



RICH IN MERCY

Ephesians 2:4: But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us...

Verses 1-3 show us the problem – we were dead in sin. Verses 5-6 show the solution, to make us spiritually alive again. Verse 4 is the reason why God set about resolving the problem, rather than leaving us lost in it.

“First, the need for rich mercy. Ephesians 2:4 does not dangle out on its wone. It is one bend in a mighty river flowing across the six chapters of Ephesians. And the harrowing stretch just upstream of 2:4 goes like this:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passion of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (2:1-3)
Christ was sent not to mend wounded people or wake sleepy people or advise confused people or inspire bored people or spur on lazy people or educate ignorant people, but to raise dead people.”

Dane Ortlund, Gentle and Lowly, Page 174-175

We were truly dead - not just dying, mercy has rescued us not from something we may face in the future but from our present reality - not drowning in need of rescue but dead at the bottom of the ocean needing rescue and resurrection. Mercy so undeserved because all aspects of who we are are tainted and dead!

Mercy is extended to all who will receive it - even the fraudulently good, because even the good and moral are dead without Christ – a good looking corpse or a rotting one are both dead!

“We can be immoral dead people, or we can be moral dead people. Either way, we’re dead. The mercy of God reaches down and rinses clean not only obviously bad people but fraudulently good people, both of whom equally stand in need of resurrection. God is rich in mercy. He doesn’t withhold mercy from some kinds of sinners while extending it to others. Because mercy is who he is – “*being* rich in mercy” – his heart gushes forth the mercy to sinners one and all. His mercy overcomes even the deadness of our souls and the hollowed-out zombie-like existence that we are all naturally born into.”

Dane Ortlund, Gentle and Lowly, Page 177

and this mercy is not some intangible concept, not airy fairy, pie in the sky, but touchable, knowable, receivable. Dane Ortlund expresses it this way:

“The richness of divine mercy becomes real to us not only when we see how depraved we naturally are, but also when we see that the river of mercy flowing out of God’s heart took shape as a man. Perhaps the

notion of heavenly mercy seems abstract; but what if that mercy became something we could see, hear and touch?

That is what happened in the incarnation. When Paul speaks of the saving appearance of Christ, he says, "When grace appeared..." (Titus 2:11). The grace and mercy of God is so bound up with and manifested in Jesus himself that to speak of Christ appearing is to speak of grace appearing."

Dane Ortlund, Gentle and Lowly, Page 177

Jesus is grace and mercy personified!

Mercy at not receiving the punishment that we deserve is matched and mirrored by grace, the other side of the coin - the life we are now afforded in Christ. We died with him that we now may live. All the benefits and riches of heaven are ours. Both the grace and mercy of God, seen most tangibly in Jesus, are moving and powerful and beautiful. Every time I reflect on it I am reminded of just how much I have been saved from, but also saved to.

Grace and Mercy are different yet intertwined.

One analogy that may help us visualise this is that of us as seeds planted into the soil of mercy, God's grace falls upon me daily in both the sun and rain and is manifest in growth and fruitfulness.

God's grace and blessing falls on us all, whether believers or not (rain falls and the sun shines on the wicked as well as righteous, spirit poured on all flesh - Joel 2 -not just the believing flesh) - the Bible is clear that this is the case, but until we are uprooted and replanted into the soil of his mercy that grace and blessing doesn't make us grow into what we were created to be.

Being rooted in mercy, and coming back to this time and again, feeding on it, is what allows grace to do its work and bear fruit in us. Recognition that we need mercy counters pride in us. If we begin to believe we should receive the blessing of heaven it is no longer grace, grace by its very nature is undeserved and recognising our need of Gods mercy helps us ensure the correct mindset and attitude of heart to receive that which is undeserved, to treasure it and not squander it. It is mercy that opens the floodgates to grace and the favour of God.

Mercy and grace are therefore inseparable - we cannot truly receive mercy while rejecting grace, for we are not just saved from something but to something, we are rescued for purpose - We are not raised from death to nothing, but to life. God's grace leads us to his mercy, his mercy enables us to receive his grace. A beautiful mystery.

We received God's mercy and grace in fullness when we accepted Christ and received his life in us - we were transformed in our very being at this point - no longer sinners but saints, new creations. A once for all time forgiveness. Yet his mercies are new each morning and there is grace for each day. We live in the tension of the in between!

The kingdom is here, now, at hand, yet will one day come in completion and fullness. The same is true for us personally, for we still struggle to fully believe, comprehend and live out this reality in our daily lives amidst a fallen world. We are still working out our salvation in fear and trembling - not works as opposed to grace, but works as in applying.

