
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

“But God...”

A Divine Invasion (Part 1)

Ephesians 2:4-7

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

This glorious text, which describes for us the things that God has done for sinful humanity, comes to us on the heels of verses 1-3, a text which described for us the darkest, most devastating reality of the human experience. Verses 1-3 speak of the common condition of each and every person before faith in Christ. What is that condition? It is the condition of described in verse 1 as being **“dead in trespasses and sins”**. We noted that being spiritually dead means a few things. First, it means that a person is **deluded** by Satan and the world system; thinking that any way other than God's way is best. Second, it means that a person is **disobedient**, not willing to do things God's way. Third, it means a person is defiled or **depraved**, meaning that sin has so affected the mind that a person is unable to do things God's way. And finally, because of all this, we see that being spiritually dead leaves a person in a state of **doom** with the only expectation being the wrath of God. This is the condition of every unbeliever. For anyone who has not trusted in Christ, this is the state of trouble he finds himself. This is the reality he needs to be saved from. And, as we have stated repeatedly, we learn here that the only thing we bring to our salvation is the sin that made it necessary.

Sinners are in a state of war, enmity, hostility and rebellion against God. We need reconciliation with God. We need peace with God. The problem with reconciliation however, is never on the Lord's side. It is not God who has alienated sinners; but sinners who have alienated themselves from God. And, left to themselves, they will march their own souls straight into hell. Because the unbeliever is dead, he is trapped in his sinful state without ability to deliver himself. Every aspect of his being is affected by sin. And so, even his attempts to remedy himself with religion or self-improvement will never make him right with the sinless God. In fact, according to the Word of God as found in Romans 3:10-12, there is not one person who will even seek after God in this condition and so there is no hope for such a person to escape the fires of hell so long as he is found in such a state.

My goal in reminding you of these things is to emphasize the utter inability of a spiritually dead person to do anything to save himself. This is not my opinion. This is not “Calvinism”. This is what God's Word declares! I referred to Romans 3:10-12 a moment ago and I would like to read for you from some various translations what this text says about our condition; a condition which Paul describes here in Ephesians 2:1 as being “dead”. We read in Romans 3:10-12 first from the Bible in Basic English: *“10 As it is said in the holy Writings, There is not one who does righteousness; 11 Not one who has the knowledge of what is right, not one who is a searcher after God; 12 They have all gone out of the way, there is no profit in any of them; there is not one who does good, not so much as one...”* Next, let me read to you from the Contemporary English Version, *“10 The Scriptures tell us, “No one is acceptable to God! 11 Not one of them understands or even searches for God. 12 They have all turned away and are worthless. There isn't one person who does right.”* And finally, let me read it to you from one of the most popular versions today, the New Living Translation, *“10 As the Scriptures*

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say, "There is no one doing what is right, not even one. 11 There is no one who understands. There is no one who is trying to be with God. 12 They have all turned away from him, and now they are of no use to anyone. There is no one who does good, not even one." This is what it means to be "dead in your trespasses and sins."

However you slice it, this is the most horrific and scary of conditions in which to be found. And this is the condition that every one of us here who have come to Christ was once found. All of this reminds us that what a dead, deluded, disobedient, depraved and doomed sinner needs is nothing short of divine intervention! And this is exactly what we see in our text this morning; a statement of fact that God has intervened; that God has met us in our darkness; that God has broken the shackles of sin and has set us free in Christ and Christ alone!

It was disobedient, self-deluded Jonah who came to realize this in the belly of that great fish declaring, "**salvation is from the LORD**" (Jonah 2:9). Beloved, if anyone would be saved; if anyone could be saved, it can only happen as a result of not only divine intervention; but let me suggest something stronger – that our salvation can only come as a result of a divine invasion! Like a massive army overtaking enemy territory, our great God is said to invade the dead, deluded, disobedient, depraved and doomed hearts of sinners and recreates them to be living, enlightened, obedient, and willing saints who love the Lord. What would motivate God to do this for us? As we will see, it is motivated by who and what God is; a God of mercy; a God of love; and a God of grace!

