

EPHESIANS 2:3
The Wonderful Work of Salvation
Message 4
December 4/2011

INTRO: Tonight we are in Ephesians 2:4. We are in Paul's first digression from sharing his prayers for the Ephesians. Let me show you how this digression begins, starting once more in Ephesians 1:22. "And He (God) put all things under His (Christ's) feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all, (and here the first digression from his prayer begins) even you who were dead in trespasses and sins, 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, 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 others!"

In our last message I shared with you my views on that wrath and what it is. It does not speak of hell. It speaks of the tribulation time of seven years. And at the end of those seven years it becomes the great day of God's wrath. John the Baptist preached repentance to the people. His message in my words is, "There is hardly any time left. Repent now. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is almost here. Today is the time to repent." And when the scribes and Pharisees came he said, "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" And then he said, "Even now, the ax is laid at the root of the trees." The time of wrath is about to begin. And of Jesus, he said, "His winnowing fan is in his hand." In other words, He would blow the chaff out and save the true kernels of grain. And He would baptize, as I understand the text, either with the Holy Spirit, or with fire.

And I told you about the Thessalonians. They had been very ungodly idol worshippers. But when Paul preached about this wrath to come and that those who belonged to Christ would be spared that wrath, they got saved and were anxiously waiting for Christ to come. And so 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 says that they turned to God from idols and waited for Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, even the Jesus that delivers us from the wrath to come.

And so Paul is saying to these Ephesian believers, that as Christians, God is filling every place in them they are making available to Him as they are being conformed to the image of Christ. And then he bursts out with this incredible thought in 2:1 that God is filling, and here are his words, "EVEN YOU WHO WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS!" And then IN 2:2-3 he goes on to describe what they were like before they were saved. He further describes what they were saved out of. They had been dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, that wicked spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience among whom all mankind conducted themselves, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the mind, and they were by nature children of wrath. And then come the tremendous two words of our text tonight, "BUT GOD..."

The conjunction 'but' gives a contrast. In contrast to that dark picture of what all the unsaved are like he says, "But God..." This must be one of the greatest 'buts' in all the Bible! And the 'but' is in stark contrast to being children of wrath which occur just before the 'but'. You see, we have been looking at the cause of this death that we found in verses 1-3, where Paul said they were dead in trespasses and sins. Tonight we want to begin to look at the release from this death. Praise God, there is a "But God...!"

c) The release from this death (2:4-10)

(1) How God released us from this death (4-6)

And so we want to begin to look at the release from that great death we all were in once. And we want to see first how God released us from this death. That is given to us in verses 4-6. Tonight we will look at verse 4. And so we begin in verse 4 now. But let us read verses 4-6 (read). In these verses we are told how God released us from sin's power which held us in the state of spiritual death. So Paul begins like this, "But God, who

is rich in mercy..." What incredible hope is held out in these words. It is not, "But God, who is perfectly just..." Or, "But God, who is perfectly holy." And He is those things. But He is more than that, and to the sinner's ears, the words, "But God who is rich in mercy..." should ring with hope!

You see, in this world there are gods many and lords many. But there are none rich in mercy. Read the Koran and you will find that Allah is nothing like this. But the God of the Bible is rich in mercy.

Now it is most crucial that we understand what this word mercy means. As I understand this word, mercy is basically a feeling or an emotion. Now there are many, many different kinds of feelings and we must describe this one to understand what Paul is saying here. I define mercy like this, "Mercy is that feeling of pity or compassion that arises when we see someone in need." Now I can give you a picture, and you will understand this word. Note the feelings that arise in you when you view this picture.

(Picture of vulture and child.)

This picture won a Pulitzer prize in 1994 and was taken by Kevin Carter in the Sudan during a famine. This child is on the way to the United Nations food camp, only about a kilometer away. The vulture is waiting for the child to keel over and then it will do what vultures do. No one knows

what happened to the child, but we do know what happened to the man who took the picture. He committed suicide three months later.

