
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 3)

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.

Let me begin by telling you a fictional story of a six year old boy named Kevin.¹ Kevin's parents had enrolled him in music lessons for guitar. Every afternoon, after school, Kevin would sit in the living room reluctantly strumming "Home on the Range" while his buddies would be playing baseball in the park across the street. For Kevin, the music lessons seemed to be discipline without direction. For Kevin this was drudgery.

Now imagine, if you would, that Kevin is visited by an angel one afternoon while practicing his guitar. The Angel gives him a vision in which he is taken to Carnegie Hall. The Angel shows him on the stage a guitar virtuoso giving a concert. Kevin normally would find himself bored by the classical music. But watching the virtuoso, Kevin is astonished by what he sees and hears. Up close and personal, Kevin sees the musician's fingers dance rhythmically on the strings seemingly effortlessly and with grace. For a moment all Kevin can think about is how difficult and clumsy his hands feel when he tries to play on the frets of his guitar. The virtuoso blends clean and soaring notes into what seemed to Kevin as a symphony of its own. Then all Kevin can remember is the tonelessness, irritating discords that seem to flow or dis-flow from his own hands.

And yet again, Kevin is enthralled by what he sees. His head tilts slightly to one side as he takes in the master guitar player's song. Kevin soaks it all in. He never imagined that anyone could play the guitar like this. At this point, the Angel turns to Kevin and asks, "What do you think, Kevin?" Kevin responds in almost a reverent whisper, slow and meticulously the word, "W-O-W!"

At this point the vision vanishes and the Angel stands in front of Kevin back in the living room. Making sure he has Kevin's attention, the Angel looks Kevin in the eyes and says to him, "Kevin, the glorious music you heard by the hands of that musician will be you in a few years." Then, pointing at the guitar, the Angel stated firmly, "but you must practice!" Then, almost as quickly as the Angel had appeared, the Angel was gone and Kevin found himself alone with his guitar.

Now let me ask you something. Do you suppose that Kevin's attitude towards practice would be different after having such a revelation? So long as Kevin remembers what he is going to become, then his discipline of music lessons and all the difficulties that he will experience in order to progress in his musicianship, all that discipline now has direction, it now has meaning, it is now seen with a definite purpose, a purpose that will drive and motivate Kevin to be what has been declared for him to be. For Kevin there will be much effort, but now knowing what he is to become, such effort could hardly be called drudgery.

¹ Story adapted from Don Whitney's book, "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life" pp.13-14

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When it comes to the Christian life, following Jesus, exercising and progressing in spiritual disciplines like Bible reading, prayer, genuine fellowship with the saints, sharing Christ with others, all that can all seem overwhelming. It can seem to be taking away from other things that at the moment seem better, have the appearance of being more fun or more productive, even as Kevin would watch his friends playing baseball thinking that that would be much more fun and delightful.

When Jesus promised His followers in John 16:33 that our experience in this life would be filled with trials and tribulations; when Jesus promised in John 15 that the world would at times hate Christians because they first hated Him; when devoting your life to Jesus seems to get in the way of everything else this life seemingly has to offer, then following Jesus can begin to feel like drudgery; like discipline without direction.

But as we come to the final verse of this little section of Ephesians chapter 2, we are presented with a glimpse of our future as believers in Christ. We look at all the things that are going on around us, we can be overwhelmed with what's happening at a national or world level; we can certainly be overwhelmed and concerned that what's happening in our jobs or in our families, and even in individual relationships; and in the midst of it all we wonder what God is up to, because we find at times trying to do things God's way, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as the author and perfecter of our faith, it seems like drudgery. This little section of Ephesians 2, began there in verse 4 with what we referred to as a divine invasion, that moment when God butted into our lives, no rather butted in to our deadness in order to eradicate our sinfulness and to bring us to true life.

Then, as we saw in verses 5-6, we were brought into a place of divine intimacy with God having a relationship with God that is unparalleled with anything else we could ever imagine or experience. But to have intimacy with anyone, whether it be a good and dear friend, whether it be the most intimate of human relationships between a husband and wife, to have intimacy with God takes discipline, it takes intentionality, it takes much effort. And sometimes when something takes a lot of effort, we are tempted to claim...

- that it is burdensome,
- that it is a drudgery,
- that it is simply too difficult.

And so Paul ends this little section by giving a revelation of what God is up to and we see this as we read the words of verse 7 in what I will call the divine intention. We read that...

