

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 2:4-7 - But God

Well, I think most of you guys know in this passage that Vss. 8-9 get most of the attention. Rightfully so, those passages summarize the gospel of salvation in such an amazing way that most of us have memorized them and it's probably one of our go-to passages when talking with unbelievers about what it means to be saved.

We're not saved by works. We are saved by grace through faith. Simply believing that God's grace was shown to us by sending Jesus to die on the cross in the place of sinners and imputing his righteousness to us - eliminates all boasting, all pride, all self confidence in ourselves and causes us to praise god and God alone.

We'll unpack that next time. This morning I want to unpack verses 4-7 which I think are equally amazing but often get overshadowed by what comes after.

Big Picture: God's goodness is greater than all our sin

And really the amazement starts in just the first two words of Vs. 4: But God.

After 3 devastating verses about who we were in our sins - we were dead, following the world, the flesh and the devil, and children of wrath - wicked beyond compression. Paul says "But God."

If you have NIV, it's not as dramatic but in the original language the words are sort of wrapped around each other and front loaded at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis: But God.

The effect is kind of like whiplash. You know those crazy people who sit in a sauna baking for 30 minutes then go run out and jump into 40 degree water? It's like this shock to the body.

Well, this is supposed to be a shock to our soul. We were dead and loved being dead. And we followed every evil thing and the prince of all evil and God hated us. Then Paul says: But God.

This is sort of a constant refrain in the Bible.

Turn to Genesis 7:22-24 This is Noah and the Genesis Flood. You remember that the world had become so wicked that God decided to wipe out all of humanity except 8 people. And he told Noah to built a massive Ark - a box - and gather animals in. And God said he would send rain for 40 days and 40 nights and he did. But just because it stop raining doesn't mean the cataclysm is over. Noah is still floating on this Ark surrounded by an ocean of water with absolutely no mountains or terrain in sight. He was told it would be 40 days and 40 nights, but he wasn't told how long he'd be on the Ark. **Read 22-24**

Everything was dead, dead. Only water and only a boat. What's the next sentence. **Read 8:1**

But God. God remembered Noah. He didn't forget Noah - God doesn't forget. The idea is that God acted on his covenant promises and the water subsided. But the picture here is that all of humanity is eradicated...but God.

Gen. 50:20. This is the aftermath of the Jospeh story where he has revealed himself to his brothers. His brothers were treacherous to him, thought about killing him but realized they could sell him and make some money. Jospeh rises to power in Egypt and now their father is dead. What protection they may have had from Dad is gone and Jospeh could easily destroy all of them for their sin. What does he say? **Read 15-21**

But God. All of their treachery and lies and deceit couldn't stop the purposes of God. Jospeh ends up being a type of Christ, doesn't he? He is handed over to certain death, only to come back and save his brothers. That's why Jacob says, My son was dead but now he is what? Alive.

But God. These are all over the Bible but let me show you 2 more. **Turn to Psalm 49:13-15**

This is sort of a sad psalm about the certainty of death. Death will come, there's nothing we can do to stop it. We can't ransom ourselves or others out of death - we can put a stopper in death. What hope do we have?

Read 7-15

What's our hope? But God. No one can stop death. No one can stop us from going to Sheol - to the grave - but you know what God can do? God can ransom our soul from Sheol. How does he do that? Through resurrection.

Death is inevitable. Nothing we can do to stop the effect of sin. But God.

One more. **Psalm 52:1-7.** This is a psalm of David. He's talking about his enemies and how they attack him with words and lies and slander him constantly. What is their end? **Read 1-7**

Do you know how David will ultimately be avenged from his lying enemies? God. **But God** will break them down forever. He will snatch them up and their tent and cast them out of the land of the living.

Acts 13:26-33: Paul's preaching about Jesus and how he was the Messiah and no one recognized him so they persecuted, crucified him and killed him. But God raised him from the dead.

Rom. 5:6-8: Talking about the amazing truth of the gospel and the fact that we were wretched sinners Paul says maybe someone somewhere will die for a righteous person, maybe for a good person. **But God** shows his love for us that while we still sinners Christ died for us.

I bring this up because this is a constant refrain in the Bible. But God.

And that's the transition we see as we **turn back** to Ephesians.

We have our wretched sinfulness in **Vss. 1-3** and then there's this amazing contrast to who God is in **Vss. 4-7.** **Vss. 4-7** are all about God and his character and the goodness of what he's done for us.

And so what I want to do with the rest of our time is unpack each of these descriptions and then tie it in with something at the end.