And why did this man commit suicide? I would say it was probably mercy overload. He saw such incredible needs that he could do little about that he ended his own life. It would take a very hardened sinner not to want to stretch out tender arms and hands and have tender feet carry him the rest of the way to the United Nations food camp. This picture wants to torque your heart right out of your chest. And those feeling of compassion one feels for a child in such deep need are called 'mercy'. When we see a picture like this, we become a little bit richer in mercy.

Now, tonight I would have time to go on to the next verse, but it is not appropriate to end after this verse because we will close the study of this verse by considering the GREAT love of God. So, because I will have a little extra time, let me insert something here, though I have spoken of it elsewhere. It is with regard to God's mercy. And let me interject here on whom He has mercy. What causes feelings of compassion to arise in God?

Turn with me for a moment to Romans 9 (read 6-21). By all appearance, God's mercy is extended arbitrarily and it has nothing to do with the condition of people. If He has chosen

someone based on nothing at all in the person whom He chose, and has reprobated, (to use a Calvinistic term) someone based on nothing in that person, then I ask you, is God rich in mercy? If in eternity past, God took a handful of names out of a hat that had all the names of all people who would ever be born, and He determined to save that handful, I ask you, is God rich in mercy? Could it be that all people have been predestined, some to salvation and the majority to hell? Does that sound like a God, rich in mercy?

Think of that picture of the child and the vulture, would mercy be true mercy if one's compassion could not be aroused because the child did not meet one's prior approval? What arouses our mercy when we see a picture like this, but the sad plight of the person? What arouses the mercy of God in man's sad plight, if He did not elect them in eternity past? What aroused God's mercy according to Ephesians 2:1-3? Was it the fact that God had elected certain persons, or was it the plight these people were in? Certainly it was not election. God is rich in mercy to all in this condition. That spells hope to all.

But I want to show you from the Bible what it is that arouses God's mercy towards man. First, God's mercy is aroused by the horrible plight of lost sinners who, though they walk according to the prince of the power of the

air and fulfill the desires and lusts of the flesh. Their plight arouses God's mercy. But, it needs to be noted that He has also said, "My Spirit will not always strive with man." There comes a time when His mercy for certain people is over. They have sinned away the day of grace.

So, that God's mercy towards sinful man is aroused by man's deplorable condition before he is saved is evident from our passage. But what of the Christian? Look at Exodus 20 (read verse 6). God also shows mercy to the Christian who loves Him and keeps His commandments. What this implies is that His mercy is withdrawn when we do not love Him and keep His commandments. This same thing is said again in Deuteronomy 5:10 and 7:9). But look at one more passage in Luke 1 (read verse 50).

God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. And on whom does He will to have mercy? Well, we have seen that from our passage in Ephesians and these other texts. It is not some election in eternity past that arouses His mercy. So, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. There are conditions that drive God's mercy away, and there are conditions that open him like a flower to the sun.

Are you here tonight and you are not saved? God would have mercy on you in a moment, if you would but repent and believe on His Son. If you are here as a

Christian, He resists the proud and unfaithful and disobedient, but He longs to show mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Now, back to our passage. Look at that picture of the pathetic condition of this child, and then look at Ephesians 2:1-3, and you get an idea of what kind of picture God got of us when we yet walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. To God, we looked as hopeless and helpless as this child. And His mercy tore at His heart.

And Paul, having shown us such a picture of ourselves now writes, "But God, who is rich in mercy..." You see, a United Nations food camp gave hope to this child in the picture. But a God who is rich in mercy gives hope to a people described in verses 1-3, sinners such as we too once were.

I want to tell you something tonight. That God who is rich in mercy is my King! He is my God! And all because of what is described to us in this section that describes for us how we are released from the death described in verses 1-3.

But I want to tell you something about feelings of mercy. To not do something when you have the opportunity to do so is to squelch those feelings of compassion. Mercy makes you want to reach out and do something. Who of us would not readily give a thousand dollars to help a

child in such a plight as the one in this picture. But let us not bypass that this text says God is RICH in mercy. Some of us are very poor in mercy. We have very little of it. In our midst are some people who have considerably more mercy than others. Some people have so little mercy that if it took a bit of money to help a child like this, they wouldn't do it. But God is rich in mercy. When my heart and your heart is almost wrenched out of us at the sight of someone in such need as this child, what does our plight do to a God who is loaded with compassion?

