

Introduction/Recap

Last week we started looking at Ephesians chapter two. Paul is moving from his glorious thirty-thousand-foot view of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus in chapter one to describing in more detail here in the beginning of chapter two. Both the dire predicament we were in and God's beautiful response to us.

I started last week with the example of how looking at a diamond on a dark backdrop can make it appear even more beautiful. The stark contrast of the radiant and sparkling jewel against a backdrop that does not reflect well can cause it to stand out even more. We talked about how that image is, in one sense, like looking at our sin with Jesus in mind. Jesus is not found lacking in light of our sin. In fact, God is seen more beautiful, more merciful, and more gracious when we consider our sin and our problems.

That is where Paul started in Ephesians chapter two. He talked about us "being dead." The picture Ezekiel gives of dry bones—we were "being" very dead! And we were dead in our trespasses and sins—in every way we were walking apart from God and against his will. And we talked about how we walked and lived in our sins and trespasses, and still often walk in them today, in three spheres:

1. **Following** the course of the world
2. Following the devil
3. In [following] our sinful flesh, body, and mind

We are influenced by a world that is trying to encourage us in ways that are contrary to God, we are influenced by a real spiritual being—Satan—and his followers to walk in ways contrary to God, and we are fighting a battle against our own flesh, body, and mind that was born in sin and is still trying to pull us back into sin and in ways contrary to God.

This description from Paul is meant to paint the bleakest of pictures. We aren't just any black backdrop—we are like these new **blackest-black paints**. Paints that can trap almost all light. Paint that **hides the form of the object** from our eyes because we can't even see the shadowy contours. This is what Ezekiel is getting at in his description. Dead! Very dead! Brittle bones. Very dark and bleak, hiding the form and shape of what we were meant to be in God as his image bearers.

Yet, as we saw last week, there is a glimmer of hope in Paul's description here. This is how we ONCE walked, this is who we WERE. In Christ Jesus this is not true of us today.

That is the great comparison Paul is making in the beginning of chapter two. He paints the very true and real picture of our problem—our nature and our choices before a holy and good God—and then he turns the camera. Where he started out talking about the black backdrop, he now turns to talk about the diamond. It is a movie style pan from one focus to

another. And, wow, does that diamond ever sparkle—especially in light of where we are in our sins.

Ephesians 2:4–7 Intro

We also saw how Paul started with us out in Ephesians 2 and all these participles (“ing” words) to describe our ongoing state. Here, Paul turns and again starts with God and participles to describe his ongoing state:

[*Kai* – Greek conjunction] **God, being** rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4–7, ESV)

Joining Ephesians 2:3 and 2:4 is a single conjunction. Unlike English, Greek uses the same conjunction for “and” AND “but” because they assume you can figure out whether the conjunction an idea is furthering the discussion or if there is a comparison going on. Or the technical term—a “coordinating conjunction” (two things going together) and an “adversative conjunction” (two things against each other).

Paul two statements about us and God in Ephesians two start like this:

You, being dead in your trespasses and sins...

God, being rich in mercy, because of [his] great love

Both of those main ideas joined with this one conjunction, *kai*.

There is no other place in Scripture where it is made so clear that this conjunction in Greek is clearly showing two statements in contrast with one another. It is called the biggest “but” in Scripture not to be crude, but because we should be floored, amazed, astounded by the contrast between our situation and our God and his character! The difference couldn’t be starker!

This morning, as we turn to look at the beauty of God in comparison to our sin, I pray that we see five things:

1. **In our sin we** deserved wrath (Eph 2:3), but God showed us love.
2. We were dead (Eph 2:1), but now we are made alive.
3. We were in bondage to sin in every way (Eph 2:1–2), but God gave us a position of authority over sin.
4. All of this was done **in Christ Jesus!**
5. All of this is for the future where God will lavish this mercy and love on us.

Here is my outline of this passage to help you see how those come straight from Paul's statements:

But God,

being rich in mercy,
because of the [his] great love

1. with which he loved us,
even when we were dead in our trespasses,

2. made us alive together with Christ

—by grace you have been saved!—

3. and raised us up with him [Christ]
and seated us with him [Christ]
in the heavenly places

in Christ Jesus,

so that in the coming ages
he might show the immeasurable riches
of his grace
in kindness toward us
in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4–7)

God: Being Merciful and Loving

We start with the main contrast of God to our situation. We were being dead, that dry bone imagery. God, on the other hand, has a default state of being rich in mercy and love.

But God,

being rich in mercy,
because of the [his] great love

I don't think we can dwell enough on this point: is this how you view God? We introduced this idea back in Ephesians 1:3–7, but this is consistently how God describes himself!