1) Rich in Mercy **Read 1-4a**

So the first contrast in this section is that God is rich in mercy. We've seen this already in Ephesians but mercy is the heartfelt compassion of God to forgive people.

Mercy is often defined as not giving someone what they deserve. It's the cop who pulls you over for doing 5 over and he gives you a warning rather than a ticket. That's mercy.

It's when you didn't do your chores and you should be disciplined but you're allowed to go outside and play anyway.

You messed up the big order at work and they don't fire you. That's mercy.

But more than that when the Bible talks about mercy it's not just not giving someone what they deserve, it's a heart of compassion. It's the internal pity you have on someone which is why you don't give them what they deserve.

I remember going deer hunting with my dad. And what's the goal of deer hunting? It's to kill a deer to eat it. Well, we were driving along and a deer ran into our truck. So my dad stopped and got out. The deer was critically injured. And it's amazing how quickly your attitude changes from "Yeah, let's go kill a deer" to a heart of compassion - you don't want this animal to suffer.

That internal compassion that instantly kicks in is what the Bible talks about when it refers to mercy. Its heart of compassion.

What does Paul say about God's mercy? He is what? Rich in mercy.

God is rich in compassion. Maybe we think we have compassion for a deer we hit, maybe we think we have compassion for our family members when they're sick - or maybe you don't have compassion and you should. Maybe we have compassion when people sin against us and we realize they are blinded in their sin and we choose to forgive.

We have some compassion. We have medium compassion. We have medium mercy. God is what? Rich. Rich in mercy.

When someone is rich they have an outsized amount of wealth, usually money. We hear of people who are rich these days who have \$10 billion or \$30 billion. Warren Buffet has \$160 billion. Others have more. What does that even mean? It's riches so big we can't really comprehend it. We can see the number on a page but what does that mean? It's beyond comprehension.

Listen: that's how God is with mercy. He's not middle class in mercy. He's not even golf course home with a six figure job in mercy.

He's trillionaire rich in mercy.

You remember in Matthew 18 there's the parable of the guy who lost 10,000 talents? Remember he borrowed 10,000 talents from the king and lost it all and couldn't pay it back? And so the king forgave all the debt? You remember that?

Well, a talent is a unit of weight for material - it's 75 pounds. So the guy lost 750,000 pounds of gold or silver - we're not actually told what material he lost. But the idea is that it was incomprehensible to somehow borrow that much and lose that much. It'd be like us borrowing 10 billion, losing it all. And what did the king do for the guy? He forgave it. No sweat. I'll forgive this incomprehensible amount of debt you have.

Who was the king in the parable? God. And the point of the parable is that God does that all the time to repentant sinners. He forgives incomprehensible sin debts all the time. Why? Because he's what? rich in mercy.

One last thought here. Mercy isn't just what God does. It's who he is: he is rich in mercy. This is his character. This is one of his fundamental attributes as God. Rich in mercy - especially toward those who are dead in sin, following sin, under his own wrath.

2) God is love. Read 4

Okay, so notice the connection here. Why is God rich in mercy? Paul makes a connection here that is important. Why is God so merciful? Because he is love. **Read 4**

The reason God is merciful is because he is by nature love. This is a fundamental attribute of God.

1 John 4:8: Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

1 John 4:16: God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

How do you know if you're a Christian? How do you know if someone else is a Christian? Do they love other people? And especially, do they love other Christians? If they don't then they're not believers.

Jason, that's very judgmental of you. I didn't say it. John did through the Holy Spirit. The reason that Christians love is because we've been loved by God who is love. Listen, if you've been loved by God because he saved you, you can't not love others because the Spirit of God is in you you will automatically love.

So if you don't love, you don't have the Spirit and you don't have God. Because one of the fundamental attributes of God is love.

And notice here - this is important and I want you tuck it away for a few minutes. He mentions love twice. **Read 4**

It's mercy, then it's love love. With the great love with which he loved us. It's almost as though Paul trying to grasp for words to express the greatness of God's love so he just repeats himself.

In English we'd say good or great or amazing. Or we'd say unparalleled, unmatched. Paul recycles this - the amazing love with which he loved us.

And here's the kicker: God didn't love us once we were all cleaned up and lovable. He didn't pour out his love on us only after we got our act together. When did God love us? **Read 4-5**

God loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses. God's love for his people is not conditional. God's not there waiting for his people to just get their stuff together a little bit and then he'll do his part.

There's this country song I listen to. And it's about a guy and girl and how they met they're trying their best. And it goes.

I'd start walking your way, you'd start walking mine
We'd meet in the middle, beneath that old Georgia pine
We'd gain a lot of ground, cause we'd both give a little.
And there ain't no road to long, when you meet in the middle.

