - a. It is indeed difficult to define God’s love. Do we define it as great personal interest, or passionate desire, or emotional attachment?
It seems we are limited by trying to describe God’s love in terms of human emotion.
But God does not react according to emotional stirrings.
 - b. For God love is best defined by how it is demonstrated. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . .”
 - c. Here in **Verse 4** Paul describes it as the great love by which He loved us. It is the love demonstrated by loving us. It is the love that seized us when we were most unlovely.
 2. The Bible describes God’s love as being at the very heart of His triune nature. The Father, Son, and the HS are characterized by love.
 - a. God is the Father of mercies, and so the Father of love, who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son to die for it.
 - b. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, the prince of peace and of love, who so loved His church as to shed his blood for her
Ephesians 5:27 NAU - "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."
 - c. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God flows out, and by whom God’s holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of all the saints on earth and in heaven.”
“The fruit of the Spirit is love.”
 3. Like God’s attribute of mercy, God’s love does not overrule or diminish His other attributes like holiness, justice, and wrath.
 - a. To deny any of God’s attributes is to deny the essence of God. To send a person to hell does not diminish God’s attribute of love.
 - b. Everything God does is motivated by love – it is God’s very nature to love

- c. For example, God is holy and a righteous judge, but as a loving God He has postponed judgment. He is full of compassion. And how great His love to remove all that is defiled so that we might spend eternity surrounded by righteousness.
- B. God chose to love His elect people as an act of His sovereign grace
- 1 While it is God's nature to love, His love is still sovereign and cannot be influenced. We didn't do anything to make God love us. We were spiritually dead and wretched in sin.
1 John 4:19 NAU - "We love, because He first loved us."
Romans 5:8 NAU - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
 - 2 Paul uses the personal pronoun – He loved us. God chose to love a particular people. He chose to love us.
 Paul is describing love in the past tense using a verb that implies completed action. God chose us in eternity and then displayed it openly at the cross.
 - 3 Paul describes it as “great love” – The Greek language has several words that mean “great.” Here Paul uses the word πολὺς which has a quantitative meaning. It was much love.
 - a. This is the word Jesus used in Matt 7
Matthew 7:13 NAS - "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it."
 - b. It was a love that was so great that He sent His Son to deliver His elect people.
 - c. It is as if Paul is asking the question, “Why did God raise us from the dead.” Because He loved us.
 - 4 This is His particular love – covenant love. It is a love directed to God's particular people. It is a love that has been God's motivation throughout history to redeem His people. It is a love that brought Jesus into the world. Listen to our Lord's prayer in John 17
John 17:21 NAU - "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."
 5. Can you imagine that! God has loved us as He loves His Son. God has loved us from before the world began. It is an everlasting love. It is an unfailing love. It is an unassailable love.
 Listen to Paul:
Romans 8:38-39 NAU - "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Conclusion:

1. Paul doesn't really begin to speak of our great salvation until **Verse 5**. With these opening verses Paul wants us to understand how great our depravity so we can understand how great our deliverance.
2. Paul also wants us to comprehend the greatness of His love for us. He wants us to comprehend the incomprehensible. As he will state in **Chapter 3 - Ephesians 3:19 NAU** - "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."
3. God has loved you, not you as a member of the human race but you as one of His particular elect people. Paul isn't telling us that God loved us because He loves everyone. He loves us particularly as those He chose and adopted from before the world began.
4. May this fill your heart with the rich assurance of God's determination to save you and may it fill your heart with overflowing love and gratitude to God.