Let us go on a little further to find out. "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us..." Now I must ask you an exegetical question here. Look at the text. Is God rich in mercy because of His great love, or did He make us alive together with Christ because of His great love? Does love cause us to be merciful or does mercy cause us to be loving? This is a huge question in our verse. Does love cause us to show mercy; or does mercy cause us to love?

Now it was my first inclination that God was merciful to sinful man because of His great love for them. But I thought about this and looked at the structure of the passage. Let me show you the two ways of reading it, "But God, who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive

together with Christ." That is one way. It says mercy proceeds from love. Now here is the other way, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." This says love proceeds from mercy.

I have concluded that the latter is correct. Let me explain. In the picture we see a young lad in the extremity of need. He must have help to make it and if he does not get food soon, the vulture will. Mercy cries, "Do something for him!" And what I am saying is that it is love that will do something for him. Thus, love comes after mercy in a case like this. So consider 1 John 3:17 in this light. John says, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart (literally, bowels of compassion) from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" In other words, seeing a brother in need should cause one's feelings of compassion to want to do something about it. And to shut up those feelings of compassion shows a lack of love. To do something about it shows love.

Consider it like this: You do not need to know this child personally and to love him in order to have feelings of mercy or compassion for him. Even if he was a little thief, we would feel mercy for him in his condition. And love would want us to do anything we could to help him in

his plight.

Now let us consider the word love. The Greek language has four words we would translate as love in English. I have come to view the basic ingredient of love as an attachment. As I see it, **eros love** is the *emotional attraction or attachment* of one person to another based in the natural drive for physical intimacy. **Phelos love** is the *relational, emotional attraction or attachment* of one person to another based on blood or friendship ties. **Stergo love** is the *emotional attraction or attachment* to another based on loyalty.

So, as I see it, these first three kinds of love are emotional in nature. But the word for love in our text is agapee. That is the word we are most familiar with because that is the word used for the love of God. And agapee love is not an emotional thing, as I see it. It is a mental, rational attachment.

Let me give you an example. You may see one a certain family in town, and when you see the children, immediately your mercy spreads itself. And you would like to help. They are poorly dressed and it is cold, and your heart goes out, especially to the children. You would like to do something but you know the dad and you know if give him money, he will immediately turn that money into alcohol. Mercy calls for one thing, and reason for another. To try to help such

persons without that help turning into liquor is sometimes impossible and love says you cannot give money to this person. So reason overrules compassion.

I maintain that God's love or agapee love is not based on feelings or emotions, but on truth and reason. In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." And so, let us say we have a great urge to do something but we know we ought not to it, and our emotions beg for it, but we know it is against the will of God. Agapee love for God will disregard the emotions and follow the facts. That is real agapee love.

With regard to our passage, the Jamieson, Faucett and Brown commentary says with regard to the words, *because of His great love*, "This was the *special* ground of God's saving us; as 'rich in mercy' (compare #Eph 2:7 1:7 Ro 2:4 10:12) was the general ground." Then they quote Bengel, who says, "Mercy takes away misery; love confers salvation." I would say that like this: Mercy desires to take away misery, and love does what is needed to take it away.

So God saw us in our plight, lost as lost can be and heading for hell. And to Him, we looked like the child in the picture looks to us. And as in the picture, it became obvious that his great enemy, that vulture of vultures would soon eat. And His mercy called on His love to do something about it. Love reasoned

it all out and said it is a legitimate request, and so God sent His only Son to die for us. And so I want us to notice something in our text. It says it was because of His GREAT love for us.

Tonight I ask you, how great was that love? Well, when mercy called for action, that is love, God pondered the question, can it be done? Can I save wicked sinners? And of every possible conceivable way He thought of, He finally came up with one way it could be done. How He could save sinful man is if He allowed the second Person of the Triune God to become flesh, and then let Him bear the sin of mankind and die because He had taken on man's sin, then if He could get man to repent of his sins and believe that Jesus' death was on his behalf, then He could save man and have all His attributes remain intact.

