

But God

Ephesians 2:4-5

When we began our study of Ephesians chapter 2 last week, we saw that Paul painted a very realistic, and yet disheartening picture of what our lives were like without Jesus Christ. He made it clear that we need a Savior because without Christ we were *dead* in our transgressions and sins; we were *dominated* by the world, Satan and our own flesh; and we were *doomed* to face the wrath of God. But the good news is God doesn't just leave us there. Paul makes it quite clear that God has an answer to all this. Follow along in your Bibles as I read from Ephesians 2:

**1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,
2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world,
according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now
works in the sons of disobedience,
3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of
our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were
by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with
which He loved us,
5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together
with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the
heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of
His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

The first words in verse one are “**And you....**” In the first three verses Paul describes what we were like before Christ saved us. We saw last week how lost we were, spiritually dead, disobedient, and doomed. Now contrast that with the first words in verse 4: “**But God....**”

Our salvation hangs entirely on those two words. We were dead...But God! We were disobedient...But God! We were dominated by the world, the flesh and the devil...but God! We were by nature children of wrath...but God!

“**But God,**” in just those two simple words Paul conveys the very essence of the gospel. There is a sense in which those two words may very well be the most important two words in the Bible. Let me share with you just a few examples. I'm just going read these verses with very little comment because they speak for themselves.

And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days. **But God** remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. (Gen. 7:24; 8:1).

"But as for you, you meant evil against me; **but God** meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. (Gen 50:20)

Like sheep they are laid in the grave; Death shall feed on them; The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; And their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling. **But God** will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me. Selah (Psa 49:14-15)

My flesh and my heart fail; **But God** is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psa 73:26)

You killed the author of life, **but God** raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. (Acts 3:15 NIV)

"Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. **But God** raised Him from the dead." (Acts 13:29-30)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8 NKJV)

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; (1 Cor 1:27 NKJV)

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." **But God** has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Cor 2:10 NKJV)

I planted, Apollos watered, **but God** gave the increase. (1 Cor 3:6 NKJV)

For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; **but God** gave it to Abraham by promise. (Gal 3:18 NKJV)

But God! Those have to be the two most exciting, encouraging, hopeful words in all of God's Word. So it's no wonder Paul chose to use them at this point in his letter. He just finished writing about the total hopelessness of man apart from God. But with just these two simple words, we have hope. Things looked really bad for all of us. We were dead, dominated and doomed. But God! There is hope! Paul is about to reveal how God entered into our lives to deal with the death, domination and doom that we all experienced at one time.

Next week we're going to come back to this passage again and see how Paul addresses each of the three problems that we faced:

- We were dead in our transgressions and sins but God made us alive with Christ.
- We were dominated by the world, Satan and our flesh but God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms.
- We were doomed but God showed us His kindness instead of His wrath.

What I'd like us to do this morning is to focus briefly on why God did all of this for us. Why did God choose to enter into our lives to redeem us from the kind of life we looked at last week?

WHY DID GOD SAVE US?

We could answer that question in very simple terms. God saved us because of His nature. Paul describes three particular attributes of God's nature that He demonstrates in saving us: Mercy, Love and Grace.

First let's talk about God's love because it is God's love that motivates His mercy and grace. Mercy and grace are simultaneous expressions of God's love.

I. God Responded to Our Lostness with Love (v.4).

I'm really amazed at how God responds to our lost condition. What we deserve is His justice and wrath, His anger and maybe even His disgust. But instead God responds to us with His love. I think that one of the reasons that we have such a hard time understanding how God could do that is that we don't really understand that kind of love.

The first thing we notice is the greatness of God's love. Here is what really catches my attention. When Paul writes about "**His great love with which He loved us**", you'll notice that he uses the past tense of love – God loved us.

Christ's death on the cross is God's greatest demonstration of His love for us. God didn't just say He loved us. He demonstrated that love by His actions. Let's just focus on that love by reading together several Scripture passages that focus on that act of God's love:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8 NKJV)

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10 NKJV)

Jesus said in John 15:13, "**Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**"

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Eph 5:2 NKJV)

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 NKJV)

Charles Spurgeon wrote ... God loved us even when we were dead in sins. His love does not depend upon what we are; it flows from his own heart. It is not love of something good in us; it is love of us because of everything good in him. Here you see the greatness of his grace, in that "he loved us, even when we were dead in sins."

F. B. Meyer: His great love was not diverted by the spectacle of our loathsomeness. He knew what we were, and what we should be, and how much pain and sorrow we should cost Him; but He loved us still. He foresaw our failures and backslidings, and lapses into the darkness of shadow; but none of these things availed to quench his love.

