

EPHESIANS 2:4-7

INTRODUCTION

There are times when I get really frustrated with the translation of the NIV. I know that the translators often have to rearrange the Greek structure in order to make it into a better English sentence but in doing so they sometimes I think take something away from the sentence. This is the case in 2:4 for this classic statement begins with two words in the Greek 'but God.'

That dramatic beginning is weakened considerably by the NIV translation. Dr. Lloyd Jones in his commentary says "these two words in and of themselves in a sense contain the whole of the gospel." These two words tell us what God has done, how God has intervened in what is otherwise an utterly hopeless situation. As we saw last time verses 1-3 describes for us what we were like before God intervened in our lives verse 3 ends with the fact that we were objects of God's wrath **but God** intervened.

These two simple words make all the difference to our situation.

1. WHAT GOD HAS DONE

It is wonderful to discover in these verses that although we run from God preferring wickedness and death to righteousness and life, God has not run from us. Instead he has come to us and done for us exactly what needed to be done. In short he has saved us (v 5). He has come to us and rescued us from the desperate deplorable condition, which Paul has described for us in the opening verses of this chapter.

Our position was totally hopeless because we were dead in our sins we were spiritual corpses. We were enslaved by the world, the devil and by our own sinful nature. We were trapped and there was nothing we could do about it.

We were by nature under God's just sentence because of our sin we were objects of God's wrath. It was a totally hopeless and helpless situation but God intervened to save us. God intervenes in the very areas in which we were dead, enslaved and objects of wrath. We were dead but notice God makes us alive (v 5). Our experience as Christians is one of resurrection, we were dead to any godly influence but God can waken the dead and that is what he has done for us if we are Christian people.

Life is no longer as once it was for us for we are now saved, we have new life we have a new Master and we now have new standards of righteous living to pursue. All of this is because God has intervened in our lives. Now this experience of being made alive takes place with Christ it is as a result of our union with Him.

We were also enslaved; even though we might have desired to do better we could not. We were totally given over to going the ways of the world the ways of Satan and the ways of our own sinful desires and passions. But God intervened and not only has he given us life but he has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (v 6).

We are now free, sin's shackles have been broken, and we are free to pursue righteousness and free to effectively serve God in this world. He has seated us in the heavenly realms we are no longer bound to this world but free to follow Christ as our new Master.

But in what sense are we seated with Christ in the heavenly realms? Well once again it is because of our union with Christ. Because we are united to him, we are where he is, we might be here on earth physically but spiritually we are with Christ in the heavenly realms. This has some profound implications for us. This means that we are in two worlds at the same time, we are no longer

creatures of this world only, we are not bound any more by what we see touch, hear, smell and taste.

We are now creatures of the greater heavenly realm because of our union with Christ, which means that we now think and work and speak in spiritual categories. We now judge everything from the heavenly perspective, we have a new standard of values, and we assess things in an entirely different way.

What we want to know about every activity that we are engaged in is not what benefit we will get out of it, or what enjoyment will this bring to me but we ask what value to my soul will this bring. Will this bring glory to my Lord? Will this enhance or hinder my relationship with my Lord?

Because we are in the heavenly realm with Christ we recognise that we belong more to heaven than we do to earth and therefore we live for heaven rather than for earth. All that we do on this earth all that we are involved with; all that we enjoy and benefit from; is received with our eyes firmly fixed on our true position with Christ in the heavenly realms. Therefore we know that this world is only temporary all that matters to us is our true home and our true Master and therefore all we do here we do in order to please him.

This is why we must always have a loose grip on this world's goods for one day we will go to our true home and to our true Master. We must set our minds on things above and not on earthly things (Colossians 3:2). Is it obvious by our lifestyle that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms? The way we use our time and resources clearly shows where our heart is. Is it set on things above or on things below? I fear that the Christian Church in Britain generally speaking has its heart and mind set on this world. I say that for it seems to me that we are more interested in what happens to us, our families, our jobs, our communities than we are about what happens to the cause of Christ.

The amount of time and resources spent by Christians on things that do not matter amazes me and the lack of time and resources spent by Christians on things that really do matter also amazes me. We seem to find time to visit our friends and family but fail to find time to pray. We find time to pursue our hobbies and interests but seem not to find time for bible study and evangelism.