This morning we look at this most momentous of events; that moment when God invades the heart of a dead sinner. The contrast between verses 1-3 and verses 4-10 is clear with those two words that begin verse 4 – "**But God...**" (δε θεος). Most of us detest it when another person "butts" into our lives. We see it as an irritant, as an intrusion, as an annoyance. I pray this morning you will give thanks to God for having butted into your life, or should I say, having butted into your death and gracing you with life.

What does the sinner experience when met by the mercy, love and grace of God? Verses 4-7 reveal three things: a divine invasion (4-5a); a divine intimacy (5b-6); and a divine intention (7). This morning we consider the first of these divine actions, that of a divine invasion...we read again in verses 4-5a, *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions...*

To begin with, let us be clear that verse 4 introduces us with the reality that God has invaded the sinner's dead heart. Here we learn some wonderful realities concerning this divine invasion into our once dead and sinful hearts. There are three I would have you consider.

I. **God's invasion is exclusive...(4a)**

But God...

Just two little words introduce such glorious truths; "**But God...**" (δε θεος) – just six letters; one conjunction and one personal noun offer us perhaps the greatest words of Scripture. These two words inform us from where salvation originates. It originates in the Person and work of God. These two words inform us who has initiated salvation. God always makes the first move in salvation because the lost sinner is incapable of making the first move toward God – why? Because the sinner is dead! Can we be sure that it is God alone; God exclusively who originates, initiates and regenerates the sinner to come to Christ? What do we read in 1 John 4:19? "**We**

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love [God and one another], because He first loved us. And what do we read in John 6:44? ***“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”*** This is the exclusive work of the Father... ***“But God...”*** (δε θεος).

I would have you consider the contrast these two words make between the deserved doom of sinners in verse 3 and the merciful blessing of salvation that begins in verse 5 as the exclusive work of God. The transition from verse 3 to verse 4 marks the profound difference between life and death, between light and darkness; between a life of peace and one of anxiety; between a life of hope and a life of despair; between a life of meaning and a life of emptiness; between a life that glorifies God in all that one does and a life of sin and sorrow; between salvation and damnation, and between Heaven and Hell.

Until God butted into your life, you were dead, deluded, disobedient, and doomed. But God and God alone invaded your heart; God and God alone opened the eyes of your heart to the fact that you were a sinner in need of a Savior. Praise God He took a personal interest in you! Do you thank God for having called upon you and having *“butted”* in on your life? At the time of your conversion, you were not looking for such a change of life; you were not looking for a Savior. Until God *“butted”* in, you were looking to please yourself; you were looking for the next thing to make you happy, the next big thrill to exhilarated you. In short, you were looking for the next hell-damning sin because that is all you knew. But now you can, you must praise God for having other plans for your life. With gratitude you ought to praise Him for invading your life, for saving your soul, for giving you hope. Do you praise God and God alone for exclusively butting into your life? This is divine invasion and I praise Him for doing it! So then, we learn that God's invasion exclusive; being a *“God-thing”*; but next...

II. God's invasion is extravagant...(4b)

...being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...

Look at the next phrase: *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...”* What is Paul saying here? He is actually pointing his readers to the very character of God. A defining attribute of God is that He is *“rich in mercy.”* The word *“rich”* speaks of *“an overabundance, that which is beyond measure, unlimited”*. This characteristic suggests that God possesses an overabundant, measureless, and unlimited quantity of *“mercy”*.

The word *“mercy”* speaks of *“goodness or kindness expressed toward the miserable and afflicted, coupled with a desire to help them.”* Our Savior was marked by His mercy while He walked this earth. Many times the Bible tells us that Jesus was *“moved with compassion”* as He looked upon those who were helpless in their afflictions and in their sins. At such times, it was the mercy of Jesus that motivated Him to reach out in love and do something to alleviate the sufferings of those He felt mercy towards.

Beloved, this is what God does for us in salvation. Verses 1-3 describe a people that were the most wretched, the most afflicted and the most miserable. That group is humanity. And let us make this personal. If you are now in Christ, remember that it was in spite of your deadness; in spite of your continual disobedience; in spite of your morally compromised and depraved condition; it was in such a state that God looked upon you with mercy. In was His mercy by which He was moved to do something to help you. And what did He do? He met you with the most extravagant of blessings. Let us remember that *“mercy”* speaks of *“not getting what one*

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deserves.” We deserved, according to verse 3, eternal wrath. Yet in mercy God turns His wrath away from the “*children of wrath*” and He extends to them His forgiveness and His salvation. He does not give them the judgment they deserve!