YWH, YWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
keeping steadfast love for thousands [of generations],
(Exodus 34:6–7, ESV)

God doesn't describe himself as angry (though he can get angry). God doesn't describe himself as vengeful (though he can take vengeance). God doesn't describe himself as apathetic. Merciful and gracious is what he says! He is a God who is taking away our punishments AND giving us what we don't deserve (that is the difference between mercy and grace). He is slow to anger, meaning God is not looking at me and you trying to find fault quickly, but rather he is patient with us. And this idea of his *hesed*, his steadfast love which is interwoven with the idea of mercy again and again in Scripture is abounding. He has a love and mercy that does not come from obligation or duty. In fact, this kind of love

and mercy are shown again and again as quite spontaneously coming from God in Scripture! This is the knee-jerk reaction of God, if you will. If you prick him, if you give him his pleasure, he will turn again and again to being merciful, to being loving. He is overflowing with mercy and love.

One of the jokes as a pastor when sharing Exodus 34:6–7 is just don't finish the sentence:

but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:7, ESV)

But that really isn't the problem people want to make it out to be. Yes, God is holy, righteous, and just. He cannot be in the presence of sin and he must punish wrongdoing. Yet HE is the one who provides a way out of the problem. How merciful is that?! HE is the one who was wronged yet HE is so overflowing with mercy that HE provides us the way out of punishment, wrath, and separation through faith in Jesus Christ! Even more so, when we look to other places like Isaiah 30:15–18, we can see it is exactly this idea of punishment that MOVES God to provide mercy! He provided a way and is simply wanting to shower those who turn to him with mercy!

For thus said the Lord YHW, the Holy One of Israel, “In returning [repenting] and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” But you were unwilling, and you said, “No! We will flee upon horses”; therefore you shall flee away; and, “We will ride upon swift steeds”; therefore your pursuers shall be swift. A thousand shall flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you shall flee, till you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill. Therefore YHW waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For YHW is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. (Isaiah 30:15–18, ESV)

How well does this describe me and you. God has already poured out his justice for you and me on Christ Jesus. Therefore you only need to come to him in rest and be saved. But we want to do it our way, and find that way is not God’s way!

Application

We have often missed the character of God! While he must be perfect, holy, righteous, and cannot stand being in the presence of sin because it is other than his nature, he has always characterized himself as overflowing, abundantly filled with mercy and love. If we don’t see God this way, especially as those who are in Jesus Christ, we are unwittingly serving an idol. A not-God. And Satan is just as happy to have me and you drawn away by a slightly false

image of the real God as much as he is to have us follow clear sin. It all keeps us from knowing and worshipping our God rightly!

I would encourage you today and this week to delve into your relationship with God and why you may not see him as merciful and loving. Has your relationship with your earthly parents merged into your relationship with your heavenly father? That is one of my biggest fears as a father—that I will mess up my kids' understanding of God through how I act. Is it your own perfectionism that wants to SHOW you are perfect—ride your own fast horse as Isaiah says—rather than accept mercy through Jesus Christ? Is it your own judgementalism towards others that maybe gets turned on yourself, where you can't imagine that if people make you as frustrated as you are that God could love someone like you who fails as well?

Rev22, don't follow an idol, follow our God! Know our God and know his mercy and love as you see it most clearly in Jesus Christ!

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15–20, ESV)

We see in Jesus, especially on the cross, this mercy and love of God poured out, overflowing, for me and you. Don't miss this God!

God loved us!

And this is exactly the point here in Ephesians! What did our God do with this mercy and love? He could have been selfish. There is no reason that God, content as he is within himself and the trinitarian existence that he has, that he HAD to show us mercy and love. He did not need to introduce his love outside of himself—but he did!

1. **with which** he loved us,
even when we were dead in our trespasses,

God took this love and placed it on me and you in Christ Jesus. And he did this when we were our ugliest—fully dead and only living in our trespasses and sins. Paul brings us back to this main condition you and I were in, that he described in Ephesians 2:1–3. We should have been objects of wrath and hate, but God gave us mercy and love.

Application

There is a two-fold message that we all need to hear. We are all sinners and deserve the wrath of God because of our sin. And, through faith in Jesus Christ we can receive God's mercy and love. But there is something for us to learn here from God's disposition. If his mercy and love is his main disposition, and if our sin is what leads him to offer mercy

and love, what should we be offering to others outside of Christ? Yes, they need to know they are sinners—the good news is not good unless there is a bad situation. But God's emphasis, our emphasis, should be the opportunity for love and mercy. Having learned from Ephesians 1 that God has to be the one to awaken dead hearts, this should only encourage our evangelism!