- the reason why God has been rich in mercy;
- the reason that God has manifested a great love toward us even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins;
- the reason God made us alive together with Christ;
- the reason God raised us up with Christ; and
- the reason why God seated us with Christ in the heavenly places;

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The reason – or the intention is this, *so that in the ages to come He [God the Father] might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

What is God's intention for you as a believer in Jesus Christ? God intends for you to be a monument of grace; a marker of that magnificent kindness and mercy of God poured out upon the undeserving, those who were identified there in verse 3 as the children of wrath. In a way that boggles my mind, we see that God's purpose, God's goal for saving us by grace is that He might lift up the redeemed before all creatures and all creation as a testimony of the vastness and the surpassing scope of what we call the grace of God. That is what we are; that is what we are becoming. Such a revelation ought to change our attitude, even as Kevin's revelation changed his. Now we are to practice the presence of God, to be an ever-increasing manifestation of the grace of God at work in us. In John chapter 1:17 we read that Jesus is the one who is **"full of grace and truth."** And here in verses 4-7 of Ephesians 2 we find ourselves as those who are "with Christ," and "in Christ." In other words, we are to be those who are full of grace and full of truth because we are full in Christ.

When God reveals the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus it will be because of the surpassing fullness of Christ within us. We are to grow in Christ likeness, something that is difficult, something our flesh rebels against, something the world does not understand, something that takes great effort and discipline; to grow in Christ likeness. And while it is true that God will bestow upon us Christ's full likeness when Jesus returns, until such time God's intention is that we grow in Christ likeness. We are not merely to sit around and wait for such holiness; we are to be actively and with discipline pursuing it. In Hebrews 12:14, we read these words,

"Pursue peace [make every effort] with all men, and the sanctification [holiness – Christlikeness] without which no one will see the Lord."

You cannot see the Lord if you are not pursuing Christ likeness. When God invaded your deadness and brought you into an intimate relationship with Him, we are reminded now in 1:7 that it is for the purpose that we would truly be such a monument of God's grace.

With this rather long introduction, I would turn your attention specifically to verse 7 as we consider together just two key thoughts concerning this divine intention.

A Divine Intention (7)

so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Beloved, God has saved us for a purpose and what we have before us is simply a two-fold revelation of what that divine intention is:

I. It is God's intention to reveal the riches of His grace to us

One of the first things that I would draw your attention to is the incredible intention of God as He uses the unfolding and coming "ages" of eternity to reveal to us the extent, the breadth, the limitless scope of His grace toward us. We have already learned that it is by the grace of God we have been saved there in verse 5 and something repeated again down in verse 8; but now Paul

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points us to the future; to both the foreseeable future as well as a future we can hardly imagine, an eternal future whereby the grace of God is being shown, unveiled, and revealed to us forever, and ever, and ever.

How do we grasp this? We have no way to truly conceive the fullness of what God the Father has done for us in and through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ and made real to us by the working of the Holy Spirit within us. But here, in an eschatological expression of eternal ecstasy, in a glorious glimpse of the great glory that we are going to possess in the coming "ages" – God declares that He will use such a "time" and place to reveal to us in a way we will then better understand, what is the surpassing riches; what is the treasure house of His unearned, undeserved and unending blessing of divine intimacy and grace with Him. In a way we cannot do so now, in these coming ages, we will be made to understand the wonder of God's love, the price of God's grace by means of the death of Christ for our sins on the cross, and the power of His salvation as Christ's life, death and resurrection saves to the uttermost!

How packed with persuasive joy is Ephesians 1:7? Before us is a reminder of what we are and will be in glory. Monuments of God's grace. How ought we respond to this? With a sense of disciplined joy. How *will* we respond to this once we arrive in God's presence and finally "get it" – more fully grasping the extravagant extent of God's grace toward us? Well, to that question we actually have an answer. Look with me at two passages in the book of Revelation. First, let us look at Revelation 4:9-11. We read, **9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."**

Here we have an expression of rejoicing, the twenty-four elders representing the raptured and redeemed Church giving praise to God the Father and of God the Son as Creator. And now, turn over to Revelation 5:8-10, seeing again the twenty-four elders who represent the raptured and redeemed Church giving praise. We read,

8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

Beloved, there will be a day when the heavens will ring with the praises of a people who were redeemed from death, delusion, disobedience, depravity and doom. They will fall before their Redeemer and they will vocally, verbally and victoriously praise Him for all that He has accomplished for them.

The truth of the matter is that we have a hard time wrapping our heads around such a future. We struggle to understand all we have and of all we are in Jesus right now. We currently lack a complete grasp of all that He has done for us by saving us and by blessing us like He does. Beloved, I suspect that if we did grasp such things right now our very bodies would not be

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able to stand the praise such knowledge would generate. On the days described here in Revelation 4 and 5, when we stand in the presence of God, we will be there in glorified bodies, bodies made fit to praise Him in a manner that befits His glory.