But where does this extravagant mercy come from? It flows out of His great love for the sinner. Paul calls it His “*great love*”. What is so great about God's love? A brief survey of Scripture reveals to us that...

- *God's love is Eternal* (Jeremiah 31:3)
- *God's love is Sacrificial* (Romans 5:8)
- *God's love is Unconditional* (Romans 8:38-39)
- *God's love is Personal* (John 15:9)
- *God's love is Effectual* (John 3:16)

A certain medieval monk announced he would be preaching on “*The Love of God*” the following Sunday evening. The shadows fell and the light ceased to come in through the cathedral windows the following evening as the congregation gathered. In the darkness of the altar, the monk lighted a candle and carried it to the crucifix. First of all, he illumined the crown of thorns, next, the two wounded hands, then the marks of the spear wound. In the hush that fell, he blew out the candle and left the church. There was nothing else to say. How true! Calvary says everything you need to hear about the eternal, sacrificial, unconditional, personal, effectual love of God. He loves you, of that fact there should be no question!

What makes the love of God so amazing and extravagant is the object of that love. Look carefully at verse 4 again, ...*being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...* The “*us*” there speaks of those who have been redeemed from among the “*children of wrath*” described in verses 1-3. Remember that it is this “*us*” who did not love Him; who lived constant disobedience to God's Word, His will and His ways. This is the “*us*” who deserved His judgment and eternal wrath in Hell. This is the “*us*” who hated Him, and rather loved our sins. This is the “*us*” who turned away from Him. And yet, He has greatly loved “*us*”!

There is no way to say it enough, beloved. While you and I were in the depths of our sin we deserved nothing and could expect nothing but His wrath and damnation. Let us never forget that God He had no reason or obligation to reach out to us and redeem us. As we have noted, we had nothing that drew God to us in ourselves that would cause Him to move in our direction. And this is why verse 5 clearly states for us the truth; “*by grace you have been saved*”. If mercy is “not getting what one deserves”; then grace is “getting that which one does not deserve.” We deserved the wrath of God; but God has given us salvation.

Do you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37? Let me say that you and I were like that poor man who was robbed, mugged, and left for dead. Religion and good works, represented by the priest and Levite, passed us by because they could not help us. But, our Good Samaritan, the Lord Jesus, came to where we were. He met us in our deplorable condition and gave His life for us, paying everything we owed to God. He lifted us out of that state of death, delusion, depravity and doom. He healed our sinful condition by means of His precious blood, forgiving all our sins. He gave us the Comforter and Helper, the Holy Spirit. Jesus set us on the road to heaven; ensuring that every need was met! And He did this knowing that we did

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not deserve it. He did this knowing we would fail Him continually. He did this knowing that we could never repay Him. Why did He do this? Because He loved us! Do you thank God for *His great love with which He loved us!* Consider the words of the Frederick Lehman hymn, "The Love of God":

*The love of God is greater far; Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star, And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled, And pardoned from his sin.*

*When hoary time shall pass away, And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men who here refuse to pray, On rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so sure, shall still endure, All measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race -The saints' and angels' song.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above, Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Though stretched from sky to sky.*

*Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure - The saints' and angels' song.*

God's invasion of the sinner's dead heart is not only exclusive, being from beginning to end a "God-thing"; it is not only extravagant, revealing the mercy, love and grace of God; but...

III. God's invasion is extraordinary...(5a)

...even when we were dead in our transgressions...

Notice when God's divine invasion took place. According to verse 5, it took place when? It took place, "***even when we were dead in our transgressions...***" God did not wait for us improve ourselves. God did not tarry while we reformed ourselves. God did not dilly-dally while we sought to spiritually improve ourselves, while we rendered ourselves "less sinful;" or better yet, made ourselves - "less dead." Rather, God set His undeserved mercy and His unconditional love on us while we were still sinners; still dead in our transgressions and sins. In other words, God loved us in spite of our wickedness; in the midst of our rebellion; in the very heat of our hostility toward Him. This is when God stooped down to us; while He knew we could not, and would not, reach up to Him.