This is how a lot of people think God works. We start walking his way, and then he'll start walking our way. We'll meet in the middle and we'll get saved.

Nope; we were dead. There's no walking half way when you're dead. No walking 75%. No walking period.

God did all the work, motivated by the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead.

So we were dead. But God is merciful and God is love.

3) God is filled with Grace. Read 4-6

So God is merciful and loving. But God is also the God of grace - which is shown by raising us from the dead. And throughout the Bible salvation is referred to as resurrection. We'll often say stuff like "I was saved" or "I became a Christian" or "I believed" - those are all ways that we communicate we became Christians.

But one of the synonyms for God's grace in salvation throughout the Bible is resurrection. We were raised up with Jesus. Why is that language used? Well, because our salvation and conversion were only possible with the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's his death on the cross that paid for our sins and it's resurrection 3 days later that vindicated his atoning death.

And since we were dead in sins spiritually, when we're saved we have been raised to new life spiritually.

This is actually the picture of baptism, isn't it? When someone gets baptized they go into the water. What does that represent? Death. And when they come back out? Resurrection. Just as Jesus died for sins and was raised to new life, so too we die to sin and are raised into new life.

God raised us from the dead. We didn't do. Dead people don't raise themselves. It has to be God. It has to be his work of resurrection.

And of course the spiritual resurrection that happened at salvation is just a shadow of our future physical resurrection that will happen when Jesus comes back. When our bodies are raised from the grave and transformed into new, glorified bodies of power and righteousness and purity.

But wait, that's not all he did. **Read 6**

What does that mean? Are we sitting in heaven right now? No, of course not. But here's the deal. When Jesus ascended into heaven he sat down at the right hand of God the Father. He's sitting on David's throne right now reigning over all the universe as the risen Messiah. And, what he has done is secured our place in heaven to reign with him. We are not physically seated there, just like we're not physically raised just yet.

But we are spiritually seated in the heavenly places. And one day we will be there in person.

It's like have you ever had an RSVP to a really fancy restaurant? Your name is on the table even though you're not physically there yet? Your place is secure and you get the benefits of the restaurant even though you're not there yet?

That's kind of the idea. We're not in heaven. But Jesus is. And our place in heaven is 100% secure because Jesus is there. And because we're united to Jesus by faith, we might as well be there too.

So we've seen that God is merciful. Then we saw that God is love, love. And that love was shown to us when he raised us from spiritual death and seated us with him in heaven. .

4) God will bless us forever in heaven. **Read 5-7**

This passage all on its own is just amazing. When I was in college I remember reading through this passage on my own for the first time and really examining each line. I was well aware of **Vss. 8-10** because I had learned them as a new Christian.

But I'll be honest with you: It was **Vs. 7** that stuck out to me. What is God's plan for us. Before time began he chose us, predestined, loved us, saved us. But this life is not all that God has promised for us.

In the coming ages God is going super bless us. See, God is full of goodness and love and kindness, that it's not just like we're saved from burning forever and that's all.

No, we're saved from hell and the wrath of God but we're saved to an eternity of blessing where it just continually gets poured onto us more and more and more forever. **Read 7**

What's God plan for me and you and all those who are in Christ? It's to spend all eternity blessing us by pouring out more and more grace. More and more kindness. More and more joy and pleasure forever.

The blessings roll on and on and on.

That's why CS Lewis says this in The Last Battle to describe his view of eternal life. And I love it because it's this verse: "All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

That's what we look forward to in heaven, and completely fulfilled in the New Heavens and New Earth.

Now, I told you I wanted to tie this all together. We've seen God's mercy. God's love - the great love with which he loved us - he says it twice. And we've seen God's intention to bless us into eternity. Watch this. **Turn to Exodus 34:6-7**

I've mentioned this passage many times because it is God's own commentary on his own nature. This is when Moses asks God to see his glory, God passes by and proclaims his name. What does he say? **Read 34:6-7**

A God merciful and gracious. Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Then he says it again, doesn't he? Keeping steadfast love for thousands. Thousands of what? Generations.

What Paul is echoing to us, are the exact same attributes God spoke to Moses. What God is now, God has always been. He has always been a God merciful and gracious. He's always been slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He's always been a God to bless for thousands generations.

God can't help himself, you guys. This is our amazing God. Filled to the brim with love and grace and mercy and kindness. Whose power is so great that even in the face of dead sinners, he delights to raise them, saved them, seat them, and bless them forever.

To God be the glory. Amen.

Pray