When in His presence, we will both willingly and yet by sheer compulsion of our status, render, bestow, and bless the Lord with all the glory due Him and with all the praise that a glorified mind and body is capable. But for today, Ephesians 1:7 calls us to contemplate the coming glory, gifts and the greatness of our God. While these sin-cursed body fail to render to God the full praise worthy of Him, oh that we would do all we can to give Him the best praise, the best we have to offer Him right now. The Scriptures are replete with such calls.

In Hebrews 13:15 we are reminded that praising God is a sacrifice; other things must go if you are to praise God aright. We read, ***“Through [Jesus] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”***

In Psalm 47:1 we are reminded that praising God is to be vocal and joyful, ***“O clap your hands, all peoples; Shout to God with the voice of joy.”***

In Psalm 113:1-3 we are reminded that we are to be praising God always, ***“1 Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord, Praise the name of the Lord. 2 Blessed be the name of the Lord From this time forth and forever. 3 From the rising of the sun to its setting The name of the Lord is to be praised.”***

And in Psalm 135:1-3 we are reminded that praising God is the simple expectation of God for His redeemed, ***1 Praise the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord; Praise Him, O servants of the Lord, 2 You who stand in the house of the Lord, In the courts of the house of our God! 3 Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely.***

In the ages to come, God's intention is to reveal the riches of His grace to us and we will respond in praise. But there is one more aspect of God's intention here.

II. It is God's intention to reveal the riches of His grace through us.

While I have been speaking to you much of things to come and our reaction to such knowledge, the truth of the matter is that there are still saints of God living in this world and that He uses them to display His power and salvation to the lost. Yes, Paul speaks of the “ages” to come in verse 7, but the implication is that God is already revealing His grace at present through His saints.

Over in 2 Corinthians 3:2, Paul makes a profound statement that parallels this. There we read, ***“2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”*** In other words, the transformed lives of these believers reveal the reality and power of the saving work of Jesus Christ. People could see this transformation. For by grace you have been saved.

Paul would say it here in Ephesians 2:10 this way; that we are God's “workmanship” God's *poiema*, His master painting put on display for all to see. Sometimes we might wonder why God saved us and left us in this world. It would seem to us much better to be taken out of this sin-curse world and to be present with the Lord (which it would be). So why does God leave us here? Beloved, God leaves us here as monuments of grace; as trophies of the truth that Jesus saves. God leaves us here to be living, breathing testimonies of His love for dead, lost sinners. Beloved, each and every redeemed saint of God is a walking testimony to the power of God to save a soul

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and to change a life. The only question is, are you a good testimony of that or are you a bad one?

Do you remember what Jesus commanded in Matthew 5:16? Jesus said, **"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."** How are you doing with that Christian? Are people ascribing all that you do to the grace of God in your life? If not, why not? This is God's intention for you both in glory as well as in the here and now.

If you are saved you are a billboard upon which God writes His love for the lost. Your life is a testimony to His saving power. You are a monument of what the grace of God can do for dead, deluded, disobedient, depraved and doomed sinners. Beloved, let us live like Jesus; let us love like Jesus. Let us labor for Jesus to the end that others might be drawn to Him so that they may be saved.

Remember the opening words of verse 4, **"But God..."** We were dead in our condition of sin, **"But God..."** We were trapped in darkness, **"But God..."** We were alienated from God and headed to suffer God's wrath in Hell, **"But God..."** We were under the dominion of Satan and were prisoners to our own sinful passions and lusts, **"But God..."** We were dead, deluded, disobedient, depraved and doomed, **"But God..."**

And now, because God has invaded our lives, we are no longer the people we used to be. God has changed the direction of our lives and has revealed to us what we are to be. Because of what God has done, by His grace alone, we have been delivered from our wretched past. We have intimacy with God; we belong to and with Jesus and are thus forever secure in Him. Do you have something to thank God for today?

But such a divine intention as a result of divine intimacy can only be experienced; can only be yours if you have had a divine invasion. Has God ever butted into your life?

- If God has not "butted" into your life yet you realize that you need to be saved from your dead condition of sin, then I ask you to come to Christ today. Jesus died to save you, and if you will call upon Him in prayer; asking Him to come and change you; the promise of His word is this, **"For all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved"** (Romans 10:13)
- If God has butted into your life, then I exhort you with this challenge; love Him more; live for Him more fully; and commit to tell others the good news that Jesus saves.
- If God has butted into your life, then I exhort you to remember His intention for you to be a monument of His grace and so determine to praise Him all the more because He is worthy.

Soli Deo Gloria

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