Knowing that God is the one who has to breath into dry bones means you and I can be bold when talking to unbelievers. We can clearly yet lovingly let them know God offers love and mercy through faith in Jesus. That is what a world, dead in their sins needs to hear! And God has chosen to use weak vessels, people like me and you, to proclaim this message and HE in his infinite power uses those moments of our sharing and talking with others to move in hearts, awaken people to the very Word of his power, and ignite real LIFE! We don't not hesitate to evangelize because our God **chooses** and **predestines** and is the only one who can **breath life into people**—we charge into it with assurance because God has told us he will use those very conversations as his ignition moment to save his people! As we read in Romans 10:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (Romans 10:14, ESV)

That preaching, friends, is not me here on this Sunday morning. That is you in conversation with your friends, family, and neighbors. It is in those moments God breaths life through his Holy Spirit into those we know and love. So we should run to those moments trusting God to work!

God made us alive!

It is here, in verse five, that we finally get our main subject and our main verb of this entire section.

2. **made us alive** together with Christ

Our God, a god overflowing with mercy and love, has chosen to direct that mercy and love towards me and you—**that is step 1**—even while we were in our sins and trespasses, dead to him, and the result—step 2—is we have been made ALIVE!

This is an old phrase you may have heard if you grew up in the church:

Grace on top of mercy!

God choosing to turn to us, to give us love instead of wrath is by definition mercy. But we needed more. That would only withhold punishment from us, but we were still destined to die. Our sinful bodies would not live forever. So, God did something amazing. In Christ's resurrection and life we too have the promise and the hope of new life! And that future

hope is breaking into our lives today by the power of the Holy Spirit! We are beginning to realize the hope of new life as we are—ever so slowly—sanctified and made more like Christ. That is our glimpse at the full future reality to come. And that isn't mercy, that is grace! That is not just God withholding punishment, that is God giving us a gift that we desperately needed and didn't deserve.

And as Paul is pondering all this his mind is exploding! He can't contain himself, so he interjects his own points:

—by grace you have been saved!—

Paul doesn't want us to miss this! God saved us not just by his disposition to mercy and love, but by his grace! His grace in his gift to us of new life in Jesus Christ. This statement, “by grace you have been saved,” becomes the summary for these last two points. God making us alive in Christ is grace! God raising us and enthroning us in Christ is grace!

God accomplished two things on the cross. He made a path for why he could be merciful and loving to us by punishing Christ in our place. And through Christ's righteous life God can now, in grace, give us the same results that Christ earned. We too, through faith in Christ, can receive his sonship, his enthronement, his power, his relationship with God! We will spend much more time on this on Easter in Ephesians 2:8–10.

Application

The grace of God is amazing! We talked about “over realized eschatology” in Romans. This idea that people inadvertently bring the promises of heaven into today. This is the error of the prosperity gospel, thinking that all that God promises us someday in the new heavens and new earth is promised now—that isn’t true. But here, in Ephesians 2, Paul’s project is to make sure we have “realized eschatology.” That we fully grasp what God has done for us and our true nature, and not neglect to appreciate how much is different now!

And Paul does that by describing the grace of being alive in Jesus. Do you realize you are now alive and all that means? Being alive you can now know God. You can relate to him through his Holy Spirit. You can choose to pursue him instead of sin. You can respond to his call on your life both through Scripture, through your gifts and talents, and through the promptings of the Spirit.

Amid the challenges of life this side of the new heavens and new earth I think we sometimes forget how much we have been given. I love seeing new believers, seeing baptisms, and being reminded again of how different things are now for us in Jesus Christ. Clearly not everything is made perfect—we are still not in the new earth. Yet we are truly brought back into relationship with our God in a real and beautiful way that you and I should treasure more. That we should take advantage of and utilize our new access and new heart

more to see and know our God. Friends, latch on to God's grace of being alive.

God raised and enthroned us!

We have seen the first two points:

1. **In our sin** we deserved wrath (Eph 2:3), but God showed us love.
2. We were dead (Eph 2:1), but now we are made alive.

And now we move onto the third:

3. **We were in** bondage to sin in every way (Eph 2:1–2), but God gave us a position of authority over sin.

We see that here in our verse this morning:

3. **and raised** us up with him [Christ]
and seated us with him [Christ]
in the heavenly places

There are two amazing truths here. First, the idea of being raised up means we will be brought up from our death. This is what Christ experienced in his resurrection, and what we are promised will happen to us as well:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and

with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, ESV)

We have been made alive in Christ and will never stay in fleshly death. This is sort of the natural outcome of being made truly alive in Christ. But it gets even better. To be “seated with Christ in the heavenly places” is the idea of being enthroned. We are seated on the throne of God with Christ:

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21, ESV)

That is quite the promise. I don’t even know what all that entails for us to rule in that way with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth, but we will.