Only God's love could save us. Some time ago, at another church, I ministered to a family that lost a baby. For a long time, they held the lifeless

body of their child. Oh how they loved that child. Yet, no matter how much they loved her, they could not bring her back to life.

We were "**dead in trespasses and sins**" *But God* alone had both the power and the love to give us life!

II. God Responded to Our Misery with His Mercy (v. 4)

Mercy is one of those terms that we tend to use a lot as believers. And we often tend to use it interchangeably with the next attribute of God that we'll discuss – His grace. And while those two terms are similar in many ways, they are not the same thing. So let's take a few minutes here this morning to see if we can't arrive at a better understanding of God's mercy and His grace.

Mercy is God's attitude toward those in distress. When God looked down from heaven and saw us the way that we were without Christ, He saw that we were miserable. A life that is characterized by death, domination and doom could result in nothing else.

"**Mercy**" carries the idea of "withholding punishment." Even though God is so holy and we are so sinful, in His compassion, because of His "**mercy**" He rescued us.

In 1998, Karla Faye Tucker became the first woman executed in Texas since the Civil War. Once a drugged-up prostitute that murdered two people with a pick-ax in Houston in 1983, she became a born-again believer in prison and an active witness of her faith in Christ. Many pleaded on her behalf for mercy. Her only hope for life was a pardon from the governor.

Minutes before her execution, then-Texas Gov. George W. Bush denied Tucker a one-time, 30-day reprieve, saying her cause had been thoroughly reviewed by appellate courts. The U.S. Supreme Court also rejected without comment two 11th-hour appeals to halt the execution.

However, regardless of the governor's decision, God had already acted in "**mercy**" toward her. She was dead and now she is alive. She will be alive forever!

Once again, Paul uses a superlative to describe the magnitude of God's mercy. God is not just merciful – He is rich in mercy. His mercy is overabounding and overflowing.

III. God Responded to our guilt with His grace

If mercy is God's attitude toward those in distress then grace is God's attitude toward law-breakers and rebels. Even though we deserve it, God does not want to leave us to suffer from the guilt that comes from being dead in transgressions and sins. So in His grace He reaches out to set aside the demands of law and to relieve us from the due punishment of our guilt and to set us free. It is the grace of God which has dealt with our guilt.

Mercy is compassion to the miserable while Grace is compassion shown to the undeserving. Mercy is God's solution to man's misery. Grace is God's solution to man's sin. Grace covers the sin, while mercy removes the pain. Grace forgives, while mercy restores. Mercy withholds the punishment we deserve while Grace gives us the blessings we don't deserve.

Justice is getting what we do deserve.

Mercy is not getting what we do deserve.

Grace is getting what we do not deserve.

A month before her execution, Larry King interviewed Karla Fay Tucker on death row at a Texas prison. Listen to a portion of that interview. After asking her about her background and her crimes, Larry King asked her,

KING: How did you find God?

TUCKER: A ministry came to that jail to do a service, a puppet show, one night and everybody in my tank was going out to the puppet show and I didn't want to stay alone in my tank, so I decided to go with them and socialize in church. Well, actually, when I walked through the door I never said a word, so I never did any socializing, but when I went back to my tank that night, something got down in there and I had grabbed a Bible. I stole this Bible not realizing Bibles were given out free in jail. So I took this Bible into my cell, and I hid way back in the corner so nobody could see me, because I was like really proud. I didn't want anybody to think I was being weak and reading this Bible. ... that night I started reading the Bible. I didn't know what I was reading and before I knew it, I was just -- I was in the middle of my floor on my knees and I was just asking God to forgive me.

KING: How do we know, as a lot of people would ask who don't know you, that this isn't a jail house conversion?

TUCKER: I don't try and convince people of that. For me, if you can't look at me and see it then nothing I can say to you is going to convince you. I just live it every day and I reach out to people and it's up them to receive from the Lord the same way I did when somebody came to me. ... There is evidence, consistent evidence, in a person's life.

And I'll tell you what, I've been in here 14 1/2 years, and it can be a pressure cooker. ... You have people who are still violently acting out in here. If I was going to do anything, it would have happened by now. But it hasn't. ...

KING: Finally, you remain up.

TUCKER: Yes.

KING: You have to explain that to me a little more. It can't just be God?

TUCKER: Yes, it can. It's called the joy of the Lord. I don't -- when you have done something that I have done, like what I have done, and you have been forgiven for it, and you're loved, that has a way of so changing you. I mean, I have experienced real love. I know what real love is. I know what forgiveness is, even when I did something so horrible. I know that because God forgave me and I accepted what Jesus did on the cross. When I leave here, I am going to go be with him.