Such a love makes absolutely no sense to our mortal minds. Let me be painfully graphic. We were dead, decaying and were spiritually offensive to God. For God to love us in this state would be akin to you or me loving a pile of horse dung. It simply does not compute. We would think it most strange and twisted for a person to have an affection for dung. If this be the likeness of our condition, then why would God choose to love us? How are we to understand why God would reach out to save such wretched, vile sinners like us and then deliver us from the bondage

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of sin and spiritual death? How miraculous and marvelous it ought to be to us that God could take something as spiritually useless as horse dung is to us, and recreate it into something that is useful; that brings Him praise and glory. Beloved, I can give no answer to the question as to why God would chose to love the likes of us; but I stand here this morning and call you to praise Him with me that He does so love us! Let us thank God that He has invaded, He has intruded, He has intervened into our dead condition and has changed us by the greatness of His grace. This is extra-ordinary; the grace and forgiveness of God, without which we could not be made right with God.

I love the illustration that John MacArthur used to drive home this point...He said, *"If a person were driving down the street and carelessly ran down and killed a child, he probably would be arrested, tried, fined, and imprisoned for involuntary manslaughter. But after he paid the fine and served the sentence he would be free and guiltless before the law in regard to that crime. But paying his penalty before the law would do nothing to restore the life of the child or alleviate the grief of the parents. The offense against them was on an immeasurably deeper level. The only way a relationship between the parents and the man who killed their child could be established or restored would be for the parents to offer forgiveness. No matter how much the man might want to do so, he could not produce reconciliation from his side. Only the one offended can offer forgiveness, and only forgiveness can bring reconciliation."*

Beloved, J.C. Ryle said, *"Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen."* Sin is the greatest offense and the highest treason any of God's creatures could commit against Him. And yet, God's Word says right here in our text, that because God is rich in mercy and so great in His love toward us, He has offered forgiveness and reconciliation to every repentant sinner. How vile is your sin? It is your sin and rebellion against God by which you actually participated in the horror of nailing Jesus to the cross. How great are the mercy, love and grace of God? It is by that same cross that you are provided a way to participate in the righteousness of Christ. It is in the cross of Christ that God says to sinners in effect, *"I know what you are and I know what you have done. But because of My great love for you, your penalty has been paid; My righteous justice has been satisfied through the work of My Son's death on the cross on your behalf. For My Son's sake, for My Son's glory, I offer you forgiveness; peace with Me and eternal life. If you wish to come to Me you need only to come to Him confessing Him as your Lord and Savior!"* Not only did He love enough to forgive us, but He also loved enough also enough to die for the very ones who had offended Him. ***"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for the his friends"*** (John 15:13). Compassionate love for those who do not deserve it makes our salvation possible.

Amazing love! Amazing Grace! Amazing Mercy – all experienced because God has invaded us; because God "butted" into our lives. This morning, if you come here and profess to be saved; then realize this; you are God's advertisement to the world upon which He communicates the wonder of His mercy, love and grace. Let us honor that advertisement and love Him and one another even as He has loved us so that other might be drawn to Him and that they might be saved.

"But God..." You were dead in your sins; ***"But God..."*** You were blind in the darkness of sin; ***"But God..."*** You were separated from life and peace headed toward Hell; ***"But God..."*** You were under the influence of Satan and this world system; ***"But God..."*** You sought to satisfy the

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lusts of your mind and flesh that only brought more wrath; **"But God..."** You were dead, deluded, disobedient, depraved and doomed; **"But God..."**

Because God invaded your life; you are no longer the person you once were. Now you are changed, recreated, headed toward the blessings of Heaven. God has done great things, delivering you from your past and giving you a hope in the present and future. All of this is yours if God has butted into your life. So then, has God butted into your life?

- If He has not and you know you need to be saved, then I beg you; come to Jesus today. He died to save, and if you will come to Him in faith, this is what He will do for you.
- If He has, let me challenge you to love Him, live for Him and tell others about Him more.
- If He has, let me challenge you to praise Him more because He is worthy!

Soli Deo Gloria

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Ephesians 2:4-6
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