God has also dealt with the wrath question. In our sins we were indeed objects of his wrath (v 3), but since Jesus has suffered in our place for our sin and we have been delivered from it we are no longer under wrath. Instead we are objects of his incomparable riches of grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (v 7). We are now objects of his kindness.

These simple words 'but God' show us what God has done for us in Christ Jesus they reinforce for us that our security does not depend upon us but upon God and it surely drives us to our knees in thankfulness for his intervention in our lives and to pray for others that God might show them mercy and intervene in their lives. These two words if fully understood will transform our lives, we will not allow apathy to take over our lives for our whole being will be taken up with what God has done for us and the result will be a life lived in harmony with God's word.

2. WHY GOD HAS DONE IT

It's one thing to understand what God has done for us but it is a different matter to understand why he has done it. It is clear that there is no merit in ourselves that would force God into intervening in our lives; there was nothing in us that would have encouraged God to save us. The answer to why God has done what he has done for us can be given in one word 'grace' (v 5). What prompted God to act on our behalf was his grace his unmerited favour towards us.

Paul uses four words to express God's motivation in saving us. All of which can be condensed into this one word 'grace.' He loved us, was merciful to us showed us grace and kindness. We were

dead; so helpless to save ourselves only mercy could reach the helpless for someone has said that mercy is love for the down and out. We were down and out spiritually but God in Christ has showed us mercy. We were under God's wrath only love could triumph over wrath. Only a love like Jesus had could triumph over God's wrath. Jesus was willing to come and to pay the price for our sin and in doing so take the wrath of God upon himself. But this does not mean that somehow Jesus and his Father were not in harmony. That the Father wanted us to suffer his wrath and Jesus didn't. No!

This was God's plan from the beginning, he is just; sin must be punished, God is righteous his wrath must be opposed to sin. But in order to rescue and save sinners, God sent his Son the Lord Jesus to take upon himself the wrath of God because God loved us so much that he willingly sent his Son and his Son loved us so much that he willingly came to deal with God's wrath.

We deserved nothing from God's hand except judgement because of our sin only grace could rescue us from our just deserts, for grace is undeserved favour. God saw nothing in us but sin and rebellion; nothing in us to attract us to him, he knew there was no hope, no future except judgement and condemnation. Yet God stepped in and showed us immense grace. While we were dead in our sins God acted towards us out of mercy, love and grace.

But in verse 7 we have another reason behind God's work of salvation for us. In raising and exalting Jesus God demonstrated his great power (1:19-20) but in raising and exalting us to spiritual life, he is displaying the immeasurable riches of his grace (v 7) and he will continue to do so both now and throughout eternity. When people look at us they ought to see something of God's incredible kindness and they ought to wonder and ponder the unbelievable grace of God in saving sinners like us.

Our fellow Christians ought to see clearly the richness of God's grace in saving us and one day the whole world will see God's immeasurable grace. We are both now and forever God's display of grace, when people want to know how gracious God is or when we want to think of God's grace then look at ourselves and look at what we were, and look at what we are now in Christ and then ask who made the difference and why?

The answer is simple and profound, God made the difference and he did it because of his love, mercy, grace and kindness towards us in Christ. He did it to display for all eternity the immeasurable riches of his grace towards sinners. We should never become familiar with God's grace it should always astound us and when it does then our whole lives will be affected by our knowledge of God's grace towards us who were dead in our sins and objects of his wrath.

Therefore we want our lives don't we to point people away from ourselves and to point people to the God who has saved us in Christ and has done so because of his love mercy grace and kindness towards us. Perhaps our problem is that we are not distinctive enough for people really to notice the richness of his grace. Perhaps we try to be like the world and therefore fail to be like Christ so that the richness of his grace is not as clearly seen by the world, as it ought to be.

Perhaps we have blurred the richness of God's grace, perhaps we have become entangled with this world and our lives are not as they ought to be. We need to understand the richness of God's grace for I am convinced that once we do then our lives will be radically different and the things that are important to us now will become so insignificant to us because we will be so taken up with Christ.

O may the richness of the grace of God become a reality to us personally and collectively as a church so that others may see the incomparable richness of his grace, which is expressed in his kindness to us through Christ.

Amen