

## Saved to Display God's Riches in Christ

### Ephesians 2.7

A few years ago Renae and I enjoyed a round of the Newly Wed Game—Church Version—with some other couples. We did ok, although we lost to a couple that you could hardly call “newlyweds.” As you know, the Newly Wed Game is not meant to see how much deep knowledge you have of your spouse. Most of the questions are trivial, some funny, none truly weighty. Still, if you don't do well, you leave feeling kind of bad that you let your spouse down. Imagine how you would feel if the game really did get at the heart of your relationship. What if the questions *were* substantial and meaningful? How would you feel if you did poorly in that instance? What if the question were asked, “What is the most important thing in your spouse's life?” and you couldn't answer, or you answered wrongly? That would be pretty bad, right? We should know what is most important to our spouse. So, your spouse comes out and the host reads the question again—“what is the most important thing in your life?”—and your spouse says something different than what you wrote down on your card. You were wrong. Perhaps, you're even surprised at the real answer. All along you thought you knew your spouse, but it turns out that you weren't really paying close attention after all. You didn't even know what was most important to her; much less did you know whether she liked peanut butter and banana better than peanut butter and marshmallow.

I'm afraid that many Christians, and perhaps many Churches, would be surprised at the answer that our heavenly Spouse—Jesus Christ—would give to this question. Some would not only be surprised, they might even be scandalized to learn the truth about the one thing God prizes above all others. So let me ask you, what does God treasure most of all? What is most important to Him? Do you have your answer ready? Ok. Now prepare to hear His answer—HIMSELF! The main point of our text this morning is that **God saved you so that He might display the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus**. But in order to appreciate what is being said here, we need to set this truth within the broader concept of God's ultimate goal or purpose.

**God's greatest treasure is His own glory.** “So that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches . . .” Some have tried to confine the “coming ages” to the succession of human history until the coming of Christ. Others have understood the “coming ages” as the succession of time only after the coming of Christ. Because Paul has typical terminology to refer both to this age and to the age to come, it is probably best to take “coming ages” as referring to all points in the future, both before and after the coming of Christ. We might best understand Paul to be saying “a *perpetual* show of God's immeasurable riches.”

The verb “to show” indicates that God is putting something on display—putting it out there for His own enjoyment, as well as for the pleasure of others. Think of the Personal Jewel Collection of Queen Elizabeth II. Their display points to the wealth and heritage of the Monarchy. Each piece, regardless of its history, is inherently valued very highly. Add to that the fact that each piece represents historical moments in the storied history of the British people—civil wars, coups, revolutions, and treaties. In the showing of these jewels is a display of the importance, the weight, the glory of the British Monarchy and

Kingdom. For example, the King George IV State Diadem “includes 1333 diamonds and 169 pearls along its base. Its design features roses, thistles and shamrocks, the floral symbols of England, Scotland and Ireland respectively.”<sup>i</sup> This impressive crown exhibit’s the monarchy’s wealth and prestige over vast and diverse peoples. God also has an exhibit that speaks of His importance, His weight, His character, His glory.

What Paul tells us here about God’s glory in our salvation is consistent with what we see in the rest of Scripture—God does everything for the praise of His glory. **Isaiah 44.6** says, “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last.’” Later in **48.12** he says “I am the first, and I am the last.” We also recall the words of the Lord God in **Revelation 1.8** “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” All of these texts point to the same truth, God is the source and cause of all that is, and He is the goal, the end, the purpose for which all things exist. Listen to Paul reiterate this: **Romans 11.36**-- “For of Him and through Him, and to Him, are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.” **Colossians 1.16**—“For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him.” **Hebrews 2.10** says that Jesus is the One, “for whom and by whom all things exist.” God’s decrees, His goal in creation and providence is Himself! “The heavens declare” . . . what? “the glory of God” (**Psalms 19.1**). That is why they were made—to declare their Maker’s praise.