And so, in the fullness of time the second Person of the Triune God became man. It is a wonderful story that we will soon be remembering. It is an incredible story. And that Man lived a righteous life. He committed no sin. He did wonderful things. He healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, cleansed lepers, cast demons out of people and even raised some dead people. And sinful, wicked, envious, religious people got irritated at Him. And it got worse. When the leaders saw that large crowds followed this Man, they cursed Him inwardly and wished Him dead.

And why did they hate Him?
Because their own deeds were evil
and He exposed them. It got so
bad that they finally, unjustly
condemned Him to death, even the
death of the cross.

God knew this would happen. And
this may be how He reasoned. "Is
it right for Me to let the devil
deceive and defraud man when I
could do something about it? But
it will cost Me My Son. But what
if I don't give Him? It would not
be right not to give Him. The
cost will be huge but
righteousness demands that I do
something about it. I have the
means to take care of this,
though the cost is tremendous.
How can I spare My only Son and
let multiplied millions go to
hell, when many of them would
respond to the Gospel?" And in
the end God said, "I will pay the
price." And when His Son pleaded
with Him for three hours in the
Garden of Gethsemene, He gave no
ear. And when His Son hung on
that cruel cross and cried out,
"My God! My God! Why have You
forsaken Me?" He turned His back
and let darkness fall over the
world in the middle of the day.

What does it mean when it says,
"...because of His GREAT love with
which He loved us, even when we
were dead in trespasses, made us
alive together with Christ"? What
is that GREAT love? It was giving
His only Son so the rest might
live!

Tonight I would like to give you
some idea of what it means when
it describes God's love as being

a GREAT love by telling you a little story. I have told you the story before and I trust you will not tire of it. Some of you have not heard this story. It pictures for us as clearly how Great God's love for us was as the picture of the child and the vulture showed us what mercy is.

I understand that the story I am about to tell is a true story which happened back in the good times of the 1920's in the state of Oklahoma to a young man, 22 years old by name of John Griffith. He had one young son. Times were prosperous and it was an exciting time to be alive. John always wanted to be a traveler. He could see himself traveling all over the world. He dreamed of this. Then in 1929 the stock market crashed. The whole country was plunged into a deep depression. Oklahoma was no exception. At that time John's dreams died. Things became very difficult in the Griffith home. Rather broken heartedly the Griffith family packed their things and along with their only son Greg, they made their way into Missouri. Finally they came to the banks of the Mississippi River and there John finally found a job. The job he got was operating one of those immense railroad bridges that span the mighty Mississippi River. Day after day John would be in the control room. When the freighters and other large ships came John would operate the levers and the railroad would raise up into the sky and the ships could travel underneath the bridge. When time

came for the train the bridge would be lowered and the trains would rumble across this mighty river. This was his job day by day.

He often wondered where the ships might be traveling but his dreams of traveling were over. Then in 1937 a new dream began to formulate. He thought of his son. Then he thought it would be nice to have a business and it could be called John Griffith and Son. One day he and his son might be able to work side by side. Thus a new dream was born in John's heart. So one day he decided to take his son to work with him at the bridge. Together they had breakfast and made their lunch. Then arm in arm they headed off to the bridge. There in the control room of that gigantic bridge Greg watched wide eyed as his father raised and lowered this vast bridge. For eight year old Greg, his father was the most amazing man in the world. He marveled at what he saw.