Application

The thing we can take away from this is that we need not worry that we have been defeated by any of the struggles in our life. Sin does not have the last word. Death has lost its sting. We will be raised to new life and we will be given authority with Christ. This is an area we have to be careful to not over-realize now, but it should have real effects now in our life.

You and I are no longer in bondage to our sin. Even today that is true! Last week we talked about the flip side and how we

are still drawn back towards sin because of our sinful nature. But do you believe this side is true for you today in Jesus? That in Christ we are now risen and seated, in authority, above sin and death. I often forget this. That is one of the main reasons I know I am tempted to sin—it feels at times inescapable. That is what Satan would want me and you to think. That is what my flesh feels often and is beckoning to me to believe. Yet in Christ we are conquerors we are told:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:37–39, ESV)

Do you, do we, challenge ourselves and challenge others to live as though this is true? That we can fight sin, we can fight temptation, we can fight our flesh because the outcome is already certain in Jesus? That we can live more in the truth of who we will be than who we feel we are today?

In Christ!

That should point us to the fourth point here this morning. That all of this has been done in Christ!

in Christ Jesus,

In Christ we have mercy and grace. In Christ our unrighteousness has been dealt with, his righteousness given to us in grace. We have, indeed, two spheres that have been impacted at the cross—our past and our future. Our past sins are mercifully washed away by the blood of the lamb. Our future is secure as God’s image bearing priest-Kings and queens who will reign with Christ.

The coming age is our destiny.

When we see the mercy and love God has given us. When we see the grace God has given us by making us alive in Christ and then raising us up (in very real ways today but assuredly at the new age) and how we will be and are already being seated with Christ on his throne, it has to make us wonder, “Why don’t I see it all now? Why does this so often not feel right?” We can begin to be frustrated and question why—if we received God’s mercy, if we have received his grace, if we are made alive, and if we are destined to be enthroned—why don’t we see it today?

I think where Paul goes next can be such a helpful grounding to us in this kind of questioning, and especially when things are hard in this life:

so that in the coming ages
he might show the immeasurable riches
of his grace
in kindness toward us
in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4–7)

The future, where we will be with God—face to face—in the new heavens and the new earth is where he will pour out on us his immeasurable riches of grace and love. By God’s design that isn’t happening here. Not now. Today is not it. Today, God is working to make you and I “fit” or “qualified” for what is coming next:

“giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
(Colossians 1:12–14, ESV)

God has destined us to choose once, here on this earth, in this environment of a battle, and to begin to receive his promises while we are still not completely fit for heaven. Why I don’t know—that was his prerogative! It pleased him to make this good earth but also to make people who had choice, who he knew would choose sin, and to know he would save us from that sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Part of God’s process is that he might make us ready in faith, in mercy and grace, solely in Christ for this coming age. That God’s power may be shown in me and you that we were saved by his work alone (which is in our next Ephesian section).

As one author said, we are being prepared in this life for the coming ages, ages where:

“one age, supervening upon another like successive waves of the sea, as far in to the future as thought can reach.”

And he continues by saying that one of the most amazing things then is that:

“Throughout time and in eternity the CHURCH, this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness. When he brings into being the reconciled universe of the future, the CHURCH will provide the pattern after which it will all be modeled.” FF Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 288

We are seeing today, in our life as God’s people, the church, the model that we will walk in for all eternity. He is training us, teaching us, with much patience. He is showing us what our life will look like there in our life here walking with one another in the Holy Spirit.

Friends, this is not all we were meant for. It is okay to be...

Holy-discontented

...with our life right now. God has and is showing us amazing grace through Jesus and our faith in him, and the work of the

Holy Spirit in our life. But God shows us this grace to us now that we might see it completely in the coming age.

Application

This is not it! This is not all there is! Don't forget that! At times and moments when you are tempted to dismay at the sin you still see in your life, at the sin you still see in the world, at the struggles and trials we go through, the suffering we saw in Romans that is necessary for our maturing and growth, don't forget this is not it! There is much more. And as Paul says here in Ephesians 2:7, the next age is where God will show us the immeasurable richness of his grace and kindness to us in Jesus!

Conclusion

1. **In our sin** we deserved wrath (Eph 2:3), but God showed us love.
2. We were dead (Eph 2:1), but now we are made alive.
3. We were in bondage to sin in every way (Eph 2:1–2), but God gave us a position of authority over sin.
4. All of this was done **in Christ Jesus!**
5. All of this is for the future where God will lavish this mercy and love on us.

Pray

Communion

Benediction

May the LORD bless you and keep you. May the LORD cause his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. May the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.