Now, some may object that for God to seek His own glory supremely would make God vain and contemptible. After all, we generally frown on people who do things only to be seen by others. How can God seek His own glory, while He condemns such self-seeking in us? Jonathan Edwards dealt with this objection in his treatise *The End for Which God Created the World*, in which he also concluded that God’s chief end is His own glory. He says that it is right for God to make himself his highest and last end, because He is supremely valuable. If He devalued Himself, He would be an evil judge. If He valued anything higher than Himself, He would be an idolater. Secondly, Edwards argued that “God’s esteeming Himself supremely is not contrary to His esteeming human happiness, since He is that happiness. . . . Nothing is more loving than for God to exalt Himself for the enjoyment of men.” Furthermore, when God commands us to praise Him, He is commanding a praiseworthy activity, because it is right to give honor where honor is due, and God is supremely glorious and honorable and praiseworthy.

So, being a good judge, and knowing perfectly the value of all things, and not being an idolater, God holds His own glory in highest regard, and makes the display of that glory His chief purpose. **God’s greatest treasure is His own glory.** Not only does God display His glory in creation and providence, but, and this is the point of our text, God displays His glory in the gracious way He saves sinners.

**God displays the glory of His grace by saving sinners through Christ.** There are many attributes or characteristics of God that are displayed in various ways. Paul says that God’s eternal power and divine nature are continually on display through the things that are created. God displays His goodness by the care that He has for His creatures. So, Jesus can argue from the lesser to the greater, that if God clothes the fields with beautiful flowers to adorn, how much more will He see to clothing us. And if God sees to the feeding of the sparrows, that neither sow nor reap, how much more will He care for us. God’s care

for these lesser creatures shows that He is good and kind, therefore He can be trusted. Paul says that God's wrath is revealed from heaven in the judgments that He executes on the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom 1.18). Just as a stroll through the museums of the Smithsonian reveal a wide range of characteristics of humanity-- our ingenuity and creativity, our potential for valor and for viciousness, our curiosity and pioneer vision, our many vanities and empty conceits—displays good and bad, so God has many exhibits in which to display aspects of His glorious person—all very good.

Our text says that God has a display that shows off His deep love and wide mercy. He has a display rich with history—it is the history of His longsuffering patience with rebel sinners; the history of His faithfulness in the face of human failure and of our unfaithfulness; the history of His loving condescension, becoming flesh, being born of a woman, born under the law, so that He might redeem those who were under the law. These “jewels” tell the story of the blessed One who became a curse for us so that we might receive the blessing of Abraham. They tell the story of the sinless One who became sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. They embody the history of God reconciling sinners to Himself in Christ Jesus so that in this union we share in His burial, dying to sin, and share in His resurrection and ascension, living to God and reigning over the enemies of our souls. What a story is told, what a God is extolled, in this display! But what is this display of the immeasurable riches of God? Or better, who is this display of the immeasurable riches of God? You, beloved, you are the display—the display for eternal ages—of the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness in Christ Jesus.

You are saved by grace so that God may display His grace in your salvation forever and ever. Speaking of the return of His people from exile, God says, “bring My sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for my glory” (Isa 43.6-7). In **Isa 48.11**, God tells us why he refines His people to purge them of their sin: “For My own sake, for My own sake, I do it, for how should My name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.” Why does God give His people righteousness and establish them in Immanuel's land? God says, in **Isa 60.21**, “Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I might be glorified.” They will be called “oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that *He* may be glorified” (**Isa 61.3**). Repeatedly throughout the prophecy of Ezekiel, the Lord tells the people that He is going to save them, not for their sakes, but for His holy name's sake. He is going to save them and sanctify them so that they will know and all the nations will know that He is the Lord. Even in that great New Covenant promise of which we are the direct heirs (**Ezek 36.22ff**), God says, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the LORD GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.” Why does God “sprinkle clean water” on us to cleanse us from every uncleanness and idol? Why does He give us a new heart and a new spirit, removing the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh? Why does God put His Spirit within us and cause us to walk in His statutes and to be careful to obey His rules? Why does He secure us as His people and give Himself to us as our God? This is the reason He gives: “Then they will know that I am the Lord” (**Ezek 36.38**). He saves

us for His own glory—for the glory of His name—for the glory of His grace. He saves us “in order to make known in the coming ages the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Here Paul speaks of God’s grace as “immeasurable.” “Super-abounding” is another way of translating this Greek word. This is typical of Paul’s wonder at the grace of God. Earlier, in chapter 1, he referred to “His glorious grace” and “the wealth of His grace, which He lavished upon us.” Just above in verse 4 Paul spoke of God “being *rich* in mercy, because of the *great* love with which He loved us.” There is nothing small and ordinary in the grace of God. Paul’s own testimony was this: “Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy . . . and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (**1 Tim 1.13-15**). This is much like the title of the spiritual biography of that great Christian, John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners or A Brief Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to His Poor Servant John Bunyan*.