Time passed quickly and soon the noon whistle blew. John raised the bridge because a number of ships were scheduled to pass during the noon hour. So John and his son Greg made their way down the ladder onto a kind of cat walk and then out to an observation deck some fifty feet over the Mississippi. And there they sat down to enjoy their lunch. As they ate John told his son story after story of some of the exotic places of the world. Greg was hanging on every word his father told him. Then

suddenly was shocked back into reality when he heard a shrill railroad whistle. He quickly looked at his watch and it was 1:07 already. In just a couple minutes the Memphis Express would be at the bridge and it was up. He didn't want to alarm his son, and so he tried to suppress the panic he himself was feeling, and so he said to his son, "Greg I have to go right up and do something but I'll come back as soon as I'm done to get you. You sit right here and don't move. OK?" And then he quickly jumped up and actually fled down the catwalk and scrambled up the ladder and into the control tower. And once he was in the control tower he quickly glanced up the river as he was trained to do to see if any ships were coming. And then as he was also trained to do he looked right straight down to see that there was nothing underneath the bridge.

As his eyes took in the scene underneath the bridge he saw something so horrifying that it froze his heart in his chest. There lying in the huge gearbox amongst the huge cogs of the gears was his son Greg. It seems Greg had tried to follow his father up the catwalk, had slipped and fallen into the gearbox. He could see that he was wedged between a few of the cogs. He could also see that he was conscious yet but his leg was bleeding profusely and he seemed to be cut quite badly. Then an even more horrifying thought struck him. If he lowers the

bridge he will kill his son. Panic hit then. Thinking over his options he was frustrated because there were no good answers. He would think of his son there in those gears and then it would go back to the Memphis Express with about 400 passengers. If he lowered the bridge his son would be squashed between those huge gears. If he left the bridge up those 400 passengers would plunge into the Mississippi. He thought about his wife. What could he tell her. Perspiration was pouring off his face. But the seconds were precious. Time was of essence.

Knowing he had only one choice John covered his face with one arm and shoved down on the lever with the other. The sound of the moving gears and heavy mechanism drowned out the cries of his son. And his son was gone. Then just as the bridge locked into position the Memphis Express came roaring out of the trees and rumbled across the bridge. John lifted his tear stained face. John looked into the train. He saw people in the dining car having tea. The conductor was looking at his watch. A boy was pushing his spoon into a pile of ice cream. It seemed everyone on the train was involved either in idle conversation or careless laughter. But no one seemed to look his way. No one even gave an idle glance at the giant gear box that contained the remains of his son Greg. And in anguish John pounded on the window in that control house. And he cried out, "What's the matter with you

people. Don't you care? Don't you understand what I have just done? What's wrong with you people that you don't even care! No one answered. No one heard. No one even looked. It seemed no one did care.

Then as suddenly as the train had appeared out of the trees it disappeared from view across the river.

Now there is a picture of great love, agapee love; rational love. Though John Griffith did not know all the people on the train. He could reason this out though. He could put his only son through the gears and let 400 others live, or He could save his son and have 400 others die. Mercy begged him almost beyond endurance to spare his son. But agapee love for fellow humans called for other action, action that would cost him his son.

So it was with God. Mercy, every feeling and emotion within God must have cried out to save His only Son. But love, agapee love called for other action. And so He paid the ultimate price.

CONCL: And so tonight I want to conclude this message briefly and then let you sit and think as long as you wish and then we will make our way down stairs for coffee and refreshments. In verses 1-3, we have a picture painted for us of lost mankind, and it is a picture that equals the picture of the child and the vulture. We were without hope and without God in the world. But, while we were yet sinners, God had pity on us. His mercy begged for action. And so His love tried to find a way to help sinful man. There was one way, only one, but it had a horrific price attached to it. But it was a price man can understand. The price was to give up His only Son so that others might

live.

And so our text says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His GREAT love with which He loved us..." How great was that love? I wonder tonight, are you here and you have not yet repented of your sins. I remember how long I waited before I repented. I have wondered sometimes, does God feel like John Griffith? Does He look down at sinful man as most of them go their merry way looking at their watches, eating ice cream? Does He sometimes say, "What's the matter with you people? Don't you know what I've just done?" And yet He patiently waits. He waited patiently for me. Is He still waiting patiently for you? May I remind you that for every person, that patience can run out at any moment, and if the devil has his way, it will be very soon. So Scripture says, "Today is the day of salvation." In all of Scripture we are given no assurance that it is safe to wait one day.