Like when you get a new phone and you spend time working out how it works. Everything is there already, you're not adding to what the phone can do, but you are discovering what it can do and finding yourself using these discoveries in the midst of life. That is what we're doing with our salvation, with mercy and grace - discovering the depths of its reality - discovering what we have truly been saved from and how dead we truly were, and what we are saved to and how glorious our life in him is, how full of blessing and favour and abundance in joy and hope and peace and love.

Be encouraged to apply this mercy and grace into the whole of our lives. His love is tender towards us and we need not fear opening our lives to him.

His mercy is most at work in our deepest pain, our shame and our sins - it abounds.

“Whether we have been sinned against or have sinned ourselves into misery, the Bible says God is not tightfisted with mercy but openhanded, not frugal but lavish, not poor but rich.

That God is rich in mercy means that your regions of deepest shame and regret are not hotels through which divine mercy passes but homes in which divine mercy abides.

It means the things about you that make you cringe most, make him hug hardest.

It means his mercy is not calculating and cautious, like ours. It is unrestrained, flood-like, sweeping, magnanimous.

It means our haunting shame is not a problem for him, but the very thing he loves most to work with.

It means our sins do not cause his love to take a hit. Our sins cause his love to surge forward all the more.

It means on that day when we stand before him, quietly, unhurriedly, we will weep with relief, shocked at how impoverished a view of his mercy-rich heart we had.”

Dane Ortlund, Gentle and Lowly, Page 179-80

For this discovery, we have to constantly go back into this one-time act of rescue where mercy and grace abound. We don't discover and make use of what our phones can do simply by coldly reading the manual - we pick it up, we play with it, we use it, we carry it with us and add it into our daily lives...

We must do the same with mercy and grace - by going back to Jesus directly. We can read about him, but let's not fool ourselves by just storing up knowledge - that puffs up in pride, we have to then live with him too and apply what we learn and discover into our lives. There is no point learning that saturated fats are bad for your heart and could eventually kill you while continuing to live on a diet of burgers and ice cream.

Jesus himself is rich in mercy. He is full of grace. Jesus is not just good at dishing out mercy and grace - it flows from him because he is the source of it. You'll note from the verse - God being rich in mercy - not becoming, or acting, or demonstrating. It is his very being. The verse goes on to say that because of the great love with which he loved us - We are the objects of his mercy because we are the objects of his love. Not just any love, but his great love. The pinnacle of all he loves; that which makes everything else more marvellous to him.

When we speak about the things a person loved after they have died, we say things like “he loved fishing and camping, but his great love was his family” we all know that what we mean is that the greatest of loves, the pinnacle of all he was about was his love for his family. Not only that, but the likelihood is that he loved fishing and camping all the more because of enjoying it with his family. The same is true of God for us - his great love is us. He loves the world, but his great love is us. In creation God declares everything made to be good as he makes it, but when he made us humans - in his image - he not only says that his

creation in us is very good, but that everything made is now very good. His love for us is so great that it makes his love for everything else grow.

Our root to growth and fruitfulness is pushing our roots deep into mercy and soaking up the grace of his sunshine and rain - which we find in him. Not in his acts or what he does, or in things written about him, or listening to talks and podcasts - these things may help but they are signposts, they are the map not the destination - these things are found in him. His acts are merciful and gracious, but only because that is who he is. He does not lack integrity - acting in a way that isn't who he is.

So let us pursue him afresh - let us be mindful of him, let us turn our attention and affection towards him and seek him above all else. But let us not throw ourselves into a whole load of self-effort and striving to do so - he has already done all that is needed, all we need do is receive, posture ourselves, and receive.

Maybe as connect groups, as families, as individuals we can take some time to do this - to reflect on the impact of his grace and mercy in our lives, to recognise all that we have been saved from and to, taking time to remember not just his acts but him. Spending time in worship and thanksgiving, taking communion together and simply being in his presence, allowing him to speak to us, without rushing.

I'd encourage us to be intentional and persistent in this - it is not a one time thing, and not something that will just happen amidst the busyness of life. We may have to re-evaluate the things we give time to, our routines and even the ways in which we connect with God.

So, I pray that as we make time and space personally and with others to spend time with God and reflect on his grace and mercy and great love for us that we will find greater depth, sweetness and intimacy in our walk with him, more humility in our lives as we recognise the reality of how dead we were and the life we now have access to, and more joy, peace and fruit in our lives as mercy gives us the soil for grace to be at work in us. Amen

Questions to consider

- What impact have the grace and mercy of God in Christ had in my life?
 - Try to articulate what you have been saved from and to, share this with others.
- How can we practically ensure we are living in the soil of mercy, and receiving the rain and sunshine of grace in our lives? What does this look like for us and how do we engage with this in Jesus?
- What in our lives needs to change/shift in order for this to happen more consistently?
- What growth or impact do we hope to see as we make time and space to do this intentionally and persistently?

Pray together into these things.