Paul also describes God’s grace as “kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” God’s kindness refers to those actions fit for the welfare of His creatures and rising from His benevolent character. He gives the sun and the rain for the good of all. He provides for and protects His creatures. But Paul has a particular kindness in view, one that is peculiar to the people of God—His kindness in Christ Jesus. To appreciate this peculiar kindness, I refer you back to chapter 1 verses 3-14, where Paul expounds on every Spiritual blessing in the heavenly places that God gave us in Christ. I refer you to Paul’s prayer in 1.19 where he speaks of “the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.” This kindness is expressed in this immediate context in verses 5-6 “even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Implications:

Assurance of Salvation. God has placed His name on His people. Another way of saying this is that He has attached His reputation to the outcome of His people’s lives. Listen to what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2.13, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.” Beloved, this is not a license to sin, this is an encouragement to repent, confess and turn on your sin. Satan will condemn you, telling you that there is no way God is going to see your face again after what you have done. He will tell you that you are hopelessly enslaved to your sin, so you might as well give up the fight. But God’s Word says, “The accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God” (Rev 12.10). He can rage and rail at you all day long, but “there was no longer any place for them in heaven”—he has no audience with God to accuse you any longer (Rev 12.8). You see, God has placed His mark on you, He has written His name upon your forehead. The blood of the Lamb, the Son of God, covers your sins. Satan wouldn’t dare to accuse you before God’s throne. So he resorts to accusing you to your face. Now, are you going to despair at his accusations? Or, are you going to fly to Christ? His glory is displayed in your salvation. His grace is on display in the coming ages through your

salvation. He will not be unfaithful. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1.9). He is faithful. Even when we are faithless, He is faithful, because He cannot deny Himself. God’s objective to glorify His grace in your salvation is a solid ground of assurance.

How we understand and explain the gospel. Do you understand that your salvation is all of grace? Do you explain to others that salvation is all a gracious work of God? It is “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20.24). If your testimony is all about what you have done, then you need to go back and re-read the narrative of your life, and particularly of your conversion. It is not primarily the story of how you *came* to Christ, but of how God saved you—how God rescued you. I love the fact that after Peter preached his first gospel sermon, the people responded, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Then he told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2.37-38). But the good news was not “repent and believe.” The good news was that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself! Now, I don’t mean to say that gospel sermons do not have an appeal to repent and believe, for they certainly do. I’m only trying to say that the “good news” is what God has done for us in Christ. We must recognize, as we will see next week, that even faith and repentance are gifts from God, not virtues worked up from within our hearts. God means to glorify His grace through your salvation—through the salvation of sinners. So let’s tell the story to that end. Let’s tell of His grace.

How to Pray. Listen to Moses’ intercession for Israel after they sinned with the golden calf idol: “Why should the nations say, ‘With evil intent did God bring them out to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?’” (Exod 32.12). Again, when Israel rebelled in the wilderness and God threatened destruction, Moses prayed, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for You brought up this people in Your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For You, O LORD, are seen face to face, and Your cloud stands over them and You go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard Your fame will say, ‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that He swore to give to them that He has killed them in the wilderness’” (Num 14.13-16). Pray in all things for God to be glorified.

Living Now to Fulfill Our Eternal Purpose. 1 Cor 6.19-20 “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” Knowing that I am redeemed to display the glorious grace of God, how should I live? Not legalism. Not license. By grace through faith.

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Personal\\_Jewel\\_Collection\\_of\\_Elizabeth\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Personal_Jewel_Collection_of_Elizabeth_II)